English 016.401
Jane Austen and her Contemporaries
Michael Gamer
mgamer@english

Class meets: MW 2:00-3:30 pm, 139 Fisher-Bennett Hall.

Film screenings: Monday 6:30-9:30 pm in the Rooftop Lounge of Rodin College House, 3901 Locust Walk

Course Website: https://courseweb.library.upenn.edu

Office Locations: 336 Fisher-Bennett Hall (746-3766)

MG's Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays after class, 336 Fisher-Bennett Hall, and by appointment.

Course Description: This freshman seminar provides students with an introduction to studying English at the university level through the study of a single author: Jane Austen. At once acutely aware of her culture and a product of it, Austen read and wrote in popular forms, from Gothic horror to raucous satire. Her love of popular theater enters into her work constantly. Her gift for writing dialogue has produced successful screen adaptations of every one of her novels. During the semester, we'll read five of Austen's novels: Sense and Sensibility, Northanger Abbey, Pride and Prejudice, Emma, and Persuasion. In addition, we will gather several Monday evenings during the semester to see how Austen has been adapted to the screen. As we read, we'll also dip into some writing by her contemporaries (such as Lord Byron, Ann Radcliffe, and Walter Scott) as well as seeing a number of screen adaptations. As this will be a real introductory research seminar, part of our aim will be learning what it means to do real literary research and to make the kinds of interpretations and interventions that professional critics make. Required work: responses, short assignments, a long essay, a screenplay assignment, and a final examination.

Books: Available at Penn Book Center, 34th and Sansom (215-222-7600)
Jane Austen, Sense and Sensibility (1811; Broadview Press edition)
Jane Austen, Pride and Prejudice (1812; Broadview edition)
Jane Austen, Emma (1816; Broadview edition)
Jane Austen, Northanger Abbey (composed late 1790s, published 1818; Broadview edition)
Jane Austen, Persuasion (1818; Broadview edition)

Strongly Recommended:
Timothy Corrigan, A Short Guide to Writing about Film. As this book is incredibly expensive new ($30), I advise you to go to Amazon or half.com or some other used book site and order a used copy. You should be able to find one for a few dollars.
Optional Books: Recommended, but these are also available on reserve at the library.
Emma Thompson, *The Sense and Sensibility Screenplay and Diaries* (Newmarket Press, 2002).

Films: (See Course Calendar for screening dates. Many will be on Penn Video Network).
*Pride and Prejudice* (1940); *Clueless* (1995); *Sense and Sensibility* (1995); *Pride and Prejudice* (1996); *Persuasion* (1996); *Emma* (1996); *Emma* (1999); *Master and Commander* (2003); *Pride and Prejudice* (2005)

Course Calendar:

**Unit 1: Opposing Forces, Adaptable Aesthetics**

Sep 5: Opening Day of Class. Three Genres. In class, we'll talk about Austen's exposition, her outbursts, and her dialogue. You'll also receive some handouts on Genres and Tropes, on 18th-c Aesthetic Terms, on Reading Austen Fiction, and on Close Reading. Like all documents for this course, these are also available on the course website.

Sep 10: Acting Sensibly. My aim for this week is to get you up to speed, and so there is a lot of reading. For this week, read the first 22 chapters (volume one) of *Sense and Sensibility*. In addition, reread all the handouts closely, and think about how to use these ideas in your own reading of *Sense and Sensibility*. Finally, read Appendix B from the Broadview edition, and the poems, by Helen Maria Williams and William Wordsworth, especially "Sensibility" (1786) by Williams, and Wordsworth's "Sonnet on seeing Miss Helen Maria Williams Weep at a Tale of Distress" (1787). The Williams especially will give you a full portrait of the poetry of sensibility.

**Assignment due today:** I'd like you to look up the words from the handout on Aesthetics in the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* Online, paying special attention to what the terms meant circa 1800 and how they evolved since their inception. You can find the *OED* by going to the Penn Library website (www.library.upenn.edu), and typing "oed" in the search window. Do bring up the full definitions on your screen -- i.e., the ones that for each definition provide quotations and sources to illustrate a particular usage of the word. I'd then like you to find moments in the first 22 chapters of *Sense and Sensibility* that partake of these terms or are informed by them. (Don't be surprised if you don't find instances of all of the terms).

**During class:** Our goal is to become familiar with key words for this novel and for the course in general. We'll review key terms, and then in the final 45 minutes concentrate on the problem of sensibility and performance (Chapters 3, 7, and 9, and the Williams poem to Mrs. Siddons), and sensibility and reading the body (Chapter 4 and 9, and the Williams and Wordsworth poems), and any other passages you wish to discuss. You might want to think about the following questions: (1) What is the relation between how people respond to art and what it says about them? (2) If being
a sentimental reader is like being a doctor -- in that both look for symptoms to analyze, then which bodily symptoms can be faked and which not faked?

**NO FILM TONIGHT.** I'll be giving a lecture on the 6th floor of Van Pelt Library at 5:15 pm in the Lea Library should you wish to come.

**Sept 12:** Reading People like a Landscape. Keep reading *Sense and Sensibility*, through Volume 2, Chapter 5. In addition, read Appendices C and E from the Broadview edition, and the selection from Uvedale Price's *On the Picturesque*. See also the pictures at [http://web2.uwindsor.ca/hrg/amckay/Claudemirror.com/Home.html](http://web2.uwindsor.ca/hrg/amckay/Claudemirror.com/Home.html) and [http://www.vam.ac.uk/collections/paintings/cheating/claude/index.html](http://www.vam.ac.uk/collections/paintings/cheating/claude/index.html). Also: look up "Claude glasses" online and see what you find.

**Assignment due today:** Please come to class with a scene from Volume 1 or the beginning of Volume 2 that you believe particularly important and good for discussion. Bring a written paragraph to class in which you explain: what scene or passage you've chosen, what aspect of it you wish to discuss, and why. Make sure that you explain how far your own thinking has taken you regarding the passage, and make clear where you need our help (through discussion) to solve clarify key issues for you. Some candidate scenes might be: Willoughby's exit (Chapter 15); Edward's return (Chapters 18-19); or one of Lucy Steele's conversations with Elinor (Volume 1, Chapter 22 and Volume 2, Chapters 1-2) -- but I repeat: choose in a scene you wish to discuss.

**Sept 17:** Set Pieces. For this week, you should read as far as you can in *Sense and Sensibility*, so that you can begin rereading key scenes. For today I'd like us to begin reading critical articles, and so please read the chapter by Marilyn Butler from *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (1975). Please also read the two handouts on the course website: *Levels of Thinking* and *Reading Critical Articles*.

Think hard about these in relation to the Butler, and in relation to your own critical writing. When you write "about" a work of literature, what is your goal? Who is your audience? What do you assume you audience knows about that work? etc.

**Assignment due in class today:** Please bring to class your short written answers to these questions: (1) what general belief about *Sense and Sensibility* is Butler trying to dispel? (2) What interpretation is she putting in its place? (3) On what passages and episodes in the novel does she depend the most? (4) What passages and episodes does she ignore or appear to misread?

**Monday Evening, 6:30, Rodin Rooftop Lounge:** Film: *Sense and Sensibility* (1995). For tonight, have a look at the chapters by Tim Corrigan and James Naremore about Film and Film Adaptation.

**Sept 19:** Reading (and) Marianne. Continue discussing *Sense and Sensibility*. Read Appendices D and F, and the Sonnets I and IX by Charlotte Smith (see course website). (For Appendix D, you might also want to have a look at the various characters' London addresses on Google Earth or Google Maps. How are London
addresses expressive of social class?). We will spend at least 30 minutes reading the poems in Appendix F (and the two Smith sonnets), so read them closely.

Sept 24: The Problem (of) Ending. Finish discussing Sense and Sensibility. For today's class I'd like you to focus on two parts of the book: Willoughby's big scene (volume 3, chapter 8) and the ending of the novel. How does the former produce the latter? Are you satisfied with the ending? What would you have to believe about duty and marriage for you to think this a perfect, happy ending? Then, read the two reviews in Appendix A. How do your assumptions about what makes a good novel differ from the reviewers'?

Assignment due today: For today, write an essay of no more than 400 words for me that answers either one of the following two questions: either (1) If the extract from Cowper's The Task really shows us how the mind and memory work associatively, how would you use the poem to demonstrate and explain why Marianne is so melancholy; or (2) Using Sonnets I and IX by Charlotte Smith, how would you explain Marianne's narcissism and snobbery of taste? Hints: please do not waste words by writing an introduction, and please directly answer the question posed to you. Show me what lines in the poem(s) matter to you, and then show me by quoting from Sense and Sensibility how the lines help you to read this aspect of the novel. Please note that quotations do not count towards the word count.

Unit 2: The Romance of the Estate

Monday Evening, 6:30, Rodin Rooftop Lounge: Film: Pride and Prejudice (1996, pt. 1)

Sep 26: Questions of character: Reading: Pride and Prejudice (1812), chapters 1-12. Read also D. A. Miller's lecture on Austen, "Secret Love" from Jane Austen, or the Secret of a Style. As you read Miller's essay, try to answer these questions: (1) what general belief about Austen is he trying to dispel? (2) What interpretation is he putting in its place? (3) On what passages and episodes in the novel does he depend the most? (4) What passages and episodes does he ignore or appear to misread?

For today's class, we should talk about Miller's essay and about the novel's opening chapter. But I'd also like you to think about "character"; and to that effect I'd like you to look up the word (both as a noun and a verb) in the OED. As you read the first 12 chapters, make a list of key words that would benefit from doing OED work with them, and look them up.

Sep 28: OED Assignment Due at Friday at 5 pm.

Oct 1: By the end of this week, you should have finished Volume 2 of Pride and Prejudice. For today we'll discuss one of the great set pieces of the novel: the Mr. Collins episode.

Monday Evening, 6:30, Rodin Rooftop Lounge: Film: Pride and Prejudice (1996, pt. 2)
Oct 3: Finish Volume 2 of *Pride and Prejudice*, and read Appendix B. Read also the article by Edward Jacobs, "Anonymous Signatures." I'd like to focus part of our discussion on Lady Catherine and the question of reading, music, and women's education, but otherwise leave the floor open for your own interests. **Note: By this week you should have begun work on your "Austen's Contemporaries" assignment, due October 12th.**

Oct 8: For today, keep reading *Pride and Prejudice*, and read Appendix E of your edition.

**Monday Evening, 6:30, Rodin Rooftop Lounge: Film: Pride and Prejudice (1940)**

Oct 10: Finish *Pride and Prejudice*.

Oct 12: "Austen's Contemporaries" assignment due by 5 pm today. I would like hard copies of this as well as electronic copies. Drop Period Ends.

Oct 15: FALL BREAK. No class.

Unit 3: Enter the Gothic

Oct 17: Read the first seven chapters of *The Italian*. Since we don't have time to read the entire novel, I've supplied you with a plot summary on the course website. Read Edmund Burke, selections from *A Philosophical Enquiry into ... the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757; selections). **Questions:** (1) What does Schedoni's exterior say about his interior? (2) Consider the scene in which Vivaldi enters Schedoni's room: what does Radcliffe describe him as finding, and what does her description suggest? (3) How does Ellena's response to the mountainous landscapes around San Stefano give you a glimpse into her interior?

Oct 22: **Responses for this week due by Sunday at noon (if you are planning to do one).** Try to get through Volume II, chapter 2 of *The Italian*, and begin *Northanger Abbey*, including the "Biographical Notice of the Author" and Appendices A-D. **Questions:** (1) Given what you know about the sublime, how does the architecture of San Stefano express its power? (2) If romances are fairly clear about what heroism is, then how would describe Ellena's "heroism"? (3) After reading the first chapter of *Northanger Abbey*, how would you describe the writing? How is it different from Radcliffe? **Special guest today: Professor Jill Heydt-Stevenson.**

**Monday Evening: No film tonight.**

Oct 24: Continue with *Northanger Abbey*, at least through Chapter 15. In addition, I'd like you to read the chapters by Jill Heydt-Stevenson, considering the usual questions: (1) what general belief about Austen is she trying to dispel? (2) What interpretation is she putting in its place? (3) On what passages and episodes in the novel does she depend the most? (4) What passages and episodes does she ignore or appear to misread? For this class, I'd like us to analyze Chapter 14 and Chapter 15 closely.
Oct 29: Responses for this week due by Sunday at noon (if you are planning to do one). Continue with Northanger Abbey. Please also read the chapter from Robert Miles's Jane Austen (on course website). As you read Miles's essay, try to answer these questions: (1) what general belief about Austen is he trying to dispel? (2) What interpretation is he putting in its place? (3) On what passages and episodes in the novel does he depend the most? (4) What passages and episodes does he ignore or appear to misread?

For today, I'd like to go back to some of the close reading work we did at the beginning of the course and analyze Isabella's behavior and Catherine's discussion of it with Henry (Ch. 16-19), and Catherine's first days at Northanger (Ch. 20-23). Think about the experience of reading these chapters: on one hand, we see the world through Catherine's eyes, and know her thoughts; on the other hand, we also may judge from the same evidence that has been placed before Catherine. Is there a disjunction between your conclusions and hers? What kind of narrative technique is this?


Oct 31: Happy Halloween. Finish Northanger Abbey. In addition, I'd like you to read the essays by Laurence Stone and Anna Clark. I'd like us to consider Henry's cautionary words to Catherine in light of the arguments of Stone and Clark; and I'd like us again to consider the question of endings.

Nov 2: SCREENPLAY ASSIGNMENT DUE. I would like hard copies of this as well as electronic copies. This weekend, read over the long essay assignment instructions (if you haven't already) and start thinking about projects for it.

Unit 4: Desire, Misreading, and Narration.

Nov 5: Responses for this week due by Sunday at noon (if you are planning to do one). Read volume one of Emma (1816). For this class I'd like to focus on questions of sexuality and androgyny in the first ten chapters of the novel. In your own reading, think about how Emma is described compared to Harriet Smith; now think about Mr. Woodhouse and Mr. Knightly.

Note: Sign for an appointment: after class Wednesday, or on Friday. This meeting will about your final essay. In preparation for the meeting, read over the long essay assignment instructions and bring a couple of short abstracts (less than 200 words each) of possible essay projects.


Nov 7: Continue reading Emma. For this class we might wish to discuss the scene of Mr. Elton's proposal, as well as Frank Churchill's letter; but we also might wish to discuss questions bring in. Note special hours today: for those of you without other commitments, class will go until 5 pm. At 3:30, we'll walk over to do an optional
library information session with Bob Walther, who'll teach you how to use the MLA Bibliography and Literature Online. The session will begin at 3:30, be held in Van Pelt Library in the Goldstein Electronic Classroom on the first floor (down the hallway past the Reference Dept, just before the new Weigle Information Commons).

Nov 12: **Responses for this week due by Sunday at noon.** Finish reading volume 2 of *Emma*. For this class, read the chapter from Claudia Johnson on *Emma* from *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (1988). As you read Johnson's chapter, try to answer these questions: (1) what general belief about Austen is she trying to dispel? (2) What interpretation is she putting in its place? (3) On what passages and episodes in the novel does she depend the most? (4) What passages and episodes does she ignore or appear to misread? **Special Guest today: Professor Claudia Johnson.**

For this class, I'd like to focus on the Frank Churchill chapters, and particularly on the way in which Austen is playing with romance expectations. What does it mean that Emma does not fall in love with Frank Churchill? What happens to the script she's been writing for herself?

**Monday Evening, 6:30, Rodin Rooftop Lounge: Film: *Clueless* (1995)**

Nov 14: For this class, I'd like to discuss *Clueless* and any aspects of volumes 1-2 of *Emma* you would like to discuss.

Nov 19: Finish *Emma*, and read the chapter from Franco Moretti's *Atlas of the European Novel* (Blackboard). For this class, we'll focus on the Donwell and Box Hill episodes. Read each closely, and ask yourself: What happens at each party? How does your answer to this question change once you understand that Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax have been all this while engaged? How is reading *Emma* -- especially these chapters -- different from rereading it?

**Monday Evening, 6:30, Rodin Rooftop Lounge: Film: *Emma* (1999)**

Nov 21: Finish *Emma*, and read through the various appendices at the end of the book. In particular, read through Walter Scott's review of *Emma* in Appendix A of the Broadview edition. Then read through the plot summary of Scott's first novel, *Waverley*, and the short selection I provide you. For this class, we'll be discussing the ending of *Emma* in relation to the very different kind of novel Scott helped pioneer. From what you can tell, how would you describe the differences between a book like *Emma* and *Waverley*?

November 22-25: Thanksgiving Vacation

**Epilogue: After the War, after the Proposal.**

Nov 26: **Responses for this week due by Sunday at noon (if you are planning to do one).** Begin *Persuasion* (1818). Read the introduction and the first several chapters. We'll
focus especially on the relation between satire and romance as two ways of seeing the world, and on Chapter 10. Also read Appendix C, F.

**Monday Evening, 6:30, Rodin Rooftop Lounge: Master and Commander (2002).** Unlike other films we've seen, this one is to provide you with an answer to the question, "So how has Wentworth made his money?"

Nov 28: **Recitation:*** Finish volume 1 of *Persuasion*. For this class, I'd like us to focus on the chapters that focus on Wentworth and the navy, especially chapters 3, 8, and 11-12. I'd also like us to focus on Appendices H and I of the Broadview edition -- i.e., on Captain Benwick's reading.

Nov 30: **LONG ESSAY DUE AT 5 pm.** I would like hard copies of this as well as electronic copies.

Dec 3: Continue reading *Persuasion*. For this class, I'd like us to focus on the character of Mrs. Smith, and on the ways in which goods and gossip circulate in the city of Bath.

**Monday Evening, 6:30, Rodin Rooftop Lounge: Persuasion (1996)**

Dec 5: Last Day of Class. Please read the ending of *Persuasion*, as well as the alternative ending to the book (Appendix A). Evaluations, summing up, answering questions about the final exam.

Dec 10: **Portfolios due by 5 pm.** I would like hard copies of this as well as electronic copies. Please provide a large stamped envelope addressed to you with proper postage.

**Course Requirements:**

**Participation:**
I've set up the course so that you will have considerable freedom to come into lectures and recitations with your own questions and concerns. Obviously, with this freedom comes responsibility. On the one hand, as a class, we must agree to honor each other's interests and intellectual tangents, and respect what each other thinks is important; on the other hand, it is every seminar member's responsibility to be succinct, and not to waste the rest of the members' time by flogging a personal hobby-horse. Participation isn't simply speaking; real participants are the ones who make a class work, who respond to one another rather than talking at one another. While participation counts for no set percentage toward your grade, in a few cases we will lower or raise your final grade based on your level of engagement in the course.

**Absences:**
Since we know that disasters happen unexpectedly during the semester, I allow you two absences. Since there's no such thing in this class as an "excused" absence, I do not want to know why you miss class. Please do not write saying "I know you don't want to know about why I've
missed class, but I still wanted to let you know" etc. *You'll drive me insane by doing so.* Your two absences are your business. Missing more than two classes is equally your business, but it will significantly lower your grade. You should count on 3-4 absences lowering your grade by 1/3 (B to B-, for example), 4-5 by 2/3 (B to C+), 6-7 by one full grade (B to C), etc. **On the other hand:** please **do notify me if you are experiencing a major illness** (missing more than a week of class); and **do get a note from your doctor. I'll need it.**

**GRADED WORK FOR THE COURSE**

1. **Responses and Exercises (5% of grade).** These include all the early written work, which I will grade either "plus," "check," or "minus."

2. **The Final Examination (20% of grade).** This will be open book and open note, and consist of identifications and an essay.

3. **Your Portfolio (75% of your grade).** During the semester, you'll be turning in assignments just as you would for any other course -- and I'll be providing feedback and provisional grades on those assignments. But I'll be gearing all my comments toward helping you revise your work for the end-of-semester portfolio.
   - The portfolio is due in on December 10th at 5 p.m. It will consist of revised versions of the following:
     - i) Your *OED* Assignment (10%);
     - ii) Your "Austen's Contemporaries" Assignment (15%);
     - iii) Your screenplay and analysis (25% of grade);

While the portfolio is there to give you an opportunity to revise your work and make it better -- as well as modeling how writing is evaluated in the real world. In addition, it is impossible for your revised work to receive a lower grade than it received in draft. This means that, in revising your work, you should take chances and **not** play it safe, since you have nothing to lose by trying out a new or better idea.

You should know that I will read only one draft of each assignment before you hand in the final versions with the end-of-semester portfolio. I'm always happy to discuss your ideas or your work with you during office hours or by appointment. I will also be very happy to talk with you about an essay already commented upon.

**A Note on Late Work and Extensions:** During the semester, I will not accept late work. In the case of the deadlines for the OED and Austen's Contemporaries assignments, and for Screenplay and Critical Essay, this will not directly affect your grade; you simply lose that opportunity for me to read your work in draft and provide you with feedback. I do this because we do not want anything to do with the hassles of students asking for extensions, bringing excuses, etc. **As with absences, please do not write to me asking for extensions.**

**Books and Films Placed on Reserve at Van Pelt Library:**
Helen Bruton Jerome, *Pride and Prejudice; A Sentimental Comedy* (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran, 1935. 822 J489P.