

JANE AUSTEN, *Persuasion* (1775-1817) (1818)



LINDA BREE, OUR EDITOR,
AT CHAWTON HOUSE

CHAWTON HOUSE – ON A RAINY DAY
THE HOUSE WHERE AUSTEN LIVED
WHEN SHE WROTE *Persuasion*

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I. FROM PHILOSOPHICAL ESSAY TO NOVEL

- A. Descartes and Austen have in common:
 - An interiorization of experience
 - A method for gaining access to an inner being, to the workings of the mind.
- B. Both Descartes and Austen think their works into existence.

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II. WHAT IS A NOVEL?

- A. "an invented prose narrative that is usually long and complex and deals especially with human experience through a usually connected sequence of events" (M-W Dict.).
- B. Compare with Descartes: D. represents isolated human experience in order to build a philosophical system. Austen creates a vivid sense of human experience in order to convey the workings of minds in a social setting.

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III. READING THE OPENING SECTION WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM DESCARTES

- A. Sir Walter Elliot escapes from an unwelcome reality by daydreaming about (and inflating) his own importance (compare Descartes).
- B. Self-preoccupation is here an ethical problem (compare Descartes).
- C. The status of inheritance
 - "Baronet" is an inherited title. The family problem of the novel is created by the "still-born son" (46). (Compare the status of inheritance in Descartes.)

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Chawton House, side yard, on a rainy day



IV. THESIS

- A. I will try to persuade you that . . .
 - The greatest pleasure in reading *Persuasion* lies in allying yourself with the ironist (the narrator) rather than in identifying with the romantic couple.
 - Do you think you are persuadable? What will it take? Why might you object?

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IV. THESIS (CONT.)

- B. Thinking with Austen
 - 1. Irony
 - a. Irony is an important stylistic element that allows a writer to create the sense that narrator and reader are thinking together.
 - b. What is it, precisely? Definition.
 - c. Irony and assessment: shaping the reader's thinking (45-57, 52, 86)

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IV. THESIS (CONT.)

B. THINKING WITH AUSTEN (CONT.)

- 2. Austen creates a "satiric field."
 - (58, 59, 70-1, 75-7, 80, 86, 142)
 - Other examples?
- 3. Forming a thought community for readers



The back garden at Chawton

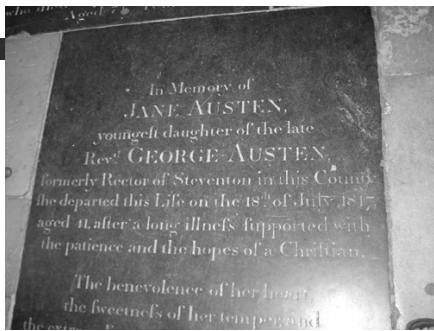
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V. MORE PHOTOGRAPHS: WINCHESTER CATHEDRAL, WHERE AUSTEN IS BURIED.



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V. MORE PHOTOGRAPHS (CONT.)
AUSTEN'S GRAVE MARKER



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