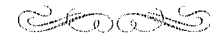


A TRUTH  
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33 GREAT WRITERS ON  
WHY WE READ JANE AUSTEN

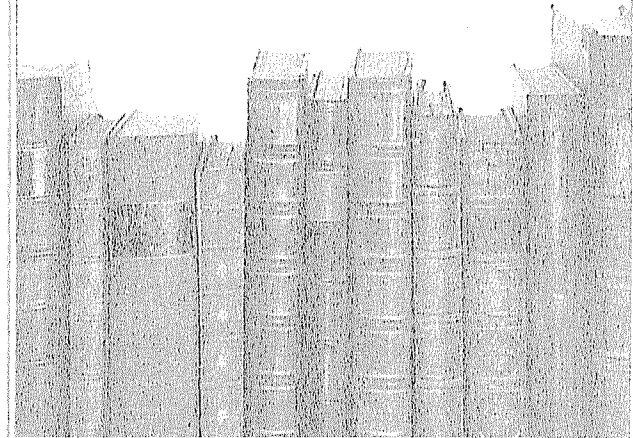


EDITED BY

**Susannah Carson**

FOREWORD BY

**Harold Bloom**



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## Foreword

HAROLD BLOOM

Some literary works are mortal; Jane Austen's are immortal. What makes this so? Austen's work possesses an uncanniness, a certain mode of originality. She created personality, character, and cognition; she brought into being new modes of consciousness. Like Shakespeare, Austen invented us. Because we are Austen's children, we behold and confront our own anguish and our own fantasies in her novels. She seems to explain us for the simple reason that she contributed to our invention. Personality is Austen's greatest originality and the cause of her perpetual pervasiveness.

The precision and accuracy of Austen's representation is Shakespearean. The influence of the heroines of Shakespeare's romantic comedies, Rosalind of *As You Like It* in particular, is palpable upon Elizabeth Bennet of *Pride and Prejudice* and Emma Woodhouse of the equally superb novel she entitles. After Shakespeare, no writer in the language does so well as Austen in giving us figures, central and peripheral, utterly consistent each in her (or his) own mode of speech and consciousness, and intensely different from each other.

The strong selves of Austen's heroines are wrought with a fine individuality that attests to her reserves of power. Had she not died so soon, she would have been capable of creating a Shakespearean diversity of persons, despite her narrowly, deliberately limited social range of representation. She had learned Shakespeare's most difficult lesson: to manifest sympathy toward all of her characters, even the least admirable, while detaching herself even from her favorite, Emma.

Austen is a profound ironist who employs her irony to refine aspects

of sound, is instrumental. In the cinema, then, Jane Austen's subversions of romantic idealism are reinvented as romantic narratives, and the narrator disappears. Perhaps the very conditions of the cinema dispose it to effects quite distinct from the bracing, contemporary, ironic, comic, and intellectual writing that is the reason why we do read Jane Austen.

## Amy Heckerling



### THE GIRLS WHO DON'T SAY "WHOO!"

On any given evening, in the music/alcohol/flirting places where young people congregate, you will find them. Some are attractive, most merely dress as if they were, and at the slightest provocation (e.g., a touchdown on the TV, a Beyoncé song on the sound system) they will throw their arms up and shout. These are the girls who say "Whoo!" Sometimes "Whoo!" is replaced with "All right!" or "I love this song!" They may even entreat everyone to "Party!"

These females will dance, flick their hair back, or otherwise find ways to physicalize their *joie de vivre*, and hopefully get you to look at them. The whooping girls certainly have their antecedents. In the first half of the nineteenth century, they might have been giggling incessantly over the soldiers in town, as Lydia and Kitty do in *Pride and Prejudice*. They might feel the need to "take a turn around the room," as Mr. Bingley's sister does, in an obvious ploy to show off her figure. Possibly jumping off a high staircase into someone's arms seems to them like a hilarious idea, as Louisa from *Persuasion* thought.

But there are the girls who can't say "Whoo," who can't be so overwhelmed by the latest song that they must draw everyone's attention to their bodies, and who can't laugh hysterically at something they don't find funny. It is here, among the non-whooping females, that one finds a large portion of the Jane Austen fan base. She has made leading ladies of the sensible sisters. She created a world where dashing, if arrogant, men seem to fall madly in love with the women who have more brains than fancy ribbons (in the 1800s, they didn't have body glitter). This paradigm