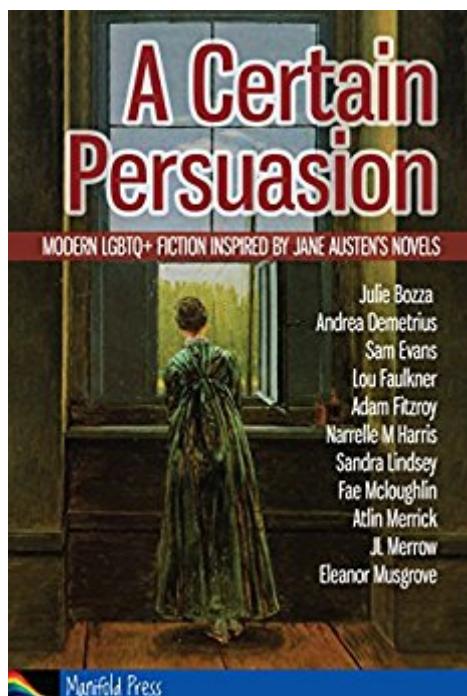


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# A Certain Persuasion: Modern LGBTQ+ Fiction Inspired By Jane Austen's Novels



## **Synopsis**

Thirteen stories from eleven authors, exploring the world of Jane Austen and celebrating her influence on ours. Being cousins-by-marriage doesn't deter William Elliot from pursuing Richard Musgrove in Lyme; nor does it prevent Elinor Dashwood falling in love with Ada Ferrars. Surprises are in store for Emma Woodhouse while visiting Harriet Smith; for William Price mentoring a seaman on board the Thrush; and for Adam Otelian befriending his children's governess, Miss Hay. Margaret Dashwood seeks an alternative to the happy marriages chosen by her sisters; and Susan Price ponders just such a possibility with Mrs Lynd. One Fitzwilliam Darcy is plagued by constant reports of convictions for 'unnatural' crimes; while another must work out how to secure the Pemberley inheritance for her family. Meanwhile, a modern-day Darcy meets the enigmatic Lint on the edge of Pemberley Cliff; while another struggles to live up to wearing Colin Firth's breeches on a celebrity dance show. Cooper is confronted by his lost love at a book club meeting in Melbourne while reading Persuasion; and Ashley finds more than he'd bargained for at the Jane Austen museum in Bath. A Pemberley-sized anthology featuring authors Julie Bozza, Andrea Demetrius, Sam Evans, Lou Faulkner, Adam Fitzroy, Narrelle M Harris, Sandra Lindsey, Fae Mcloughlin, Atlin Merrick, JL Merrow and Eleanor Musgrove.

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Anthologies

## Customer Reviews

Anthology books are always very hit and miss with me. Either I hate every single story (no matter how much I wish to love them) or I'm amazingly impressed with the stories. This was one that I just adored! Not every story hit the mark, but not enough that I disliked the whole thing. The themes and characters were perfectly blended, and went beyond the basic "hehe what if Darcy was gay" stories. There were believable tales that explored so many types of relationships and identities that surely existed in the regency era, but had to be so desperately hidden.

It's nice, I've been reading this on my phone during breaks at work. Why is there a word count minimum on in app reviews?

A Certain Persuasion (very clever title, by the way) is an anthology of queer stories inspired in some way by the fiction of Jane Austen. It includes new looks at Austen's protagonists, imagined back-stories for minor characters, and stories about modern characters that interact with the Austen canon in some way. Please note that, although I attempt to avoid significant spoilers in this review, I do not consider the identity of transgender characters to be a spoiler and will discuss this aspect of relevant stories. The stories are all solidly written and well-edited, though a couple had the somewhat annoying feature that seems common in Austen pastiches of lifting whole chunks of the original texts into their new settings. I was most fond of the stories that focused on a brief, crucial encounter between the characters, rather than trying to tell a sweeping epic in short story length. I don't specifically look for erotic stories when I read material of this sort. None of the stories was so explicit that I skipped passages, and the more physical scenes were generally integrated well into the story so that they didn't jump out as "insert sex scene here." The mannered nature of Austen's settings work well for queer romance aimed at modern readers, as the slow formal pace of social interactions provides a rich context for characters to sound each other out and explore the potential for mutual attraction that falls outside society's norms. The mix of stories is rather unbalanced towards the masculine, though it includes a wide variety of representation. Of the thirteen stories, four involve romance between two cis women, six have romance between two cis men, two involve romance between a cis man and

one each of a trans man and a trans woman. And one story is ambiguous within the story itself regarding whether it involves a passing woman or a trans man (the author's notes indicate they intend a trans framing) with the implied potential (if the story continues on Austen's plotline) of romance with a cis woman at a later date. "A Charming Marine Prospect" describes a chance erotic encounter between *Persuasion*'s William Elliot and the unfortunate Richard Musgrove (though perhaps not so much unfortunate here as having decided to opt out of the family drama). A fossil-hunting expedition in the neighborhood of Lyme sparks a brief erotic encounter. I enjoyed the way the fossil-hunting profession was brought in. The prose is solid and has a very Austenesque feel to it. "One Half of the World" depicts a delicate negotiation between Emma Woodhouse and Harriet Smith regarding turning their friendship into a lifelong companionship *à la* the Ladies of Llangollen (whom Harriet specifically references). I'm afraid I found this story over-long, too talky, and devoid of believable romantic chemistry. That is, I suppose I can believe it as a negotiation of two expected spinsters regarding a home-sharing agreement, but not as the careful sounding-out and planning of two women admitting that they hope the other also considers their friendship closer than the ordinary. And though I'm happy to accept new takes on canon characters, the Harriet in this story bears little resemblance to the mousy, uncertain, devoted follower of Emma. In "Hide nor Hair," a orphaned man at the beginning of adulthood discovers the joys of love and a quiet country life with the governess he hires for his younger siblings--a governess whose only noticeable flaw is a need to shave more regularly than is typical for a woman. This is one of those slow, delicate negotiation stories that the collection does well. I can't quite figure out which Austen novel the characters are meant to evoke, though. "Outside the Parlour" is a somewhat rambling exploration of an alternate Fitzwilliam Darcy, whose romantic entanglements with men provide a motivation for his very ambiguous attitude toward the marriage market and toward Elizabeth Bennet in particular. It provides a keen exploration of the hazards and sorrows of a Regency-era Englishman who had erotic leanings toward his own sex, while Lizzie is relegated to the role of the one woman Darcy might have been able to bear being married to, should he conclude it was necessary to marry at all. The story makes an interesting contrast to the more traditional romance arcs in many of the other pieces in this collection. Margaret Dashwood is the youngest of the Dashwood sisters and a woman longing for the joy of a female confidante and friend with whom she can share her doubts and uncertainties about the prospect of marriage to a man. In "Margaret," she is solicited to lend respectability as a lady companion to the household of Colonel Brandon's ward, Eliza (and her young son who bears a noticeable

relationship to their neighbor Willoughby), and discovers that companionship can lead to love. A realistic study of the fine lines between respectable and scandalous for unmarried women of that age. And as with some of my other favorites in this collection, it presents a realistic picture of how women might broach the subject of turning companionship into something more passionate. In *The Wind over Pemberley* an encounter between two modern-day Austen fans on Pemberley Cliff (a setting that confused me greatly at first, as Derbyshire has no seaside cliffs that I'm aware of!) turns a shared literary interest into an erotic encounter, though a tragic ending. It's interesting that the stories in this collection that fall short of a happy ending are the ones with modern settings, perhaps because modern characters have more scope for genuine happiness and therefore may be allowed to fall short of it? *Cross and Cast* has a similar modern setting, with characters that echo persons and relationships in *Pride and Prejudice* crossing paths in a *dancing with the stars* type of reality show involving Regency dancing. I liked how the play of misunderstandings, miscommunications, and the nursing of hurts paralleled the original text in new and believable ways for the modern characters. It can be hard to set up an Austenesque plot in the modern day, given the very different social rules and dynamics, and this one did it very well. Similarly, in an excellent modern parallel for the family and romantic dynamics of *Persuasion*, *Know Your Own Happiness* allows a young man to revisit his capitulation to his family's rejection of his bisexuality with a chance to choose true love this time. I particularly liked the subtlety with which the theme was developed. For much of the story, the Austen reference is all about the protagonist's reluctant attendance at a book club...and then the Captain Wentworth-analogue enters and suddenly all is made clear. The third modern-setting story of the collection involves living history...or does it? A cynical young man has an encounter in an Austen museum with a deliciously wicked Wickham actor in *Thirteen Hours in Austen*. Wickham's challenge to be allowed an illicit night in the museum to open the protagonist's mind brings a bittersweet ending after a fun costumed romp. *Man of War* is a story rich in naval details (perhaps a little too rich?) as William Price (the brother of Mansfield Park's protagonist) mentors a promising seaman. Those not familiar with the rich history of women serving in 17-19th century militaries in male disguise may question the believability of the story's trans man serving as a sailor but I enjoyed how the motif was handled. The story does not end in romance, but transforms Price's understanding of his own desires in a promising way. I felt the story suffered a little from an excess of technical naval details, and perhaps too rosy a vision of the inherent benevolence of naval officert toward their crews. We have a gender-flipped retelling of a core Austen story when *Elinor and*

Ada's follows the trials of Elinor Dashwood's secret love for Ada Ferrars, who stands in place of Edward. There has been a certain reorganization of family relationships: instead of Ada being the brother to John Dashwood's wife Fanny and to Robert Ferrars, she is a cousin of theirs and something of a family poor relation. She has been serving as governess to the Steele sisters (rather than being tutored by their uncle) and had formed an indiscreet connection with Lucy Steele, who now holds certain letters over her as earnest for a promise to have Mrs. Ferrars set them up with an independent household. With those alterations (and the eventual substitution of a position as village schoolmistress at Delaford rather than the ecclesiastical living) the story otherwise follows the plot of *Sense and Sensibility* very closely. Rather too closely, perhaps, as it traces out the entire plot of the novel in the space of a short story, which makes for a great deal of summarizing and plot-outlining. This was also one of the stories that recycled significant chunks of text from the original story. While I loved the re-imagining of the plot, I wasn't entirely delighted with the execution. In-story gender-flipping also takes the lead in "Father Doesn't Dance," in which the Darcy sisters' lack of a brother to inherit and the impending loss of Pemberley through entailment to an unknown distant cousin inspires a daring masquerade. The elder Darcy's lingering fatal illness provides time for elder daughter Lavinia to conceive of, and convince her parents to go along with, a plan in which she will become her mythical long-estranged brother Fitzwilliam, thereby keeping the estate in the family and being able to provide for her beloved younger sister Georgiana. We have something of a "training montage" where Lavinia goes away to learn how to perform as a man from her cousin Richard Fitzwilliam (not yet Colonel Fitzwilliam) who will be Lavinia/Fitzwilliam's co-guardian for Georgiana. The author's note at the end indicates that she intends the character of Fitzwilliam Darcy in this story to be a trans man, but I didn't see that implicit in the story itself, which presents the decision as entirely driven by economic and legal motivations. I think it can be read either way (i.e., as a trans man or a passing woman) as the reader pleases. But what I found fatally unbelievable was the motif of the "returning son" that nobody at Pemberly has ever met or heard about previously. Matters had advanced far enough that the dying Mr. Darcy had sent his solicitor on a quest to locate the legal recipient of the entailment. Would the solicitor have simply accepted "Oh, wait, I forgot to tell you about my actual son who's been off traveling on the continent since forever?" We at least get a nod from the elder Mr. Wickham that he has guessed what's afoot and is willing to support the filial fiction. Like the preceding story, this one also suffers from trying to stuff entirely too much plot into too short a story, though in this case the majority of the plot covers backstory before the start of

Pride and Prejudice. If the premise had been more solid, I would have loved to see an expanded version that carried the plot onward, following Fitzwilliam Darcy's studied cool distance as a ploy to preserve the secret of his identity, and how that facade falters and crumbles in the face of falling unexpectedly in love with Elizabeth Bennet. Mansfield Park again takes the stage in a story set well after the novel concludes when Fanny's sister Susan encounters the former Mary Crawford--now the widowed Mrs. Lynd--in Bath and a hesitant and daring courtship ensues that secures Susan a future home with her new Romantic Friend. For a reader who is not fluent in the characters and relationships of Mansfield Park, there may be either too much info-dumping on this point or too little. (I confess that MP makes me want to throw books across the room, so I have less familiarity with it than many of the others.) One thing I very much enjoy in this collection is the historic verities that are reflected in the differences for the male and female characters. Men have the agency to more directly pursue their desires, but with far more perilous consequences for public disclosure. Women risk social ostracism for any sort of deviance from the paradigms of heterosexual marriage, but the realities of a surplus women and the structures of Romantic Friendship give them a more open means of securing lives together. I don't know whether it's a consequence of following these historic archetypes, or simply a difference in what the authors expect their readers to prefer and accept, but there is virtually no erotic content beyond kissing in the women's stories, while the men's stories frequently include overt (though not overwhelming) erotic scenes. Overall, this is a pleasant collection of queer Austen re-imaginings that will serve well for the reader who finds that concept intriguing but isn't ready to venture the vast sea (that I imagine exists) of Austen fanfic.

"First of all, I need to say ""Whew! What a long book!"" But I couldn't put it down. The premise is charming, telling LGBT stories set in the early 1800's in the style of Jane Austen. Almost every story was captivating, though I will say I was less impressed with the few in the middle of the book which were set in modern times. The stories at the beginning of the anthology and again at the end, all set circa 1810, were more rewarding. That said, I was a bit put off by the sex scenes in several of the stories, something Jane Austen would never have done. Austen's stories are all about emotional love and societal concerns, not overt physicality. At least, that's how I remember the books from my college days. So the sex scenes felt like a misstep. Perhaps that isn't a fair assessment, given that the current anthology wasn't written for readers in 1810 but today. Still, the few period pieces without sex scenes felt more authentic to me. While I enjoyed almost all of the stories, I think my favorite was by editor Julie Bozza. Most of the other stories were relatively straightforward

romances, but Bozza's contained the convoluted conflicts of Austen's works and seemed to me the most successful of all the stories. The book was well-edited and proofed, always welcome features. I highly recommend the book to any Jane Austen fans, and really, to Dear Readers in general."

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