

# Jane Austen



# Jane Austen's Place in the Romantic Era

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1. Jane Austen

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3. Shades of Romanticism

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4. Austen as a Counterpoint to Romanticism



# JANE AUSTEN (1775-1817)

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- Daughter of clergyman and schoolmaster
- Early years: Steventon in Hampshire, 60 miles south of London
- 7<sup>th</sup> of 8 children: 6 brothers 1 sister

# 6 published novels

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- *Sense and Sensibility* (1811)
- *Pride and Prejudice* (1813)
- *Mansfield Park* (1814)
- *Emma* (1815)
- *Persuasion* (1818 posthumous)
- *Northanger Abbey* (1818 posthumous)

Unfinished:

*Sanditon*

**SENSE**  
AND  
**SENSIBILITY:**

A NOVEL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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BY A LADY.

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VOL. I.

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London:  
PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR,  
*By C. Roworth, Bell-yard, Temple-bar,*  
AND PUBLISHED BY T. EGERTON, WHITEHALL.  
1811.

**PRIDE**  
AND  
**PREJUDICE:**

A NOVEL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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BY THE  
AUTHOR OF "SENSE AND SENSIBILITY."

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VOL. I.

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London:  
PRINTED FOR T. EGERTON,  
MILITARY LIBRARY, WHITEHALL.  
1813.

# Austen's subject and style

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- English country village life
- Landed gentry and middle class
- Keen observation of human behavior
- Ironic wit, satire



# **Common features of an Austen novel**

- **Female protagonist, age 18-28**
- **One or more parent absent or ineffectual**
- **Obstacles**
- **Heroine imperfect; undergoes an awakening**
- **Happy ending**

# Contemporary criticism: Sir Walter Scott

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from Scott's diary entry for March 14, 1826:

Read again, for the third time at least, Miss Austen's finely written novel of *Pride and Prejudice*. That young lady had a talent for describing the involvements and feelings and characters of ordinary life, which is to me the most wonderful I ever met with. The big Bow-Wow strain I can do myself like any now going; but the exquisite touch which renders ordinary commonplace things and characters interesting from the truth of the description and the sentiment is denied to me.





Possibly Jane Austen, by unknown artist, hollow-cut silhouette, 1800-1815, National Portrait Gallery, London

## Austen on Scott:

Walter Scott has no business to write novels, especially good ones.—It is not fair.—He has Fame and Profit enough as a Poet, and should not be taking the bread out of other people's mouths.—I do not like him, & do not mean to like *Waverley* if I can help it—but I fear I must.

--Letter to niece Anna Austen, 28 September 1814 (a few months after the publication of *Waverley*)

# Austen, on her own writing

Letter to nephew James Edward Austen-Leigh, who had asked for comment on a draft of his own writing (1816):

What should I do with your strong, manly, spirited Sketches, full of Variety and Glow? -- How could I join them on to the little bit (two Inches wide) of Ivory on which I work with so fine a Brush, as produces little effect after much labour?

# The Place of **THE NOVEL** in the 18<sup>th</sup> century

## Classical hierarchy of literature:

- Epic
- Drama
- Lyric
  
- The novel

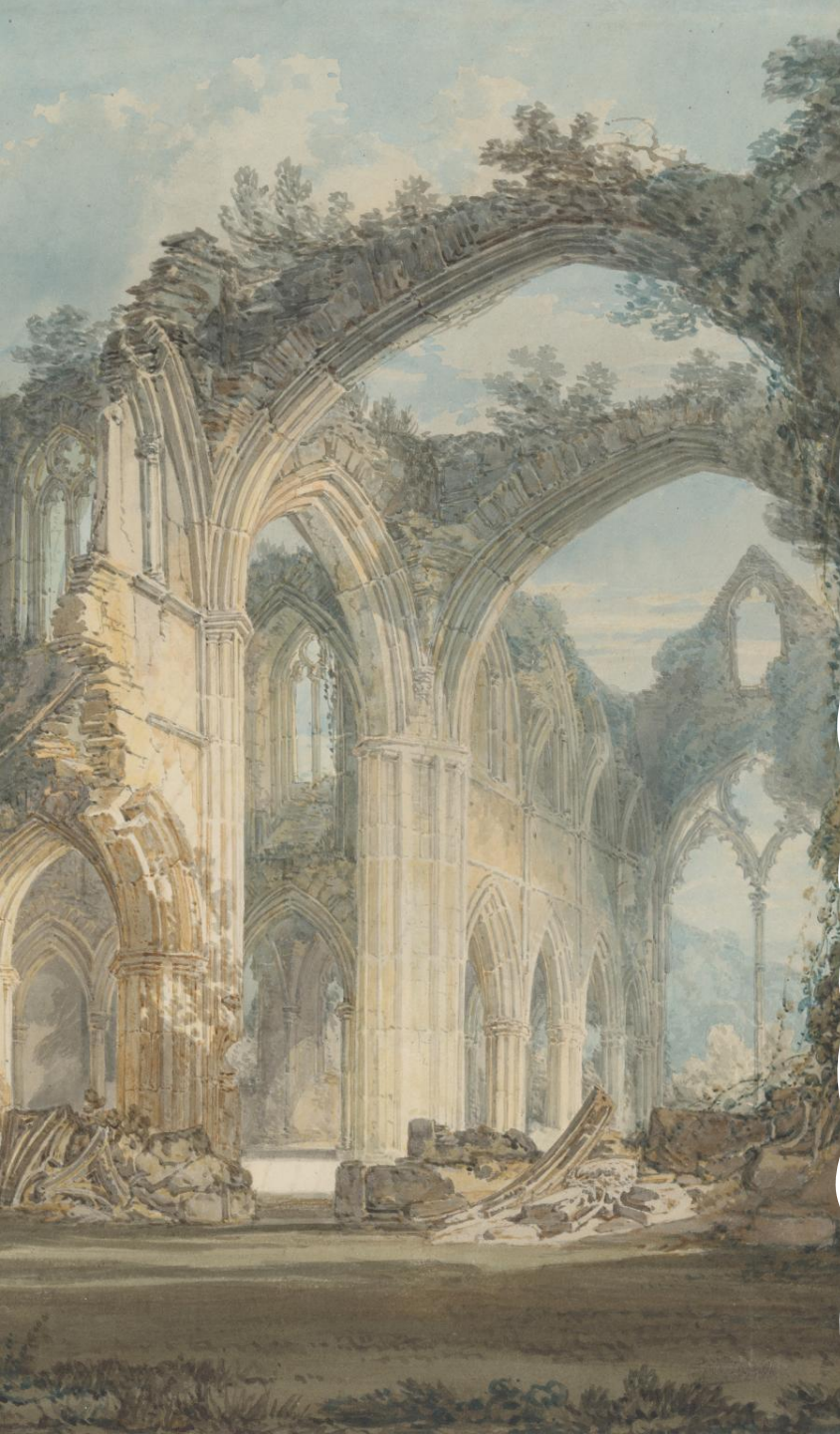
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from *Northanger Abbey*. Ch. 5

A novel is “only ... some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour, are conveyed to the world in the best-chosen language.”



# SHADES OF ROMANTICISM



from *Mansfield Park*, ch. 16

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The room was most dear to her ... the three lower panes of one window, where Tintern Abbey held its station between a cave in Italy and a moonlight lake in Cumberland...

from *Persuasion*, ch. 11

Anne and Captain Benwick discuss poems by Lord Byron:

... [Captain Benwick] repeated, with such tremulous feeling, the various lines which imaged a broken heart, or a mind destroyed by wretchedness, and looked so entirely as if he meant to be understood, that she ventured to hope he did not always read only poetry.

I have read *The Corsair*,  
mended my petticoat, & have  
nothing else to do.

—Letter from Jane Austen to sister  
Cassandra, March 5, 1814



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from *Sense and Sensibility*, ch. 16, after vacating Norland Park:

“Dear, dear Norland,” said Elinor, “probably looks much as it always does at this time of year. The woods and walks thickly covered with dead leaves.”

“Oh!” cried Marianne, “with what transporting sensations have I formerly seen them fall! How have I delighted, as I walked, to see them driven in showers about me by the wind! What feelings have they, the season, the air altogether inspired! Now there is no one to regard them. [T]hey are seen only as a nuisance, swept hastily off, and driven as much as possible from the sight.”

“It is not everyone,” said Elinor, “who has your passion for dead leaves.”



# **III. Austen as a Counterpoint to Romanticism**

What makes  
Austen's writing  
**distinctive?**

- Style
- Subject matter
- World view

# Irony

from *Pride and Prejudice*, opening:

IT is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.

However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighbourhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered as the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters.

from *Pride and Prejudice*, ch. 5

Sir William Lucas had been formerly in trade in Meryton, where he had made a tolerable fortune, and risen to the honour of knighthood by an address to the king during his mayoralty. The distinction had, perhaps, been felt too strongly. ... It had given him a disgust to his business and to his residence in a small market town; and, quitting them both, he had removed with his family to a house about a mile from Meryton, denominated from that period Lucas Lodge; where he could think with pleasure of his own importance ...

From *Pride and Prejudice*, ch. 5 and ch. 20:

Lady Lucas was a very good kind of woman, not too clever to be a valuable neighbour to Mrs. Bennet.

“An unhappy alternative is before you ... From this day you must be a stranger to one of your parents: --Your mother will never see you again if you do not marry Mr. Collins, and I will never see you again if you do.”

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Jane Austen 1775-1817



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# Innovation – free indirect discourse

*from Pride and Prejudice, Vol II, ch. 14:*

Elizabeth had frequently united with Jane in an endeavor to check the imprudence of Catherine and Lydia; but while they were supported by their mother's indulgence, what chance could there be of improvement?

*from Pride and Prejudice, ch. 4:*

Bingley had never met with pleasanter people or prettier girls in his life; every body had been most kind and attentive to him, there had been no formality, no stiffness, he had soon felt acquainted with all the room; and as to Miss Bennet, he could not conceive an angel more beautiful.

*From Pride and Prejudice, ch. 43:*

Oh! why did she come? or, why did he thus come a day before he was expected? Had they been only ten minutes sooner, they should have been beyond the reach of his discrimination...

# Dialogue

from *Pride and Prejudice*, ch. 10:

“Do you not feel a great inclination, Miss Bennet, to seize an opportunity of dancing a reel?”

“You wanted me, I know, to say ‘Yes,’ that you might have the pleasure of despising my taste; but I always delight in ... cheating a person of their premeditated contempt. I have therefore made up my mind to tell you, that I do not want to dance a reel at all— and now despise me if you dare.”

“Indeed I do not dare.”

Elizabeth, having rather expected to affront him, was amazed at his gallantry; but there was a mixture of sweetness and archness in her manner which made it difficult for her to affront anybody; and Darcy had never been so bewitched by any woman as he was by her. He really believed, that were it not for the inferiority of her connections, he should be in some danger.

Subject  
matter  
**money**  
**and social**  
**standing**

From *Pride and Prejudice*, ch. 1

“... Mrs. Long says that Netherfield is taken by a young man of large fortune from the north of England; that he came down on Monday in a chaise and four to see the place, and ... some of his servants are to be in the house by the end of next week.”

“What is his name?”

“Bingley.”

“Is he married or single?”

“Oh, single, my dear, to be sure! A single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year. What a fine thing for our girls!”

[H]is friend Mr. Darcy soon drew the attention of the room by his fine, tall person, handsome features, noble mien; and the report which was in general circulation within five minutes after his entrance, of his having ten thousand a year. The gentlemen pronounced him to be a fine figure of a man, the ladies declared he was much handsomer than Mr. Bingley, and he was looked at with great admiration for about half the evening, till his manners gave a disgust which turned the tide of his popularity; for he was discovered to be proud, to be above his company ...

from *Mansfield Park*,  
opening

About thirty years ago Miss Maria Ward, of Huntingdon, with only seven thousand pounds, had the good luck to captivate Sir Thomas Bertram, of Mansfield Park, in the county of Northampton, and to be thereby raised to the rank of a baronet's lady, with all the comforts and consequences of an handsome house and large income. All Huntingdon exclaimed on the greatness of the match, and her uncle, the lawyer, himself, allowed her to be at least three thousand pounds short of any equitable claim to it. She had two sisters to be benefited by her elevation ... But there certainly are not so many men of large fortune in the world as there are pretty women to deserve them.

# **courtship and marriage**

Letter to niece Fanny Knight, 1816:

Single women have a dreadful propensity for being poor—which is one very strong argument in favour of matrimony.

- Jane Austen

from *Pride and Prejudice*, Ch. 6

“Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance. If the dispositions of the parties are ever so well known to each other ... it does not advance their felicity in the least. They always continue to grow sufficiently unlike afterwards to have their share of vexation; and it is better to know as little as possible of the defects of the person with whom you are to pass your life.”

“You make me laugh, Charlotte; but it is not sound. You know it is not sound, and that you would never act in this way yourself.”

From *Pride and Prejudice*, ch. 19:

“My reasons for marrying are, first, that I think it a right thing for every clergyman in easy circumstances (like myself) to set the example of matrimony in his parish; secondly, that I am convinced it will add very greatly to my happiness; and, thirdly, which perhaps I ought to have mentioned earlier, that it is the particular advice and recommendation of the very noble lady whom I have the honour of calling patroness. ... And now nothing remains for me but to assure you in the most animated language of the violence of my affection.”

from *Pride and Prejudice*, Ch. 34 (Vol. II,  
Ch. XI):

“In vain have I struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you.”

Elizabeth’s astonishment was beyond expression. ... His sense of her inferiority, of its being a degradation, of the family obstacles ... were dwelt on with a warmth which seemed due to the consequence he was wounding, but was very unlikely to recommend his suit. ...

“I might as well inquire,” replied she, “why, with so evident a design of offending and insulting me, you chose to tell me that you liked me against your will, against your reason, and even against your character?”

# World View

Conservative in Defending the Established Social Order

# Consequences of Immorality

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from *Pride and Prejudice*, Ch. 61:

It had always been evident to [Elizabeth] that such an income as [Lydia and Wickham's], under the direction of two persons so extravagant in their wants, and heedless of the future, must be very insufficient to their support. ... Their manner of living, even when the restoration of peace dismissed them to a home, was unsettled in the extreme. They were always moving from place to place in quest of a cheap situation, and always spending more than they ought. His affection for her soon sunk into indifference: hers lasted a little longer;...

# Defense of the Navy

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from *Persuasion*, page 21: (the first words Anne, the heroine, speaks):

“The navy, I think, who have done so much for us, have at least an equal claim with any other set of men, for all the comforts and all the privileges which any home can give. Sailors work hard enough for their comforts, we must all allow.”

# British solution to class struggle

Social mobility through personal merit

# Reconciliation

from *Pride and Prejudice*, conclusion:

Lady Catherine was extremely indignant on the marriage of her nephew; ... But at length, by Elizabeth's persuasion, [Darcy] was prevailed on to seek a reconciliation; ... her resentment gave way ... and she condescended to wait on them at Pemberley, in spite of that pollution which its woods had received, not merely from the presence of such a mistress, but the visits of her uncle and aunt from the city.

from *Pride and Prejudice*: conclusion

With the Gardiners they were always on the most intimate terms. Darcy, as well as Elizabeth, really loved them; and they were both ever sensible of the warmest gratitude towards the persons who, by bringing her into Derbyshire, had been the means of uniting them.

