The Making of Jane Austen

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Austen's First Dramatist

Rosina Filippi's *Duologues* for Every Cultivated Amateur

> Mr. Collins: Your wit and vivacity, I think, must be acceptable to [Lady Catherine de Bourgh], especially when tempered with the silence and respect which her rank will inevitably excite.
>
> Elizabeth (*aside*): How am I to stop the man?
>
> —Rosina Filippi, *Duologues and Scenes from the Novels of Jane Austen: Arranged and Adapted for Drawing-Room Performance* (1895)

If you've read *Mansfield Park* (1814), then you'll find humor in knowing that the history of performing Jane Austen's fiction begins with private theatricals. It didn't happen in the toniest theaters. Austen's characters and stories first came to be performed for live audiences on makeshift stages in people's homes, in community groups, and in schools, especially in the growing number of girls' schools. In some ways, it's an amusing, real-life echo of the performance planned at Mansfield Park. A signal difference is that the responsible elders involved in these first 1890s Austen-inspired amateur plays weren't there to crack down on dramatic impropriety. Instead, the older generation served as directors, teachers, and impresarios—benign versions of Austen's officious, unfair Mrs. Norris.

Nor were the fin-de-siècle amateur actors using their thespian turns as excuses to flirt with each other. Few of these early Austen dramatizations involved acting out romance. They more often staged failed proposals, like Mr. Collins's to Elizabeth Bennet. Most involved short dramatic or comic scenes, especially featuring Austen's heroines (and Austen herself) at their most forthright and bold. In drawing-room performances, before friends and family, amateur Austen actors denied not only heinous suitors but defied traditional gender roles and the old-fashioned powers that be who would enforce them. In short, these actors were not channeling *Mansfield Park*'s righteously timid heroine Fanny Price.

What they were channeling, through selected and adapted portions of Austen's dialogue, was the era's New Woman movement. It called for

greater personal freedom, more economic independence, and expanded public opportunities for women. Once you notice the pattern, it becomes surprising that so few have realized it before. These amateur dramatizations at first sliced and diced Austen's novels into select chunks of dialogue, with small scenes featuring mostly female actors, performed in female-focused spaces. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many people, especially young women, would have first "read" Jane Austen aloud, in excerpts, as amateur actors or in elocution courses.[1] Many more would have heard these scenes read aloud as audience members or classmates. It's not an exaggeration to say that early stage adaptations of Austen's fiction determined how massive numbers of young people first came to know the author and her writings in this period. It profoundly shifted Austen's reputation, making her, despite being "old fashioned," seem a natural ally for the New Woman. No longer an author of politeness, repose, and quietude, the early dramatized Aunt Jane was loud, clear, and funny. For those acting on amateur stages, it was not their mothers' Jane Austen.

Pride and Prejudice's heroine Elizabeth Bennet became a performance staple of amateur theatricals, especially in the scenes in which she proudly—and without being punished for it—chose to say, "No!" We have not previously processed what this meant: young English-speaking women of the early twentieth century were literally ventriloquizing the carefully selected and dramatized words of an Austen heroine who charmingly but firmly spoke her mind, stood her ground, and would not acquiesce to the expectations of those around her. Amateur actors and audiences in the United States, United Kingdom, and beyond were introduced by the uncountable thousands to *Pride and Prejudice* as a tale of admirable female domestic protest. Then, as now, such first encounters would have had a profound effect on how audiences came to understand the themes of the novel, teaching them how to value (or devalue) its author. Yet we've almost entirely written this phenomenon out of our records, probably because drawing-room amateur theatricals went out of style by the mid-twentieth century. We might also blame the fact that later critics would carry the day, with their exaggerated complaints that these dramatizations deserve the historical dustbin as mangled, garbage versions of Austen. It's a story that deserves to be told without the usual condescension.

Thousands may have contributed to the surge in Austen's dramatic popularity, but exceptional individuals led the charge. Pioneering visionary Rosina Filippi (1866–1930) first dramatized Austen for print and

adapted it for the stage.[2] A successful actress who also ran an acting school and taught elocution, Filippi published *Duologues and Scenes from the Novels of Jane Austen: Arranged and Adapted for Drawing-Room Performance* (1895), after having directed many of her own adapted comic scenes, probably with an amateur acting group in Oxford. Oxford was at this time a "hive of amateur dramatic activity," and Filippi was directing at least one group, the Christmas Dramatic Wanderers. There was genius among them. One of her actors, "Dolly," became the famed Dorothea Baird (1875–1923).[3] Filippi herself was already a proven stage talent. In 1895, Baird and Filippi appeared together in the London Haymarket Theatre production of *Trilby*, with Baird in the lead role.

Just one year before Filippi's *Duologues* saw print, and during the period in which they were likely being performed by her troupe in Oxford, an American critic was opining that Jane Austen should be drama-proof. The critic exclaims in 1894, "Miss Jane Austen seems to say *Noli me tangere* to biographers, critics, illustrators and literary or artistic embroiderers of every sort. Most of all does she cry hands off to the intending dramatist."[4] But "hands off" did not hold, on either side of the Atlantic. The critic suggests that there may have been an American rival or forerunner to Filippi: "A well-known man of letters told me the other day, that some intemperate girl had sent him a stage version of 'Emma'! Even the newest woman could not make such an experiment a success" (737). The names of this critic, as well as the well-known man of letters and upstart "girl" dramatist of *Emma* he references, seem to be lost to history. But mere months later, Filippi did exactly what raised hackles. She became the new woman who made the experiment of dramatizing Austen a success.

Some since have called Filippi's book lightweight, but, in its repurposed scenes and illustrations for actors and directors, it was brilliantly conceived and executed. Reviews and wide circulation suggest, too, that its impact was great, regardless of how any reader then or now might assess its literary or dramatic quality. Filippi developed a passion for Jane Austen, and she envisioned dramatizing the author's fiction as filling a cultural need and creating a marketable opportunity. Dickens had long been incredibly popular in dramatic dialogues for private theatricals.[5] Why not Austen? Filippi brought together her knowledge of Austen and her expertise in stagecraft, expressing confidence in her product. In her introduction to the *Duologues*, Filippi declares, "I am convinced that Jane Austen *as a play-wright* will fascinate her audiences as much as she has her readers *as a novelist*."[6] The London

Times's reviewer agrees, declaring "We share Miss Filippi's conviction."[7] To some today, this may sound like an absurd fantasy, but Filippi's prediction came true and held true. It did so well into the twentieth century.

Filippi brought to the project her skills as a storyteller and as an artful narrator of her own past. She claimed Italian and French descent, having been born in Venice, the daughter of the Italian music critic Filippo Filippi (1830–87). Rosina's father was best known as the man who gave Puccini his first positive review, and he was an ardent supporter of Verdi and Wagner.[8] Her mother, Paolina Vaneri, was a renowned singer, said to be French by birth, who married Filippi in 1868 and became the first woman professor (of singing) at the Royal Conservatory in Milan in 1878.[9] Vaneri's mother—Rosina's grandmother—was the writer Madame (Georgina) Colmache (c. 1811–1904), described as "a connecting link with the times of the first Napoleon" because she was the widow of the private secretary of Prince Talleyrand.[10] This all sounds very cosmopolitan and high culture—aristocrats, Italian opera stars, professors, French diplomats, and the like. For an aspiring stage actress in London like Rosina Filippi, that sort of European cachet and those cultural connections would have been of no small value.

She was not initially forthcoming—at least not publicly—about the fact that she was also of British descent and grew up in England. Filippi was raised for some years by her grandmother, the aforementioned Madame Colmache, rather than by her French singing professor mother or her Italian music critic father, both of whom seem to have lived in Italy. But Madame Colmache was English, not French, by birth, having been born in London as Georgina Alicia Lee. A mother of four, said to have been widowed in France, Colmache returned to Britain, supporting herself as a writer and journalist. She contributed a weekly column for forty years to the *Birmingham Daily Post*. Madame Colmache's obituary describes her as a friend to George Sand, Gioachino Rossini, Charles Dickens, Agnes Strickland, Lady Rosina Lytton, and Frédéric Chopin, with William Thackeray particularly mentioned as a "personal friend."[11] In published accounts, presumably created with her cooperation, Filippi rarely mentions her British ancestry or anything with a whiff of the *Birmingham Daily Post*. The glamour quotient of these parts of her pedigree were lacking.

To be fair, Filippi's mysteriousness about her English heritage seems tied to a lack of clarity about how and where she was raised. Some accounts mention a Paris education, but Grandmother Colmache seems to have been the one more closely involved in rearing the Filippi daughters. Filippi's obit-

uary reports that she and her grandmother escaped from France together at the outbreak of the Paris Commune in 1871, when the girl would have been in her fifth year. Rosina Filippi was said to have first set out to be an opera singer like her mother, having afterward turning to acting.[12] Census records show that, as a teenager, Filippi was living in England in a household with her grandmother, her unmarried uncle Morris (or Maurice) Colmache, the manager of a telegraph company, and her unmarried aunt Laura (or Laure).[13]

In published features about Filippi's life as an actor, she liked to emphasize her foreign roots and was often described in the press as olive-skinned, as if to concretize that heritage. In 1898, when proposing the creation of a drama school, she touted her dual French and English training.[14] Filippi was cast in outsized minor comic roles, not as a leading lady. Surviving photographs suggest a charismatic woman in the mold of the jocular Mrs. Jennings from *Sense and Sensibility*—a peculiar combination of iconoclastic and maternal. Her son-in-law's sister, famous actor Dame Sybil Thorndike, candidly describes Filippi as having "*such* a temper, a terrible temper," but the surviving stories suggest someone driven more by a benevolent artistic-educational vision than an oversized actor ego.[15] A fellow actor, E. Harcourt Williams, says Filippi was "a woman who put up with no nonsense" and "a forthright character tempered with great humour" and a "rich chuckle."[16]

Filippi became beloved by many greats of her generation. George Bernard Shaw was a fan. His letter to her of June 21, 1905, trying to persuade Filippi to accept the role of Cleopatra's nurse in his play *Caesar and Cleopatra*, flatters her enormously. Shaw writes, "Do try to get free. There is nobody like you. All I want is the best of everything; and you are not only the best, but something more—something different in kind & quality."[17] A letter from Filippi to Shaw shows that she was a free-spirited woman who presents herself as flighty and unreliable, though not entirely unwilling to please. She responds to Shaw, "I am never quite sure of what I *say*—I speak at random—I *mean* what I say when I *say* it, but as I never remember *what* I say I also can't remember what I *meant* when I said it," but she concludes, "when you want me I shall be proud to play for you."[18] It's hard not to read each of them as playing calculated, self-serving parts in this exchange, but the details may be telling. Filippi understood the extent to which correspondence, self-fashioning, and career management might be handled in the manner of an early nineteenth-century country dance.

That is one reason we might not be surprised at her attraction to Jane Austen's life and writings. Filippi lived a kind of public-private double life.

In the public eye as an actress on the London stage, she also took pains to create a more conventional private life as a wife and mother in Oxford. The other name she used was Mrs. H. M. Dowson. On the title page to the *Duologues*, she uses both names: "By Rosina Filippi (Mrs. Dowson)." Four years earlier, in 1891 (after having been on the stage for nearly a decade, much of that with famed actor-manager F. R. Benson's Shakespearean company), Filippi had married Henry Martin Dowson. He's been described as a man who "lived in Iffley, a village outside of Oxford, played the viola, and was a brewer"—a Nonconformist—who just happened to be married to "one of the best-known stage actresses of the time."[19] It's not clear how the two met, but outward signs suggest a successful marriage, raising four children. Filippi led a full life. When she is discussed by recent scholars, it's usually for (unsuccessfully) trying to establish a people's theater in London, to bring Shakespeare to the masses at low cost.[20] Few realize how interesting a woman Austen's first dramatist was.

Reviewers praise Filippi's *Duologues* for how little they tinkered with Austen's prose. In her preface to the *Duologues and Scenes*, Filippi describes herself as an arranger of the material, but she obviously takes license with the seven scenes she adapts from four Austen novels: two from *Pride and Prejudice*, three from *Emma*, and one each from *Sense and Sensibility* and *Northanger Abbey*. (*Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion*—arguably Austen's least comic novels—are the ones that Filippi passes over.) Filippi retitles each scene with a capsule phrase describing its theme and characters, such as "Literary Tastes: Duologue between Catherine Morland and Isabella Thorpe" (1) or "Lady Catherine's Visit: Duologue between Lady Catherine and Elizabeth Bennet" (123).

Filippi's *Duologues* are a pleasurable read. One can easily imagine the scenes enjoyed by audiences, as well as by fledgling actors. In giving asides to Austen's characters (often while they're alone on stage), Filippi makes them more broadly comic than they are in the novels. This may not be to everyone's liking, but she renders them and their thoughts refreshingly directly. It's hard not to take pleasure in Elizabeth, listening to Mr. Collins's proposal, vocalizing asides such as "I may as well get it over as soon and as quietly as possible" (109) and, dripping with sarcasm, "The idea of this man being run away with his feelings" (110). Along with these amusing exaggerations, there are false notes, such as when Filippi has her Mrs. Elton, in an aside, declare her own husband "foolish" (62). (Then again, perhaps Filippi has a valuable insight. We

don't get much information from the original novel's narration as to what Mrs. Elton really thinks of her much-vaunted Mr. E.)

Filippi's compact, octavo book, at 140 pages, provides a smattering of Austen, not a deep reading experience. It's in keeping with her reasons for the project: "The idea of compiling this small book arose from the dearth of good duologues and one-act plays suitable for amateur performance" (Filippi vii). The *Duologues* present an Austen cleverly packaged for the everyday reader, not for the well-trained aficionado and critic. Filippi's focus is on Austen's humor and on the villainous characters' delectable awfulness. This approach played well to Filippi's own talents as an actor, but it also catered to a range of contemporary theatrical tastes. The *Duologues* repurpose Austen for, as Filippi puts it, "every cultivated amateur" (viii).

To the publisher of the *Duologues*, Filippi's book was also Austen repurposed for new readers and collectors, designed to sell. J. M. Dent made a crucial marketing decision when it brought out her *Duologues*. Three years earlier, in 1892, as we saw in the previous section, Dent published its ten-volume edition of Austen's novels, edited by R. Brimley Johnson and illustrated by William C. Cooke. When Dent published Filippi's *Duologues*, it designed the book to match its earlier edition. The *Duologues* were widely advertised as "uniform" with the Dent Austen, meaning that one could neatly line up one's Austen books on a shelf, as nearly identical. In effect, Filippi's *Duologues* was marketed as an eleventh volume of Austen's fiction. It was made to seem as if, in buying Filippi's book, you were completing your Austen set. In this way, Dent could appeal to those already loyal to Austen. But Filippi's book was pitched to the novice, too. Reviewers understood well that the book would be used, as one put it, by the "uninitiate in Miss Austen."[21] The *Duologues* served as both an extension of Austen's own writings and as an introduction to them. They appear to have been designed, by author and publisher, in the hope of capturing established and new audiences.

The historical moment at which the *Duologues* appeared was also of consequence. As mentioned earlier, Filippi's dramatized Austen was born on the heels of what came to be called the New Woman movement, a time when many, particularly well-heeled, well-educated women in Great Britain and North America, were roused to advocate for and seek what they believed would be more meaningful lives for females, including employment or activity outside of the home, political representation, and greater personal freedoms. Young women of privilege—and their teachers—were hungry for

dramatic texts that developed speaking skills and gave expression to the idea that females are strong, capable, and intelligent. Finding a woman writer whose words, characters, and stories could advance these projects served the New Woman's political ends. Austen's fiction also had the advantage of having been pre-endorsed as great by great men, including Walter Scott, Thomas Babington Macaulay, and Alfred, Lord Tennyson. Austen could at once be packaged as old and new, old guard and New Woman. Filippi's book pulled it off.

Early dramatized Austen was often by, about, and for women. Filippi's Austen duologues are, like Ferdinand Pickering's early Austen illustrations, noticeably and profoundly female focused, with a dearth of successful suitor-heroes. In all, Filippi's Austen duologues and scenes contain sixteen character parts—twelve female and four male. Those four male parts are Mr. Collins, Mr. John Dashwood, Mr. Knightley (talking to Mrs. Elton), and a second Mr. Knightley (talking to Emma, after Emma speaks to Harriet). Seven scenes, then, include just one set of lovers, and that set for just half of a scene. Romance is not at all the point of these dramatic texts. Women's self-confident voices, in the face of domestic and familial conflict, are.

One reviewer, acknowledging that the volumes would "assuredly be welcome and popular," nevertheless believes they could not be successful with well-known amateur theater groups in Cambridge, "for the obvious reason," the reviewer writes, "that the women characters are all-important."[22] That reviewer does, however, make a joke that Austen's descendant, Richard Arthur Austen-Leigh (1872–1961), might make it work.[23] President of the Amateur Dramatic Club at Cambridge, Austen-Leigh was well known for taking female dramatic roles, with his Mrs. Malaprop being especially well received.[24] The reviewer declares (surely cheekily) that Austen-Leigh would make "an excellent Lady Catherine."[25]

The *Duologues* also guided its amateur directors and producers, not just its actors. It features eight illustrations, ostensibly so that actors will not make the mistake, as Filippi puts it in her preface, of choosing inappropriate, anachronistic costumes. (Shades of Pickering's illustrations may be perceived here.) But the *Duologues* offer images that go far beyond guidance on dress. They indicate potential cues for blocking—positions of bodies, physical interpretations of scenes, and other entertaining flourishes. Some illustrations are also broadly comic, rather than strictly functional, such as that of Emma on her knees, execution style, being shot through the chest by Cupid's arrow (Filippi 100). This image surely derives from the fashionable cupids in

Thomson's Peacock edition, published the previous year, rather than as a guide to actors or directors.

Considering the *Duologues*' illustrations in comparison with William Cooke's allows us to see how they move beyond the functional and into the interpretive and political. Cooke's illustration, from his 1892 Dent *Pride and Prejudice*, is captioned, "Lady Catherine beaten." It shows Lady Catherine in a dominant physical position, lording over Elizabeth. Elizabeth Bennet is "beating" her by sitting calmly and coolly on a bench, as Lady Catherine points a finger and foments. If this is victory, it's an intellectual one. It is otherwise quite physically passive for the heroine. Comparing Cooke's illustration to the one that Margaret Fletcher produced for Filippi's *Duologues*, we see the potential for an alternate interpretation of the scene. Fletcher's version depicts a very different physical arrangement from Cooke's. Fletcher's Elizabeth stands as her Lady Catherine sits, almost hunched over. Elizabeth's position could be read as deference, but it also puts her in a position of physical dominance on the stage. Fletcher's Elizabeth stands back, bemused,

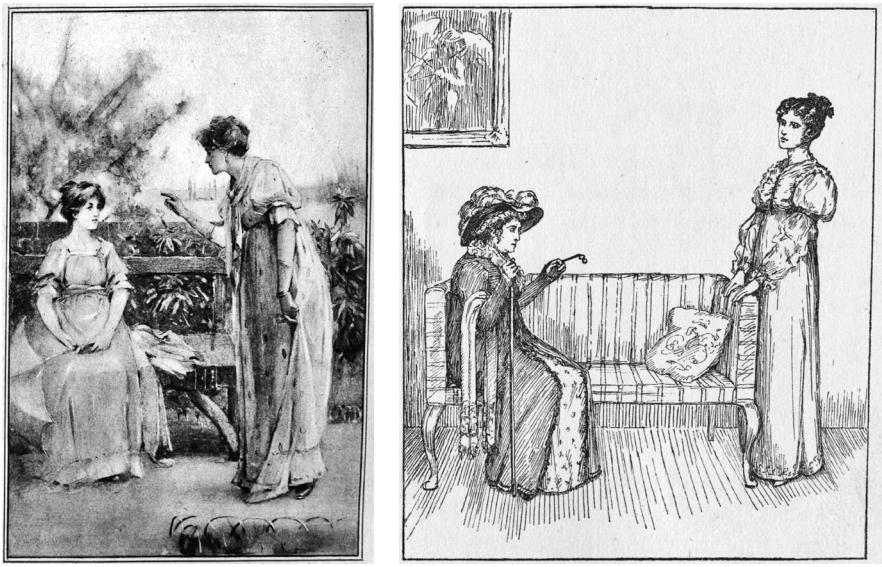

Figure 4.1. *Left*, "Lady Catherine Beaten," Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, vol. 2 (London: J. M. Dent, 1892), frontispiece, by William Cubitt Cooke; *right*, "Lady Catherine and Elizabeth Bennet," Rosina Filippi's *Duologues and Scenes from the Novels of Jane Austen Arranged and Adapted for Drawing-Room Performance* (London: J. M. Dent, 1895), 125, by Margaret Fletcher.

hands perched on the sofa. Her stance suggests her ownership of the object, the room, and the situation.

Cooke's and Fletcher's illustrations offer us almost opposing Elizabeths. The only clues Austen's novel itself gives as to the placement of the characters' bodies do not exactly accord with either illustration. Lady Catherine commands Elizabeth to sit, but it's not said whether she does so. The narrator also indicates that at one point during this scene both women are sitting down, but when Elizabeth rises, Lady Catherine immediately rises also. It's hard to imagine either illustration as attempting fidelity to Austen's prose, given these details. Cooke's and Fletcher's images both must be understood as loose, albeit telling, visual interpretations of the text. Published within three years of each other, these illustrations represent the dueling ways in which images of Austen were circulating. Crucially, only one, Fletcher's, was designed with intention of being physically reenacted.

That Fletcher would put her Elizabeth Bennet in a more active, forceful position accords with the life and politics of the illustrator. Margaret Fletcher (1862–1943) was a social critic who pushed the envelope for what was then allowed for women. She and Filippi must have known each other in Oxford, where Fletcher was raised as an Anglican clergyman's daughter. She later become an art teacher, gaining at the same time a name as a talented amateur actor. It's tempting to imagine Filippi and Fletcher collaborating not only on the printed *Duologues* but on their earlier staged test runs.[26] There is evidence that the scenes were being performed by Filippi "and her friends" as the "Jane Austen Comedies" in Oxford; the amateur stage seems a likely place for the author-artist collaboration to have had its genesis.[27] A decade after the *Duologues* were published, Fletcher would convert to Catholicism. She went on to found the Catholic Women's League and wrote several works advocating for the enlargement of women's roles in the church. One of them was *Christian Feminism: A Charter of Rights and Duties* (1915).[28]

Like Fletcher's illustrations, Filippi's *Duologues* stress Austen's female protagonists as assertive women. Filippi repeatedly chooses to emphasize the moments in which Austen's female characters are most direct and rebellious. Her short scenes may ostensibly teach students about elocution, history, or literature, but they were also teaching comportment and behavior. Filippi adds emotional descriptions in parentheses for the characters to play that make evident their self-confidence. Filippi's Elizabeth is given many asides with the audience that highlight her knowing rebellion. When told that she must stay in the drawing room to hear Mr. Collins's addresses,

she replies, "I am going away by myself." When commanded by her mother to stay, she says in an aside, "Well, if it has to be—I may as well get it over as soon as possible" (109). After Mr. Collins makes his declaration, Elizabeth says, in another aside, "How am I to stop the man?" (111). Elizabeth's strength and humor are accentuated—we might say modernized—as they are communicated and embodied beyond Austen's original prose.

In her conversation with Lady Catherine de Bourgh (misspelled as De Burgh in Filippi's text), Elizabeth is assigned emotional responses to assist actors that also reshape scenes into moments of calculated rebellion. When Lady Catherine asks Elizabeth whether she's engaged to Mr. Darcy, Filippi's Elizabeth responds with emotions not clearly specified in the original text:

> ELIZABETH (*surprised and angry*): If you believed it impossible to be true, I wonder you took the trouble of coming so far. What could your ladyship propose by it?
>
> LADY C: At once to insist upon having such a report universally contradicted.
>
> ELIZABETH (*coolly*). Your coming to Longbourn to see me will be rather a confirmation of it, if, indeed, such a report is in existence. (Filippi 130)

In addition to adding cues for Elizabeth such as "*quietly*," "*surprised*," and "*rising angrily*," Filippi gives the heroine several asides to deliver in this scene, too. About Lady Catherine, Filippi's Elizabeth says, "Heaven! how could I think her like her nephew" (129), where the original has the more emotionally equivocal, "How could I ever think her like her nephew?"[29] When Lady Catherine takes her leave of Elizabeth without sending regards to her mother, the heroine is given a cheeky reply in closing: "Good-day to you, Lady Catherine." In the original novel, Elizabeth makes no answer. Filippi goes further, providing Elizabeth with the last line of the scene. In an aside about her eagerness for Darcy to arrive the next day, Filippi's Elizabeth declares, "Perhaps I, too, may learn to think the Bennet family lucky in spite of Lady Catherine de Burgh" (139). Elizabeth's sassy self-determination comes through even more clearly in Filippi's version, despite its using, in the bulk of the scene, Austen's original dialogue.

It's impossible to chart how many actors and audiences became familiar with Austen through Filippi's *Duologues*, but the number seems potentially, even astoundingly, large. The book went into a second edition in 1904. Two duologues were anthologized, by permission, in *The Reciter's Treasury of Prose and Drama* (1904).[30] A third edition was published in 1907. Then a new edition appeared in 1929, reedited and introduced. This time, it was

presented as a textbook, with a series of study questions as its appendix. This is an interesting evolution of the text, although it's clear Filippi brought a teacher's sensibilities to the project from the first.[31] There is also evidence of 1920s radio versions of the *Duologues*, suggesting an even wider impact, for both Filippi and Austen.[32] The *Duologues*, from their original publication to their last edition thirty-five years on, functioned as more than a dramatization of Austen. They served as a powerful teaching tool for those seeking to impart, or to gain, an education in literature, history, acting, public speaking, and female self-assertion.

One source from the period gives us a glimpse into how Filippi's text and others like it may have been used. Former high school headmistress Fanny Johnson published her essay "School Plays" in 1909, describing herself as one of the "increasing number" of people who "believe in the drama as an instrument of education." She notes "the superiority both in quantity and quality of the plays provided for the use of girls," recognizing that "even plays specially adapted for boys . . . have for the most part been written by women."[33] Johnson also mentions Filippi's Austen *Duologues*, calling it "well known" and "chiefly suitable for small classes in girls' boarding schools" (101). School plays, then—not just Austen adaptations—were perceived as written by, and geared toward, girls and women, particularly privileged ones.

This is demonstrably the case in Austen dramatic adaptations. Of the fifty texts of this type that Gilson catalogues, published between 1895 and 1975, 62 percent were written by women, 30 percent by men, and 4 percent by collaborator couples. (A further 4 percent have not yet been sex-identified.)[34] As Gilson acknowledges, however, he kept track of printed adaptations only, not known performances in which a script—which may or may not survive—was registered. The Lord Chamberlain's Plays Correspondence file at the British Library shows an additional seven dramatic versions of *Pride and Prejudice* alone, at least four of them authored by women, in this period.[35] Other versions can be inferred, such as *Pride and Prejudice* script authored by "Miss Booth" that actor Sybil Thorndike describes in an unpublished 1933 letter as "well done." Thorndike nevertheless turns down the opportunity to be a part of it, because, as she tells the author, "I already have another 'Pride and Prejudice' play which I have promised to use if I ever want to do such a one."[36]

As these examples show, many began to join Filippi in the Austen dramatization effort, the aforementioned Fanny Johnson herself becoming one of the number.[37] These writers may have been acting on what one reviewer

called "a feeling of good-natured envy" of Filippi's "excellent" and "simple" idea, one that "might so easily have occurred to them."[38] There were further stage versions of Austen almost immediately on both sides of the Atlantic, with most of them written by amateur playwrights. A few were full-length plays, such as *Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen Arranged in Dramatic Form*, registered with the Copyright Office in November 1901, by Ohio librarian Hortense Fogelsong (d. 1915).[39] It was performed by a group of women teachers in Dayton, Ohio, who called themselves the Helen Hunt Club. They were devoted to dramatizing literature.[40] The play does not seem to have been published. The most successful full-length American version of Austen was by Mary Keith Medbery MacKaye (1845–1924). She wrote and published *Pride and Prejudice*: *A Play, Founded on Jane Austen's Novel* (1906) in four acts, which was frequently staged in American schools.[41] (Its actor-Darcys will be discussed in chapter 5.) Far more common were single scenes or miniature plays based on Austen's novels.

There were soon dozens of these Austen scenes and plays for amateur actors, published both as stand-alone texts and in collections of texts drawn from "classic authors." As we saw earlier, Austen was by no means alone in being used this way, as other novelists' work was similarly transformed. The fiction of Dickens and Scott proved enormously popular for selected scene dramatization in this period, as did that of Eliot and Gaskell.[42] These stand-alone scenes for the amateur stage were often made available simultaneously through agents in the United Kingdom, the United States, and beyond, suggesting a global market. Even the *Duologues* began to include an inserted slip prior to the title page that read, "Permission to perform these duologues in Great Britain, whether singly or otherwise, must be obtained from the publisher."[43] There was a growing, and probably lucrative, Austen amateur drama licensing market.

By far the most popular Austen text staged by the amateur or student actor during the early twentieth century was *Pride and Prejudice*. Particularly prevalent were the novel's scenes featuring Elizabeth's sizzling dialogue, including her conversations with Mr. Collins, Mr. Darcy, and Lady Catherine de Bourgh. These are among the most famous sections of the novel, presenting readers with evidence of the heroine's strength, intelligence, and right to self-determination in courtship. These adaptations presented dialogue-rich sections as *stand-alone scenes*. Typical among them is Sophie Trasel and Elizabeth Williams's "Mr. Collins in Search of a Wife: Being Scenes from Jane Austen's Novel 'Pride and Prejudice' " (1903), which describes its focus

through its title. Registered for US copyright, the script survives, although its performance history is murky.[44] Other examples of the type were published by lawyer, writer, and critic Phosphor Mallam. His two short dramatic pamphlets, *Mr. Collins Proposes* and *Lady Catherine Is Annoyed with Elizabeth Bennet* (1912), also use their titles to reveal their dramatic thrust.[45] In each case, the scenes echo Filippi's choice of female-focused, power-struggle-centered Austen content.

Nowhere is the early emphasis on Elizabeth Bennet's staged defiance made clearer than in the title of the play *Elizabeth Refuses* (1926), adapted by feminist-socialist-pacifist playwright Margaret Macnamara (1874–1950).[46] Her play features five actors and is described as "shaped to play in Five-and-twenty minutes, on a stage lacking front curtain and scenery." Its innovation is to have Elizabeth refuse Mr. Collins and Lady Catherine in the same scene. To Mr. Collins, Elizabeth says, "I know I should make you miserable" (14). Macnamara's play also demonstrates the extent to which such early dramatic works were designed to be performed to small audiences, catering to girls and women. The text of *Elizabeth Refuses* gives directions for how to pay royalties for amateur use but also indicates that "special facilities are given for public performances by Girls' Clubs and Women's Institutions" (1). Macnamara would later publish another Austen dramatization, *I Have Five Daughters: A Morning Room Comedy in Three Acts Made from Jane Austen's novel "Pride and Prejudice"* (1936). As in her earlier effort, Macnamara's dialogue works to make Elizabeth even more "pert" and "saucy," as the character calls herself. Rewritten scenes emphasize Elizabeth's courage, outspokenness, lack of sentimentalism, and wit—hallmarks of the New Woman and the first wave of feminism, leading up to the widespread passage of women's suffrage. Macnamara's plays are later examples of this kind, but they're representative of many ongoing trends in dramatizing Austen, in showcasing Elizabeth at her most defiant and independent.

Readers at this time who came to Austen's novel *after* having seen or acted in these short plays would have gone into the original text anticipating a story about a heroine who exerts her own strong will, proudly saying no. In the novel, of course, Elizabeth also apologizes, accepts, and expresses gratitude. But what many in this generation of readers would have had imprinted on them, through performing or watching amateur drama, is the image of a witty Elizabeth thwarting the wishes and imperatives of the traditional and the powerful, in favor of her own desires and will. In these scenes, Darcy seems almost beside the point, a fortunate afterthought, a just

dessert for Elizabeth's cleverness, self-assertion, and confidence. These dramatic scenes and plays were written by a far more politicized set of progressive (and largely female) authors than we ever suspected. They compel us to expand, if not overturn, our sense that Austen's early celebrity depended on establishment conservative male literati. The Austen dramatists' reach was arguably larger, in the short if not in the long term. While the literati were arguing over whether Austen and her novels ought to be appreciated or depreciated as politically limited or narrow in scope (as we will see in chapter 8), dramatists were tweaking her characters and plots to more directly empower girls and young women. Although we've been slow to realize it, it was the opposite of trifling, lightweight work.