



# Persuasion

*Jane Austen*

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## **Persuasion** Jane Austen

Persuasion is Jane Austen's last completed novel. Besides the theme of persuasion, the novel evokes other topics, such as the Royal Navy, in which two of Jane Austen's brothers ultimately rose to the rank of admiral. As in *Northanger Abbey*, the superficial social life of Bath—well known to Austen, who spent several relatively unhappy and unproductive years there—is portrayed extensively and serves as a setting for the second half of the book. In many respects, *Persuasion* marks a break with Austen's previous works, both in the more biting, even irritable satire directed at some of the novel's characters and in the regretful, resigned outlook of its otherwise admirable heroine, Anne Elliot, in the first part of the story. Against this is set the energy and appeal of the Royal Navy, which symbolises for Anne and the reader the possibility of a more outgoing, engaged, and fulfilling life, and it is this worldview which triumphs for the most part at the end of the novel.

More than eight years before the novel opens, Anne Elliot, then a lovely, thoughtful, warm-hearted 19-year old, accepted a proposal of marriage from the handsome young naval officer Frederick Wentworth. He was clever, confident, and ambitious, but poor and with no particular family connections to recommend him. Sir Walter, Anne's fatuous, snobbish father and her equally self-involved older sister Elizabeth were dissatisfied with her choice, maintaining that he was no match for an Elliot of Kellynch Hall, the family estate. Her older friend and mentor, Lady Russell, acting in place of Anne's late mother, persuaded her to break the engagement, for she, too, felt it was an imprudent match that was beneath Anne. Now 27 and still unmarried, Anne re-encounters her former love when his sister and brother-in-law, the Crofts, take out a lease on Kellynch. Wentworth is now a captain and wealthy from maritime victories in the Napoleonic wars. However, he has not forgiven Anne for rejecting him. While publicly declaring that he is ready to marry any suitable young woman who catches his fancy, he privately resolves that he is ready to become attached to any appealing young woman with the exception of Anne Elliot. The self-interested machinations of Anne's father, her older sister Elizabeth, Elizabeth's widowed friend Mrs. Clay, and William Elliot (Anne's cousin and her father's heir) constitute important subplots.

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