

29 set 2020 - Jane Austen

Jane Austen was born in 1775 in Steventon, Hampshire, (1) in southern England where her father was rector of the church. The seventh of eight children, she spent her (2) , uneventful life within the circle of her very close, affectionate family. Her lifelong, inseparable companion was her (3) Cassandra, who, like Jane, never married. She was educated at home (4) , and showed an interest in literature and writing very early. Her earliest writings in fact date from 1787. She then produced a large output of prose and, between 1795 and 1797, she completed *Elinor and Marianne*, which would become the basis of *Sense and Sensibility*, published in 1811, and *First Impressions*, which, later revised, became *Pride and Prejudice*, published in 1813 (→T55, T56). In 1798 she wrote *Northanger Abbey*, which (5) posthumously. When her father died, Jane, her sister and mother settled at Chawton, a small country village a few miles from her birthplace. There Jane produced her (6) works: *Mansfield Park*, begun in 1811 and published in 1814; *Emma*, begun in 1814 and published in 1816; *Persuasion*, begun in 1815 and published in 1818, (7) . She died probably of Addison's disease in Winchester in 1817, and was buried in Winchester (8) . All her novels were published (9) ; her identity was later revealed by her (10) who supervised the publication of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, adding a 'Biographical Notice of the Author'. Jane's fame, however, was already (11) : among her contemporaries, Sir Walter Scott was one of the first to realise her greatness in his review of *Emma*, where he pointed out her 'exquisite touch which renders ordinary (12) things and characters

She is an unusual writer in the romantic period, because she wrote novels in a period when poetry was very popular. She wrote six novels.

Because of this and many other choices she made she is considered anti-romantic.

Why is she anti-romantic?

1. She wrote novels
2. She was not interested in historical events
3. She didn't take part in literary circles
4. She didn't care about social problems (as all romantics did)
5. She focuses on a class and a reality that she used to know very well: the **upper-middle class**.

The world of her novels is restricted to provincial England. Critics had said that she lacked an

overall vision of the historical and social events

Why can we say she is a great writer?

Because we still read her novels with great pleasure.

The strength of her novels appears in the following elements:

1. With her **penetrating inside** she recreates the triviality of **everyday life**. Made up of *dinners, dances, excursions, balls*, which she turns into opportunities to gather and study a large range of characters
2. **Characterisation**: she is very good at creating living characters from the kind of people she knew:
 - Landed gentry
 - Country clergy
 - Middle classesHer characters are reasonable creatures who are not given to violent inner conflicts, nor to fierce passions.
3. **Objectivity**: she seldom intrudes in her novels with comments or judgements. When she does so it's generally in a delicate almost impersonal way, which makes her presence unobtrusive.
4. **Intensity of observation**: She is capable of observation but also of detachment, so she describes her characters with a scientific eye, neither sparing their faults, nor idealizing them.
5. **Profound psychological study**: her main subjects are *courtship* and *marriage*. By dealing with them she shows the restrictions of the woman's position in the 18th and 19th centuries, in which an unmarried woman was destined to the dull life of nursing elderly parents or relatives or looking after her relatives children.
6. **Lack of sentimentality**: feelings seem to be absent, or anyway well concealed under everyday rituals. At the core of everything there is marriage. Jane Austen doesn't appreciate a marriage based on wealth or on a sudden violent passion. A good marriage is based on calm judgment and mutual understanding.
7. **Realism**: she never romances her stories, so she writes stories of domestic life, without heroes or adventures. She inherits the lesson Richardson's novels, that are not so cheesy.
8. **Humor**: her sense of humor is subtle and unpredictable, and it is often made up of unexpected paradoxes.
9. **Satire**: She can be very mordant and witty, but she is never ruthless.
10. **Precise and lucid style**, made up of
 - **dialogues** and conversations that are the main vehicle for the revelation of a character
 - **letter writing**, which is typical of the Augustan age, and rich in varied registers
 - **ironic wit**
 - **precise use of words**
 - **well structured** and **polished sentences**