

JANE'S FAME | Claire Harman



PICADOR

HOW

Jane Austen

CONQUERED

THE

WORLD

"An informed and elegant chronicle of the rise of 'Divine Jane.'"
—MAUREEN CORRIGAN, NPR'S *FRESH AIR*

Jane's Fame

HOW JANE AUSTEN CONQUERED
THE WORLD



CLAIRE HARMAN

PICADOR

A JOHN MACRAE BOOK
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY
NEW YORK

JANE'S FAME. Copyright © 2009 by Claire Harman. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. For information, address Picador, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10010.

www.picadorusa.com

Picador® is a U.S. registered trademark and is used by Henry Holt and Company under license from Pan Books Limited.

For information on Picador Reading Group Guides, please contact Picador.
E-mail: readinggroupguides@picadorusa.com

Designed by Meryl Sussman Levavi

The Library of Congress has cataloged the Henry Holt edition as follows:

Harman, Claire.

Jane's fame: how Jane Austen conquered the world / Claire Harman.—1st U.S. ed.

p. cm.

Originally published : Edinburgh : Canongate, 2009.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8050-8258-6

1. Austen, Jane, 1775-1817—Appreciation. 2. Austen, Jane, 1775-1817—Influence. 3. Novelists, English—19th century—Biography. I. Title.

PR4036.H37 2010

823.7—dc22

[B]

2009022291

Picador ISBN 978-0-312-68065-7


Originally published in Great Britain by Canongate Books Ltd

First published in the United States by John Macrae Books,
an imprint of Henry Holt and Company

First Picador Edition: February 2011

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Divine Jane

 THE NOVELIST MARGARET OLIPHANT MADE SEVERAL SHREWD remarks in her review of Austen-Leigh's *Memoir* in 1870, at the very beginning of the burgeoning of Austen's fame. Austen-Leigh had sought to impress readers with his aunt's personal and professional modesty; his (unsurprising) view was that she had not got her due during her lifetime. Mrs. Oliphant wondered rather how the author had subsequently achieved wider recognition: "To the general public . . . it is scarcely to be expected that books so calm and cold and keen, and making so little claim upon their sympathy, would ever be popular." She was surely right in thinking that Austen's novels, as novels, were unlikely candidates for mass consumption and global fame, that there was a great deal about them, in fact, that was uncompromising and pokerishly unbending, that their surface satisfactions hid other agendas, too privately interesting to the author to impel her to point them out. But Mrs. Oliphant was also right that such considerations would make very little difference to the growth of Austen's popularity. The widening audience was not for the novels so much as for the novels in combination with "Miss Austen" and, increasingly, "Jane."

Several new biographies of Austen appeared in the 1880s and '90s,

all heavily derivative of the *Memoir*, and in 1883 a Harvard undergraduate won a prize for his dissertation on Austen's novels, the first time the author had been studied in the academy. Another American, Oscar Fay Adams (a friend of the poet James Russell Lowell), was the only one of the new biographers who attempted to do some original research and was the first to travel around the sites significant to Austen in England, taking photographs as he went (reproduced in the second edition of his book). Most of his rivals in the field were interested only in recasting the published material to their own taste: Sarah Tytler, the first "unofficial" biographer, filled her book with résumés of the novels, while Sarah Fanny Malden made what she could of the romantic episodes in Austen's life, including the shadowy "seaside romance" and a completely apocryphal story, promulgated by Sir Francis Doyle in the 1880s, of how Austen had once been engaged to a naval officer (à la *Persuasion*) and had been due to meet him on a walking tour of Switzerland with her father and sister when news came of his death: "The story adds that the young officer had overwalked himself, and became so alarmingly ill on his way that he had been carried to a cottage, where he lay for many days between life and death, incapable of communicating with the outer world until just before his death, when he rallied sufficiently to give the Austens' address to those who were nursing him."¹ . . . and so forth, and so on, a complete fiction. Even Adams, with his quasi-scientific approach, felt the need for a softening process to go on, stating his aim as "to place [Austen] before the world as the winsome, delightful woman that she really was, and thus to dispel the unattractive, not to say forbidding, mental picture that so many have formed of her."²

In 1885, Jane Austen made it into the *Dictionary of National Biography*, an honor not granted to Elizabeth Inchbald or Charlotte Smith. The article was written by Leslie Stephen, the editor of the project, who kept his account brief and brisk, outlining Austen's life, career, and critical reception without deviating into the admiration "even to fanaticism" that he noted "of innumerable readers." His emphasis is on scale: her understanding of "the precise limits of her own powers" (cue the "little bit of Ivory") and how, within her tiny world, she is "flawless." His characterization, derived from the only readily

available sources, Austen-Leigh's *Memoir* and Brabourne's *Letters* (which Stephen judges "trivial" and affording "no new facts"), follows them in lauding her most mediocre accomplishments—" [She] could sing a few simple old songs in a sweet voice, and was remarkably dextrous with her needle"—and thinking her art "unconscious." But Stephen's coolly appraising tone, that of the men's-club cabal that ran London literary life in the 1880s and '90s, and his pivotal position in that influential society, admitted Austen, like a guest on the Savile's annual ladies' night, to a different locus of appreciation. As James Edward Austen-Leigh had noted of his aunt's preeminent popularity among a group of "well-known literary men" gathered at a country house, she appeared to have "the power of attracting powerful minds."³

It was important to Austen's growing status that she was open to such "discovery" and that it could be made to reflect flatteringly on the discoverer. James Edward Austen-Leigh's view of who appreciated Jane Austen best during her lifetime had been an emphatic restatement of what his father had written, that "to her family alone/Her real & genuine worth was known." Reflecting on "how coldly her works were first received, and how few readers had any appreciation of their peculiar merits,"⁴ James Edward claimed all the credit of perspicacity for the family: "If they had known that we, in our secret thoughts, classed her with Madame d'Arblay or Miss Edgeworth, or even with some other novel writers of the day whose names are now scarcely remembered, they would have considered it an amusing instance of family conceit":

To the multitude her works appeared tame and commonplace, poor in colouring and sadly deficient in incident and interest. It is true that we were sometimes cheered by hearing that a different verdict had been pronounced by more competent judges; we were told how some great statesman or distinguished poet held these works in high estimation; we had the satisfaction of believing that they were most admired by the best judges, and comforted ourselves with Horace's "satis est Equitem mihi plaudere." So much was this the case, that one of the ablest men of my acquaintance said, in that kind of jest

which has much earnest in it, that he had established it in his own mind, as a new test of ability, whether people *could or could not* appreciate Miss Austen's merits.⁵

This idea (generated by Austen-Leigh's friend R. H. Cheney) of Austen appreciation being some kind of "test" or benchmark of taste and intellect had irresistible appeal and featured prominently in many reviews of the *Memoir*. But the whole passage, with its insistence on "we and they," was the strongest possible foundation for a literary cult emerging around Austen that addressed the club mentality rather than the subject's actual achievements. Rather like a reversal of the Groucho Marx quip, "I don't want to join a club that will accept me as a member," the idea of a society of Austen appreciators self-selected for their superior discrimination held out a way to join a band of people linked by complacency over their own taste. Her snob value was guaranteed by this formula, and by 1894, George Saintsbury was confident that "a fondness for Miss Austen" could be considered "itself a patent of exemption from any possible charge of vulgarity."⁶

As this supposedly exclusive interest spread, Mrs. Oliphant's wonder "that books so calm and cold and keen . . . would ever be popular" was borne out by the books themselves having to adapt to the requirements of a mass market. Just as "Jane Austen" had become "Jane," the texts on their own no longer seemed suitable vehicles for what could be read into them, and late-nineteenth-century, post-*Memoir* editions of Austen increasingly introduced illustrations—however poor or inappropriate—as decoration and to some extent *distraction* from the novel in hand. Austen's characters had inspired such widespread affection by this date that there was a craving to give them a concrete shape, to "fix" the best-loved of them in the public mind's eye, in the way that modern film and television versions of the novels vie with one another through more and more ingenious or desperate casting to get just the "right" Emma Woodhouse or Elizabeth Bennet or Anne Elliot, or the right one for the audience of the moment. After a number of pre-Raphaelite-style illustrated editions in the 1870s and '80s (the Routledge Emma has an interestingly Ford Madox Brown-ish look), the 1890s saw a burst of incontinently decorated versions,

from those by Edmund H. Garrett for the American market to Chris Hammond's pen-and-ink pictures for George Allen, and the brothers C. E. and H. M. Brock's separate sets of pictures for Macmillan and Dent. All tended toward sentimental caricature, and there was no attempt at historical accuracy—one reviewer in 1903 complained with justice that the J. M. Dent illustrations made the characters "look rather as if they were dressed up for acting in their poke-bonnets, short waists, high stocks, and pantaloons."⁷

The 1894 Allen and Macmillan edition of *Pride and Prejudice*, with 160 illustrations by Hugh Thomson, showed what commercial potential was locked into the presentation of Austen's novels. Thomson didn't just impose his own mark on everything in the book (he even redrew the lettering of the title page) but redrew the boundaries between the author's ownership of a text and an interpreter's, abducting *Pride and Prejudice* into the land of kitsch. It was an instant success: Thomson's super-fussy fine pencil work, the blandly interchangeable faces he gave to all the "attractive" females (whose heads are much smaller than anyone else's), and the exaggerated physiognomies of the "comic" characters proved immensely popular; the edition sold 11,500 copies in its first year and was reprinted countless times until the middle of the following century. These were far higher sales than any previous edition of the novel and earned more money for the illustrator than the author or her estate had ever seen.⁸ Though not universally admired (E. M. Forster called them "lamentable"), Thomson's drawings have acquired a "classic" status of their own, and an extensive set of printers' first proofs from his *Pride and Prejudice* hang now in the sanctum of all things Austen, the Jane Austen House Museum, as if they represent an officially sanctioned way to visualize the story.

The edition that was so stuffed with Thomson's decorations was also notable for a preface, by George Saintsbury, which revealed the spectacle of a respected critic and academic indulging in sentimental reverie about Austen's characters and confiding that Elizabeth Bennet was at the top of his list of fictional heroines that "no man of taste and spirit" could help falling in love with and wanting to marry.⁹ In the distinction he drew (pace Walt Whitman) between "loving by

allowance" and "loving with personal love," Saintsbury let slip a new word:

In the case of the not very numerous authors who are the objects of the personal affection, it brings a curious consequence with it. There is much more difference as to their best work than in the case of those others who are loved "by allowance," by convention, and because it is felt to be the right and proper thing to love them. And in the sect—fairly large and yet unusually choice—of Austenians or Janites, there would probably be found partisans of the claim to primacy of almost every one of the novels.¹⁰

Janites, or "Janeites" as the spelling was adapted, now had a name and a banner under which to rally.

Leslie Stephen had commented acidly as early as 1876, "I never . . . knew a person thoroughly deaf to humour who did not worship Miss Austen. [Hers] seems to be the very type of that kind of humour which charms one large class of amiable persons; and Austenolatry is perhaps the most intolerant and dogmatic of literary creeds."¹¹ The coining of the term "Janeite" by Saintsbury in 1894 showed how widespread and mainstream Austen fandom had become by then, far surpassing the sentimental cult of any other writer. Several influential middlebrow commentators seemed to have entirely lost their heads over the female paragon who had emerged from the biography; Austen Dobson and Richard Brimley Johnson both gushed about her charm, and E. V. Lucas was delighted to see the spirit of criticism "disconcerted and defeated in the presence of the 'divine chit-chat' of this little lady."¹² Lucas said there was "no middle way" with Austen; you either idolized or ignored her, a formula that easily modulated from an argument about taste to a statement of belief. The American novelist and critic W. D. Howells, himself an ardent Janeite, remarked in 1890 on the transition that was taking place: "The story of 'Pride and Prejudice' has of late years become known to a constantly, almost rapidly, increasing cult, as it must be called, for the readers of Jane Austen are hardly ever less than her adorers: she is a passion and a creed, if not quite a religion."¹³

Religious imagery began to appear everywhere, from Austen's books being frequently described as "sacred" and "immortal" and her name "hallowed," to a passage in *Persuasion* being called "one of the very sacred things of literature."¹⁴ Howells was the first to name the author "the divine Jane,"¹⁵ and though he meant it semisatirically, the sobriquet gained immediate currency. In 1900, the Earl of Iddesleigh proposed a magazine entirely devoted to Jane Austen and, in an article titled brazenly "The Legend of St Jane," talked of his "worship" at various "sacred spots." By the early years of the new century even the distinguished academic A. C. Bradley felt free to presume when he lectured to a group of Cambridge undergraduates "that, like myself, you belong to the faithful"¹⁶ and that "the faithful enjoy comparing notes," while Saintsbury, who was professor of English literature at Edinburgh, had by 1913 disintegrated to the point of declaring himself proud to be "an Austen Friar, a knight (or at least a squire) of the order of St Jane."¹⁷

A cult needs relics, pilgrims, a priesthood, a shrine. Austen's first home in Steventon had been demolished in the 1820s, and her last, the cottage at Chawton, was in use as estate workers' tenements and bore little resemblance to the house the author had known. Winchester was the only readily accessible pilgrimage site in the 1890s, and Americans were the first pilgrims; they laid flowers on the gravestone in the cathedral and wandered up and down College Street, trying to identify the house where Jane Austen had died. Octavius Le Croix, proprietor of the College Street confectionery shop, was so annoyed at being asked by tourists whether or not his was the right building that he petitioned his landlords, Winchester College, to put up a tablet on the outside. "They never buy anything and they waste my time," the disgruntled trader complained to a housemaster's wife. However, a few months later he was asking for the sign to be removed again. The Americans had been silenced, but now he had a new lot of time wasters in the shop, local people asking who Jane Austen was.¹⁸

Local people might well have been puzzled by the Austen memorial stained-glass window that was installed in Winchester Cathedral in 1900, paid for by public subscription at the suggestion of Austen's American biographer, Oscar Fay Adams. The artist, C. E. Kempe, was

not, of course, allowed to represent Austen herself or her creations in the cathedral's glass (however much some Janeites might have dreamed of it), but seems to have been hard pressed to find suitable alternative imagery. His design is so cryptically allusive as to be virtually meaningless: two rows of three figures, including David with his harp, St. John, his gospel open at "In the beginning was the Word" (in Latin); and several of the children of Korah, mentioned in 2 Chronicles 19–20 as spontaneous and joyful praisers of the Lord. If it weren't for a barely legible inscription at the bottom of one panel (in Latin) that translates, "Remember in the Lord Jane Austen / who died July 18th, A.D. 1817," I doubt that anyone would guess what or whom the window commemorates. The presence of St. Augustine at the head is meant to be a big clue, as one guide tells us: "His name, in its abbreviated form, is St Austin."¹⁹ How much better it would have been if church authority and precedent had allowed Kempe to include among the sons of Korah Mrs. Elton with her "apparatus of happiness," the strawberry trug and rustic hat, or Lady Bertram and Pug: both so instantly recognizable.

Rudyard Kipling, a fervent Janeite, regarded Winchester as "the holiest place in England" after Stratford²⁰ and used to go out of his way to pass through the town on journeys down country. A rollicking quatrain that he published in the 1920s could have provided the cult of Austen, had they sought one, with the words for an anthem, and the nation with an alternative patron saint:

*Jane lies in Winchester—blessed be her shade!
Praise the Lord for making her, and her for all she made!
And while the stones of Winchester, or Milsom Street, remain,
Glory, love, and honour unto England's Jane!*

Janeites have never fought shy of blasphemous suggestions. David Rhydderch, in 1932, only half-jokingly, compared the author's emergence from "long eclipse" with that of another inspired virgin, the newly canonized Joan of Arc: "Beside her tomb in Winchester, her name is writ on brass; and above, a Latin inscription beneath the harps of David in stained glass points her worth. The Maid of Orleans al-

ready looks down upon us; and the day is not far distant when the 'Divine Jane' like patience on a monument smiling at fame, will keep her company."²¹



THE CULT OF DIVINE Jane provoked some violent reactions, none more so than Mark Twain's. Twain found English literary taste and tradition oppressive, and Austen represented the worst of it to him; he thought her "impossible" not just in literary terms, but socially and politically. Ralph Waldo Emerson had had a similarly strong antipathy, accusing Jane Austen of being "sterile in artistic invention, imprisoned in the wretched conventions of English society, without genius, wit, or knowledge of the world."²² No "3 or 4 Families in a Country Village" or little bits of Ivory for him! Like Emerson, Twain loathed what he perceived as Austen's artificiality and English spinster passionlessness, dismissing her characters as a bunch of "Presbyterians." "I often want to criticize Jane Austen, but her books madden me so that I can't conceal my frenzy from the reader; and therefore I have to stop every time I begin," he wrote to Joseph Twitchell. "Every time I read 'Pride and Prejudice' I want to dig her up and hit her over the skull with her own shin-bone."²³

Twain didn't encounter Austen's novels under very auspicious circumstances. During his grueling world lecture tour of 1895–96, conducted to raise some quick cash after the bankruptcy in 1894 of his publishing firm, Webster & Co., Twain read *The Vicar of Wakefield* and "some of Jane Austen" on the boat between Wellington and Sydney, and thought them both "thoroughly artificial."²⁴ A few weeks later, on the long haul from Sydney to Ceylon, he found "the best library I have seen in a ship yet," though that wasn't saying much, as the usual suspects were staring out at him: "I must read that devilish Vicar of Wakefield again. Also Jane Austen."²⁵ The experience proved decisive, for on the next ship, from Madras to Mauritius, he was relieved to find there was no Austen on board: "Just that one omission alone would make a fairly good library out of a library that hadn't a book in it."²⁶

Twain never tired of railing against Austen or (apparently) returning, aghast, to her novels. "Whenever I take up *Pride and Prejudice* or

Sense and Sensibility, I feel like a barkeeper entering the kingdom of heaven. I know what his sensations would be and his private comments. He would not find the place to his taste, and he would probably say so." This characteristically epigrammatic opener is from an essay on Jane Austen that Twain never published in his lifetime. But Twain took his antipathy to Austen so seriously one can't help seeing it as an inflated response to the "Presbyterianism" he saw in her and his settled dislike of the English. Passing through India on his 1896 tour, between one Austen novel and another, Twain had been disgusted by the British army's refusal to acknowledge the danger to troops of contracting syphilis, of which he witnessed many bad cases. "Then those 70,000 young men go home and marry fresh young English girls and transmit a heritage of disease to their children and grand children," Twain wrote in his diary. "England is the home of pious cant."²⁷

The strength of Twain's feelings against Austen was also partly in reaction to those of his friend W. D. Howells, who had become something of a one-man Austenolatry machine. As editor in chief of the *Atlantic Monthly* in the 1870s and editorial writer for *Harper's Monthly* in the following years, Howells kept his fulsome praise of Austen ever before the public. Twain goaded him with letters claiming that he could just about read Poe's prose if he was paid to, but not Jane Austin's [*sic*]: "Jane is entirely impossible. It seems a great pity to me that they allowed her to die a natural death!"²⁸ Howells said later that Austen was Twain's "prime abhorrence," but that "he forbore withering me with his scorn, apparently because we had been friends so long, and he more pitied than hated me for my bad taste."²⁹ Perhaps, like the argument between G. H. Lewes and Charlotte Brontë in the 1840s, and like the antipathy that F. R. Leavis felt toward Lord David Cecil a century later, the difference between Twain and Howells was another example of what Ian Watt has called "the total impasse between different personalities which the subject of Jane Austen so perennially provokes."³⁰



AUSTEN'S MOST ARDENT FANS and most dispassionate critics in the late nineteenth century were American, including the writer who was

later called Austen's literary "son" and heir, Henry James. James knew George Pellew, the young Harvard man who had written the first thesis on Austen, and in a letter to him, with characteristically deferential politeness, referred to the author as "the delightful Jane."³¹ His public articulations about Austen aired a much more subtle and discriminating view. In his essay "The Lesson of Balzac," first published in 1905, James conceded that Austen was "one of those of the shelved and safe, for all time," but, like the Brontës (the industry around whom appalled him), she had entered a zone of unreal and disproportionate attention: "This tide has risen high on the opposite shore, the shore of appreciation—risen rather higher, I think, than the high-water mark, the highest, of her intrinsic merit and interest; though I grant indeed—as a point to be made—that we are dealing here in some degree with the tides so freely driven up, beyond their mere logical reach, by the stiff breeze of the commercial."³²

James's convoluted expression here, and insistence on there being a degree of Austen appreciation that is "merely logical," and others that rise above the author's "intrinsic merit and interest" seems snifty and ungenerous, but his underlying point was in defense of this—and any—author against forces that prevent him or her from being read in ways that are untrammelled by commerce and celebrity. Overvaluation, he believed, does no one any good, and his chilliest remarks are reserved for that distorting agent, "the special bookselling spirit":

an eager, active, interfering force which has a great many confusions of apparent value, a great many wild and wandering estimates, to answer for. For these distinctly mechanical and overdone reactions, of course, the critical spirit, even in its most relaxed mood, is not responsible. Responsible, rather, is the body of publishers, editors, illustrators, producers of the pleasant twaddle of magazines; who have found their "dear," our dear, everybody's dear, Jane so infinitely to their material purpose, so amenable to pretty reproduction in every variety of what is called tasteful, and in what seemingly proves to be saleable, form.³³

James was writing before the dawn of the Jane Austen tote bag and T-shirt, of course, and the salability he refers to was limited to

print versions of Austen's novels, magazine fillers, and a very few stage productions. Nevertheless, "pleasant twaddle" about Austen was becoming unavoidable; as Sarah Fanny Malden had remarked in 1889, "those who do appreciate her novels will think no praise too high for them, while those who do not, will marvel at the infatuation of her admirers; for no one ever cares moderately for Jane Austen's works."³⁴

The idea that Austen had divided the reading nation was echoed by R. H. Hutton the following year: "It cannot be denied that for a very considerable number of remarkably able men, Miss Austen wields no spell at all, though for those over whom she does wield a spell, she wields a spell of quite curious force." His analysis of Austen's charm addressed the issue of "smallness" as a deliberate choice on the part of the author, which chimes, or fails to, with her readers' temperaments. Austen's artistry, Hutton claimed,

is a selection of all that is most superficially interesting in human life, of all that is most easily appreciated without going very deep, and an exclusion of all that it takes real wear and tear of spirit to enter thoroughly into. . . . It was hardly possible to find a finer sieve, a more effective strainer for artistic material than such a mind as this, and the result was something exquisitely interesting and attractive to those who liked the fastidious selection of social elements which such a mind instinctively made for itself, and intolerably uninteresting and unattractive to those who loved to brood over the larger enterprises, the deeper passions, the weightier responsibilities, the more massive interests at which Miss Austen hardly glanced except to convince herself that she must leave them to the care of others.³⁵

It is Austen's ability to intrigue "remarkably able men," even "statesmen and thinkers," that encouraged Hutton to conclude that what was coming through Austen's "fine feminine sieve" was not simply pap. He pictures those able men turning gratefully from the cares of the real world to Austen's parallel universe, where she had created for the reader "a social world . . . relieved of the bitterest elements and infinitely more entertaining, . . . which rivets the attention without wearying it, and makes life appear far less dreary and burden-

some, though also far less laborious, eager, and anxious than it really is." In this delicately altered reality, one could find the most extravagant form of escape.

Had any female writer ever had quite this effect before? "The power of attracting powerful minds" was what James Edward Austen-Leigh had also marveled at, and his friend R. H. Cheney (of "the test") had been "one of the ablest men." None of the factors usually despised in women's literature—the absence of big themes, the love stories, the thoroughly domestic focus—seems to have stood in the way of their appreciation, for they took comfort in perceiving a controlling intelligence behind it: discriminating, generous, critical, and humorous—a "powerful mind" itself. Cultural conservatives took this as evidence, not that women might have greater potential than was usually assumed, but that Austen was some sort of exception, almost an honorary man.

It was no accident that Austen's appeal was recognized by this group during a period of rising feminism and that her verbal restraint and quiet life began to be held up as examples of what the specter of the 1890s "New Woman" was threatening to overthrow. The growing number of educated, independent (but poor) unmarried women in society was a new and worrying phenomenon, a challenge to male dominance of the professions, a threat to sound government if they succeeded in getting the vote, an affront to every traditional value. The birth rate was falling, home life was suffering, and the world was beginning to turn upside down. Jane Austen came in very handily here as a model of a high-achieving woman in an unreformed society who seemed to have been perfectly happy with her lot, who, far from complaining about the conditions of her own existence or the rights of women generally, beamed her cheerful, contented disposition on all and sundry and quietly got on with writing her charming books. If a great writer could cause so little disturbance and make so few demands domestically and professionally, what need ordinary women of any special treatment?

George Saintsbury made the comparison explicit in his preface to *Pride and Prejudice*, where he praised Elizabeth Bennet as having "nothing offensive, nothing *viraginous*, nothing for the 'New Woman'

about her, [who] has by nature what the best modern (not 'new') women have by education and experience, a perfect freedom from the idea that all men may bully her if they choose, and that most will run away with her if they can."³⁶ Elizabeth is a model for all times, not just her own, "not in the least 'impudent and mannish grown.'" "Mannish," a favorite term of abuse toward late-nineteenth-century feminists, is a word Saintsbury used earlier in his essay to distinguish Austen's genius, in which he felt there was "though nothing mannish, much that was masculine." It was an interesting distinction: "mannish" viragos on one side and "masculine" Austen ("somewhat like a man of the world" as the *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* had suggested back in 1866) on the other.

But Austen could also be held up as an example by the opposite camp. In her essays and feminist journalism, Millicent Fawcett promoted Austen to independent young women of the working and lower middle class as "an encouragement to them to be reminded how much good work had been done in various ways by women."³⁷ For once, "work" didn't mean the sewing that had featured so prominently in Leslie Stephen's *DNB* article and that was feebly echoed by E. V. Lucas in his entry on Austen for the eleventh edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*: "During her placid life Miss Austen never allowed her literary work to interfere with her domestic duties: sewing much and admirably, keeping house, writing many letters and reading aloud."³⁸ Fawcett was the first person to treat Austen as a producer of "good work," a devoted sister and a "thoroughly womanly" woman,³⁹ and addressed her remarks to those very "bachelor girls" who were regularly vilified in the press as unnatural and *oddish*. Descriptions of this demographic turn up time and again phrases that could easily apply to Jane Austen herself, from her "oddish" "bachelor" status and independent earning capacity to the "sharp and critical common sense" that Freud found characteristic of his earliest hysteria patients (see his description of "Anna O" and her "powerful intellect" in *Studies on Hysteria*). And not just the author but her creations: The *Yellow Book's* condemnatory image of women who "attempt to take the initiative, particularly in marriage, or attempt to assert themselves emotionally"⁴⁰ could be aimed exactly at Emma Woodhouse or George Saintsbury's intended, Lizzie Bennet.



Jane Austen's dramatization of scenes from Samuel Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison*, showing her habit of working in a series of small, hand-folded booklets.