

= Reception history of Jane Austen =

The reception history of Jane Austen follows a path from modest fame to wild popularity . Jane Austen (1775 ? 1817) , the author of such works as *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and *Emma* (1815) , has become one of the best @-@ known and most widely read novelists in the English language . Her novels are the subject of intense scholarly study and the centre of a diverse fan culture .

During her lifetime , Austen 's novels brought her little personal fame . Like many women writers , she chose to publish anonymously and it was only among members of the aristocracy that her authorship was an open secret . At the time they were published , Austen 's works were considered fashionable by members of high society but received few positive reviews . By the mid @-@ 19th century , her novels were admired by members of the literary elite who viewed their appreciation of her works as a mark of cultivation . The publication in 1870 of her nephew 's *Memoir of Jane Austen* introduced her to a wider public as an appealing personality ? dear , quiet aunt Jane ? and her works were republished in popular editions . By the start of the 20th century , competing groups had sprung up ? some to worship her and some to defend her from the " teeming masses " ? but all claiming to be the true Janeites , or those who properly appreciated Austen .

Early in the 20th century , scholars produced a carefully edited collection of her works ? the first for any British novelist ? but it was not until the 1940s that Austen was widely accepted in academia as a " great English novelist " . The second half of the 20th century saw a proliferation of Austen scholarship , which explored numerous aspects of her works : artistic , ideological , and historical . With the growing professionalisation of university English departments in the first half of the 20th century , criticism of Austen became progressively more esoteric and , as a result , appreciation of Austen splintered into distinctive high culture and popular culture trends . In the late 20th century , fans founded Jane Austen societies and clubs to celebrate the author , her time , and her works . As of the early 21st century , Austen fandom supports an industry of printed sequels and prequels as well as television and film adaptations , which started with the 1940 *Pride and Prejudice* and continued in 2005 when three new adaptations of *Mansfield Park* , *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* which were presented on British public television and home video .

= = Background = =

Jane Austen lived her entire life as part of a large and close @-@ knit family on the lower fringes of the English gentry . Her family 's steadfast support was critical to Austen 's development as a professional writer . Austen read draft versions of all of her novels to her family , receiving feedback and encouragement , and it was her father who sent out her first publication bid . Austen 's artistic apprenticeship lasted from her teenage years until she was about thirty @-@ five . During this period , she experimented with various literary forms , including the epistolary novel which she tried and then abandoned , and wrote and extensively revised three major novels and began a fourth . With the release of *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) , *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) , *Mansfield Park* (1814) and *Emma* (1815) , she achieved success as a published writer .

Novel @-@ writing was a suspect occupation for women in the early 19th century , because it imperiled their social reputation by bringing them publicity , viewed as unfeminine . Therefore , like many other female writers , Austen published anonymously . Eventually , though , her novels ' authorship became an open secret among the aristocracy . During one of her visits to London , the Prince Regent invited her , through his librarian , James Stanier Clarke , to view his library at Carlton House ; his librarian mentioned that the Regent admired her novels and that " if Miss Austen had any other Novel forthcoming , she was quite at liberty to dedicate it to the Prince " . Austen , who disapproved of the prince 's extravagant lifestyle , did not want to follow this suggestion , but her friends convinced her otherwise : in short order , *Emma* was dedicated to him . Austen turned down the librarian 's further hint to write a historical romance in honour of the prince 's daughter 's marriage .

In the last year of her life , Austen revised *Northanger Abbey* (1817) , wrote *Persuasion* (1817) , and began another novel , eventually titled *Sanditon* , which was left unfinished at her death .

Austen did not have time to see *Northanger Abbey* or *Persuasion* through the press, but her family published them as one volume after her death and her brother Henry included a "Biographical Notice of the Author". This short biography sowed the seeds for the myth of Austen as a quiet, retiring aunt who wrote during her spare time: "Neither the hope of fame nor profit mixed with her early motives ... [S]o much did she shrink from notoriety, that no accumulation of fame would have induced her, had she lived, to affix her name to any productions of her pen ... in public she turned away from any allusion to the character of an authoress." However, this description is in direct contrast to the excitement Austen shows in her letters regarding publication and profit: Austen was a professional writer.

Austen's works, although a noted part of high British Idealism and high British Romanticism, are also noted for their literary realism, biting social commentary, and masterful use of free indirect speech, burlesque and irony. This biting social commentary often focused on the realistic depiction of landed English aristocracy. Her books critique the romantic novels of sensibility of the second half of the 18th century and are part of the literature leading to the eventual transition to 19th-century literary realism. As Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert explain, Austen makes fun of "such novelistic clichés as love at first sight, the primacy of passion over all other emotions and / or duties, the chivalric exploits of the hero, the vulnerable sensitivity of the heroine, the lovers' proclaimed indifference to financial considerations, and the cruel crudity of parents". Austen's plots, though comic, highlight the way women of the gentry depended on marriage to secure social standing and economic security. Like the writings of Samuel Johnson, a strong influence on her, her works are fundamentally concerned with moral issues.

= = 1812 ? 1821 : Individual reactions and contemporary reviews = =

Austen's novels quickly became fashionable among opinion makers, namely, those aristocrats who often dictated fashion and taste. Lady Bessborough, sister to the notorious Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, commented on *Sense and Sensibility* in a letter to a friend: "it is a clever novel. ... tho' it ends stupidly, I was much amused by it." The fifteen-year-old daughter of the Prince Regent, Princess Charlotte Augusta, compared herself to one of the book's heroines: "I think Marianne & me are very like in disposition, that certainly I am not so good, the same imprudence, & tc". After reading *Pride and Prejudice*, playwright Richard Sheridan advised a friend to "buy it immediately" for it "was one of the cleverest things" he had ever read. Anne Milbanke, future wife of the Romantic poet Lord Byron, wrote that "I have finished the Novel called *Pride and Prejudice*, which I think a very superior work." She commented that the novel "is the most probable fiction I have ever read" and had become "at present the fashionable novel". The Dowager Lady Vernon told a friend that *Mansfield Park* was "not much of a novel, more the history of a family party in the country, very natural" as if, comments one Austen scholar, "Lady Vernon's parties mostly featured adultery." Lady Anne Romilly told her friend, the novelist Maria Edgeworth, that "[*Mansfield Park*] has been pretty generally admired here" and Edgeworth commented later that "we have been much entertained with *Mansfield Park*".

Despite these positive reactions from the elite, Austen's novels received relatively few reviews during her lifetime: two for *Sense and Sensibility*, three for *Pride and Prejudice*, none for *Mansfield Park*, and seven for *Emma*. Most of the reviews were short and on balance favourable, although superficial and cautious. They most often focused on the moral lessons of the novels. Moreover, as Brian Southam, who has edited the definitive volumes on Austen's reception, writes in his description of these reviewers, "their job was merely to provide brief notices, extended with quotations, for the benefit of women readers compiling their library lists and interested only in knowing whether they would like a book for its story, its characters and moral". Asked by publisher John Murray to review *Emma*, famed historical novelist Walter Scott wrote the longest and most thoughtful of these reviews, which was published anonymously in the March 1816 issue of the *Quarterly Review*. Using the review as a platform from which to defend the then disreputable genre of the novel, Scott praised Austen's works, celebrating her ability to copy "from nature as she really exists in the common walks of life, and presenting to the reader ... a correct and striking

representation of that which is daily taking place around him " . Modern Austen scholar William Galperin has noted that " unlike some of Austen 's lay readers , who recognized her divergence from realistic practice as it had been prescribed and defined at the time , Walter Scott may well have been the first to install Austen as the realist par excellence " . Scott wrote in his private journal in 1826 , in what later became a widely quoted comparison :

Also read again and for the third time at least Miss Austen 's very finely written novel of *Pride and Prejudice* . That young lady had a talent for describing the involvement 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 . What a pity such a gifted creature died so early !

Northanger Abbey and *Persuasion* , published together posthumously in December 1817 , were reviewed in the *British Critic* in March 1818 and in the *Edinburgh Review* and *Literary Miscellany* in May 1818 . The reviewer for the *British Critic* felt that Austen 's exclusive dependence on realism was evidence of a deficient imagination . The reviewer for the *Edinburgh Review* disagreed , praising Austen for her " exhaustless invention " and the combination of the familiar and the surprising in her plots . Overall , Austen scholars have pointed out that these early reviewers did not know what to make of her novels ? for example , they misunderstood her use of irony . Reviewers reduced *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* to didactic tales of virtue prevailing over vice .

In the *Quarterly Review* in 1821 , the English writer and theologian Richard Whately published the most serious and enthusiastic early posthumous review of Austen 's work . Whately drew favourable comparisons between Austen and such acknowledged greats as Homer and Shakespeare , praising the dramatic qualities of her narrative . He also affirmed the respectability and legitimacy of the novel as a genre , arguing that imaginative literature , especially narrative , was more valuable than history or biography . When it was properly done , as in Austen , Whately said , imaginative literature concerned itself with generalised human experience from which the reader could gain important insights into human nature ; in other words , it was moral . Whately also addressed Austen 's position as a female writer , writing : " we suspect one of Miss Austin 's [sic] great merits in our eyes to be , the insight she gives us into the peculiarities of female characters Her heroines are what one knows women must be , though one never can get them to acknowledge it . " No more significant , original Austen criticism was published until the late 19th century : Whately and Scott had set the tone for the Victorian era 's view of Austen .

= = 1821 ? 1870 : Cultured few = =

Austen had many admiring readers during the 19th century , who , according to critic Ian Watt , appreciated her " scrupulous ... fidelity to ordinary social experience " . However , Austen 's novels did not conform to certain strong Romantic and Victorian British preferences , which required that " powerful emotion [be] authenticated by an egregious display of sound and colour in the writing " . Victorian critics and audiences were drawn to the work of authors such as Charles Dickens and George Eliot ; by comparison , Austen 's novels seemed provincial and quiet . Although Austen 's works were republished beginning in late 1832 or early 1833 by Richard Bentley in the *Standard Novels* series , and remained in print continuously thereafter , they were not best @-@ sellers . Southam describes her " reading public between 1821 and 1870 " as " minute beside the known audience for Dickens and his contemporaries " .

Those who did read Austen saw themselves as discriminating readers ? they were a cultured few . This became a common theme of Austen criticism during the 19th and early 20th centuries . Philosopher and literary critic George Henry Lewes articulated this theme in a series of enthusiastic articles in the 1840s and 1850s . In " *The Novels of Jane Austen* " , published anonymously in *Blackwood 's Magazine* in 1859 , Lewes praised Austen 's novels for " the economy of art ... the easy adaptation of means to ends , with no aid from superfluous elements " and compared her to Shakespeare . Arguing that Austen lacked the ability to construct a plot , he still celebrated her

dramatisations : " The reader 's pulse never throbs , his curiosity is never intense ; but his interest never wanes for a moment . The action begins ; the people speak , feel , and act ; everything that is said , felt , or done tends towards the entanglement or disentanglement of the plot ; and we are almost made actors as well as spectators of the little drama . "

Reacting against Lewes 's essays and his personal communications with her , novelist Charlotte Brontë admired Austen 's fidelity to everyday life but described her as " only shrewd and observant " and criticised the absence of visible passion in her work . To Brontë , Austen 's work appeared formal and constrained , " a carefully fenced , highly cultivated garden , with neat borders and delicate flowers ; but no glance of bright vivid physiognomy , no open country , no fresh air , no blue hill , no bonny beck " .

= = 19th @-@ century European translations = =

Austen 's novels appeared in some European countries soon after their publication in Britain , beginning in 1813 with a French translation of *Pride and Prejudice* , quickly followed by German , Danish , and Swedish editions . Their availability in Europe was not universal . Austen was not well known in Russia and the first Russian translation of an Austen novel did not appear until 1967 . Despite the fact that Austen 's novels were translated into many European languages , Europeans did not recognise her works as part of the English novel tradition . This perception was reinforced by the changes made by translators who injected sentimentalism into Austen 's novels and eliminated their humour and irony . European readers therefore more readily associated Walter Scott 's style with the English novel .

Because of the significant changes made by her translators , Austen was received as a different kind of novelist on the Continent than in Britain . For example , the French novelist Isabelle de Montolieu translated several of Austen 's novels into a genre in which Montolieu herself wrote : the French sentimental novel . In Montolieu 's *Pride and Prejudice* , for example , vivacious conversations between Elizabeth and Darcy were replaced by decorous ones . Elizabeth 's claim that she has " always seen a great similarity in the turn of [their] minds " (her and Darcy 's) because they are " unwilling to speak , unless [they] expect to say something that will amaze the whole room " becomes " Moi , je garde le silence , parce que je ne sais que dire , et vous , parce que vous aiguisez vos traits pour parler avec effet . " (" Me , I keep silent , because I don 't know what to say , and you , because you excite your features for effect when speaking . ") As Cossy and Saglia explain in their essay on Austen translations , " the equality of mind which Elizabeth takes for granted is denied and gender distinction introduced " . Because Austen 's works were seen in France as part of a sentimental tradition , they were overshadowed by the works of French realists such as Stendhal , Balzac , and Flaubert . German translations and reviews of those translations also placed Austen in a line of sentimental writers , particularly late Romantic women writers . However , a study of other important dimensions of the French translations , such as free indirect discourse (FID) do much to nuance our understanding of Austen 's initial " aesthetic " reception with her first French readership . Austen uses a narrative technique known as free indirect discourse (FID) to represent Anne Elliot 's consciousness in *Persuasion* . Indeed , the portrayal of the heroine 's subjective experience is central to its narration . The frequent use of FID imbues *Persuasion* 's narrative discourse with a high degree of subtlety , placing a huge burden of interpretation on Austen 's first translators . Recent studies demonstrate that FID from *Persuasion* was translated extensively in Montolieu 's *La Famille Elliot* . Indeed , Montolieu was aware of the propensity of Austen 's narrator to delve into the heroine 's psychology in *Persuasion* as she comments on this in the Preface to *La Famille Elliot* . She characterises it as " almost imperceptible , delicate nuances that come from the heart " : des nuances délicates presque imperceptibles qui partent du fond du cœur , et dont miss JANE AUSTEN avait le secret plus qu 'aucun autre romancier . Montolieu 's extensive translations of Austen 's FID demonstrate that she was in fact one of Austen 's first critical readers , whose own finely nuanced reading of Austen 's narrative technique meant that her first French readers could also share in Anne Elliot 's psychological drama in much the same way that her English readership could .

= = 1870 ? 1930 : Explosion in popularity = =

= = = Family biographies = = =

For decades , Scott 's and Whately 's opinions dominated the reception of Austen 's works and few people read her novels . In 1869 , this changed with the publication of the first significant Austen biography , *A Memoir of Jane Austen* , which was written by Jane Austen 's nephew , James Edward Austen @-@ Leigh . With its release , Austen 's popularity and critical standing increased dramatically . Readers of the Memoir were presented with the myth of the amateur novelist who wrote masterpieces : the Memoir fixed in the public mind a sentimental picture of Austen as a quiet , middle @-@ aged maiden aunt and reassured them that her work was suitable for a respectable Victorian family . James Edward Austen @-@ Leigh had a portrait of Jane Austen painted , based on the earlier watercolour , softening her image and making her presentable to the Victorian public . The engraving by Bentley which formed the frontispiece of Memoir is based on the idealised image .

The publication of the Memoir spurred a major reissue of Austen 's novels . The first popular editions were released in 1883 ? a cheap sixpenny series published by Routledge . This was followed by a proliferation of elaborate illustrated editions , collectors ' sets , and scholarly editions . However , contemporary critics continued to assert that her works were sophisticated and only appropriate for those who could truly plumb their depths . Yet , after the publication of the Memoir , more criticism was published on Austen 's novels in two years than had appeared in the previous fifty .

In 1913 , William Austen @-@ Leigh and Richard Arthur Austen @-@ Leigh , descendants of the Austen family , published the definitive family biography , *Jane Austen : Her Life and Letters ? A Family Record* . Based primarily on family papers and letters , it is described by Austen biographer Park Honan as " accurate , staid , reliable , and at times vivid and suggestive " . Although the authors moved away from the sentimental tone of the Memoir , they made little effort to go beyond the family records and traditions immediately available to them . Their book therefore offers bare facts and little in the way of interpretation .

= = = Criticism = = =

During the last quarter of the 19th century , the first books of critical analysis regarding Austen 's works were published . In 1890 Godwin Smith published the *Life of Jane Austen* , initiating a " fresh phase in the critical heritage " , in which Austen reviewers became critics . This launched the beginning of " formal criticism " , that is , a focus on Austen as a writer and an analysis of the techniques that made her writing unique . According to Southam , while Austen criticism increased in amount and , to some degree , in quality after 1870 , " a certain uniformity " pervaded it :

We see the novels praised for their elegance of form and their surface ' finish ' ; for the realism of their fictional world , the variety and vitality of their characters ; for their pervasive humour ; and for their gentle and undogmatic morality and its unsermonising delivery . The novels are prized for their ' perfection ' . Yet it is seen to be a narrow perfection , achieved within the bounds of domestic comedy .

Among the most astute of these critics were Richard Simpson , Margaret Oliphant , and Leslie Stephen . In a review of the Memoir , Simpson described Austen as a serious yet ironic critic of English society . He introduced two interpretative themes which later became the basis for modern literary criticism of Austen 's works : humour as social critique and irony as a means of moral evaluation . Continuing Lewes 's comparison to Shakespeare , Simpson wrote that Austen :

began by being an ironical critic ; she manifested her judgment ... not by direct censure , but by the indirect method of imitating and exaggerating the faults of her models Criticism , humour , irony , the judgment not of one that gives sentence but of the mimic who quizzes while he mocks , are her

characteristics .

Simpson 's essay was not well known and did not become influential until Lionel Trilling quoted it in 1957 . Another prominent writer whose Austen criticism was ignored , novelist Margaret Oliphant , described Austen in almost proto @-@ feminist terms , as " armed with a ' fine vein of feminine cynicism , ' ' full of subtle power , keenness , finesse , and self @-@ restraint , ' blessed with an ' exquisite sense ' of the ' ridiculous , ' ' a fine stinging yet soft @-@ voiced contempt , ' whose novels are ' so calm and cold and keen ' " . This line of criticism would not be fully explored until the 1970s with the rise of feminist literary criticism .

Although Austen 's novels had been published in the United States since 1832 , albeit in bowdlerised editions , it was not until after 1870 that there was a distinctive American response to Austen . As Southam explains , " for American literary nationalists Jane Austen 's cultivated scene was too pallid , too constrained , too refined , too downright unheroic " . Austen was not democratic enough for American tastes and her canvas did not extend to the frontier themes that had come to define American literature . By the start of the 20th century , the American response was represented by the debate between the American novelist and critic William Dean Howells and the writer and humourist Mark Twain . In a series of essays , Howells helped make Austen into a canonical figure for the populace whereas Twain used Austen to argue against the Anglophile tradition in America . That is , Twain argued for the distinctiveness of American literature by attacking English literature . In his book *Following the Equator* , Twain described the library on his ship : " Jane Austen 's books ... are absent from this library . Just that one omission alone would make a fairly good library out of a library that hadn 't a book in it . "

= = = Janeites = = =

The Encyclopædia Britannica 's changing entries on Austen illustrate her increasing popularity and status . The eighth edition (1854) described her as " an elegant novelist " while the ninth edition (1875) lauded her as " one of the most distinguished modern British novelists " . Around the start of the 20th century , Austen novels began to be studied at universities and appear in histories of the English novel . The image of her that dominated the popular imagination was still that first presented in the *Memoir* and made famous by Howells in his series of essays in *Harper 's Magazine* , that of " dear aunt Jane " . Author and critic Leslie Stephen described a mania that started to develop for Austen in the 1880s as " Austenolatry " ? it was only after the publication of the *Memoir* that readers developed a personal connection with Austen . However , around 1900 , members of the literary elite , who had claimed an appreciation of Austen as a mark of culture , reacted against this popularisation of her work . They referred to themselves as Janeites to distinguish themselves from the masses who , in their view , did not properly understand Austen .

American novelist Henry James , one member of this literary elite , referred to Austen several times with approval and on one occasion ranked her with Shakespeare , Cervantes , and Henry Fielding as among " the fine painters of life " . But , James thought Austen an " unconscious " artist whom he described as " instinctive and charming " . In 1905 , James responded frustratingly to what he described as " a beguiled infatuation " with Austen , a rising tide of public interest that exceeded Austen 's " intrinsic merit and interest " . James attributed this rise principally to " the stiff breeze of the commercial , ... the special bookselling spirits the body of publishers , editors , illustrators , producers of the pleasant twaddle of magazines ; who have found their ' dear , ' our dear , everybody 's dear , Jane so infinitely to their material purpose , so amenable to pretty reproduction in every variety of what is called tasteful , and in what seemingly proves to be salable , form . "

In an effort to avoid the sentimental image of the " Aunt Jane " tradition and approach Austen 's fiction from a fresh perspective , in 1917 British intellectual and travel writer Reginald Farrer published a lengthy essay in the *Quarterly Review* which Austen scholar A. Walton Litz calls the best single introduction to her fiction . Southam describes it as a " Janeite " piece without the worship . Farrer denied that Austen 's artistry was unconscious (contradicting James) and described her as a writer of intense concentration and a severe critic of her society , " radiant and remorseless " , " dispassionate yet pitiless " , with " the steely quality , the incurable rigor of her

judgment " . Farrer was one of the first critics who viewed Austen as a subversive writer .

= = 1930 ? 2000 : Modern scholarship = =

Several important early works ? glimmers of brilliant Austen scholarship ? paved the way for Austen to become solidly entrenched within the academy . The first was Oxford Shakespearean scholar A. C. Bradley 's 1911 essay , " generally regarded as the starting @-@ point for the serious academic approach to Jane Austen " . Bradley emphasised Austen 's ties to 18th @-@ century critic and writer Samuel Johnson , arguing that she was a moralist as well as humourist ; in this he was " totally original " , according to Southam . Bradley divided Austen 's works into " early " and " late " novels , categories which are still used by scholars today . The second path @-@ breaking early @-@ 20th century critic of Austen was R. W. Chapman , whose magisterial edition of Austen 's collected works was the first scholarly edition of the works of any English novelist . The Chapman texts have remained the basis for all subsequent editions of Austen 's works .

In the wake of Bradley and Chapman 's contributions , the 1920s saw a boom in Austen scholarship , and the novelist E. M. Forster primarily illustrated his concept of the " round " character by citing Austen 's works . It was with the 1939 publication of Mary Lascelles ' *Jane Austen and Her Art* ? " the first full @-@ scale historical and scholarly study " of Austen ? that the academic study of her works matured . Lascelles included a short biographical essay ; an innovative analysis of the books Austen read and their effect on her writing ; and an extended analysis of Austen 's style and her " narrative art " . Lascelles felt that prior critics had all worked on a scale " so small that the reader does not see how they have reached their conclusions until he has patiently found his own way to them " . She wished to examine all of Austen 's works together and to subject her style and techniques to methodical analysis . Subsequent critics agree that she succeeded . Like Bradley earlier , she emphasised Austen 's connection to Samuel Johnson and her desire to discuss morality through fiction . However , at the time some fans of Austen worried that academics were taking over Austen criticism and it was becoming increasingly esoteric ? a debate that has continued to the beginning of the 21st century .

In an outpouring of mid @-@ century revisionist views , scholars approached Austen more sceptically . D. W. Harding , following and expanding upon Farrer , argued in his essay " *Regulated Hatred : An Aspect of the Work of Jane Austen* " that Austen 's novels did not support the status quo but rather subverted it . Her irony was not humorous but caustic and intended to undermine the assumptions of the society she portrayed . Through her use of irony , Austen attempted to protect her integrity as an artist and a person in the face of attitudes and practices she rejected . Almost simultaneously , influential critic Q. D. Leavis argued in " *Critical Theory of Jane Austen 's Writing* " , published in *Scrutiny* in the early 1940s , that Austen was a professional , not an amateur , writer . Harding 's and Leavis 's articles were followed by another revisionist treatment by Marvin Mudrick in *Jane Austen : Irony as Defense and Discovery* (1952) . Mudrick portrayed Austen as isolated , defensive , and critical of her society , and described in detail the relationship he saw between Austen 's attitude toward contemporary literature and her use of irony as a technique to contrast the realities of her society with what she felt they should be . These revisionist views , together with prominent critic F. R. Leavis 's pronouncement in *The Great Tradition* (1948) that Austen was one of the great writers of English fiction , a view shared by Ian Watt , who helped shape the scholarly debate regarding the genre of the novel , did much to cement Austen 's reputation amongst academics . They agreed that she " combined [Henry Fielding 's and Samuel Richardson 's] qualities of interiority and irony , realism and satire to form an author superior to both " .

The period after the Second World War saw a flowering of scholarship on Austen as well as a diversity of critical approaches . One of the most fruitful and contentious has been the consideration of Austen as a political writer . As critic Gary Kelly explains , " Some see her as a political ' conservative ' because she seems to defend the established social order . Others see her as sympathetic to ' radical ' politics that challenged the established order , especially in the form of patriarchy ... some critics see Austen 's novels as neither conservative nor subversive , but complex , criticizing aspects of the social order but supporting stability and an open class hierarchy . " In *Jane*

Austen and the War of Ideas (1975) , perhaps the most important of these works , Marilyn Butler argues that Austen was steeped in , not insulated from , the principal moral and political controversies of her time , and espoused a partisan , fundamentally conservative and Christian position in these controversies . In a similar vein , Alistair M. Duckworth in *The Improvement of the Estate : A Study of Jane Austen 's Novels* (1971) argues that Austen used the concept of the " estate " to symbolise all that was important about contemporary English society , which should be conserved , improved , and passed down to future generations . As Rajeswari Rajan notes in her essay on recent Austen scholarship , " the idea of a political Austen is no longer seriously challenged " . The questions scholars now investigate involve : " the [French] Revolution , war , nationalism , empire , class , ' improvement ' [of the estate] , the clergy , town versus country , abolition , the professions , female emancipation ; whether her politics were Tory , Whig , or radical ; whether she was a conservative or a revolutionary , or occupied a reformist position between these extremes " .

In the 1970s and 1980s , Austen studies was influenced by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar 's seminal *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) , which contrasts the " decorous surfaces " with the " explosive anger " of 19th @-@ century female English writers . This work , along with other feminist criticism of Austen , has firmly positioned Austen as a woman writer . The interest generated in Austen by these critics led to the discovery and study of other woman writers of the time . Moreover , with the publication of Julia Prewitt Brown 's *Jane Austen 's Novels : Social Change and Literary Form* (1979) , Margaret Kirkham 's *Jane Austen : Feminism and Fiction* (1983) , and Claudia L. Johnson 's *Jane Austen : Women , Politics and the Novel* (1988) , scholars were no longer able to easily argue that Austen was " apolitical , or even unqualifiedly ' conservative ' " . Kirkham , for example , described the similarities between Austen 's thought and that of Mary Wollstonecraft , labelling them both as " Enlightenment feminists " . Johnson similarly places Austen in an 18th @-@ century political tradition , however , she outlines the debt Austen owes to the political novels of the 1790s written by women .

In the late @-@ 1980s , 1990s , and 2000s ideological , postcolonial , and Marxist criticism dominated Austen studies . Generating heated debate , Edward Said devoted a chapter of his book *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) to *Mansfield Park* , arguing that the peripheral position of " Antigua " and the issue of slavery demonstrated that colonial oppression was an unspoken assumption of English society during the early 19th century . In *Jane Austen and the Body : ' The Picture of Health ' ,* (1992) John Wiltshire explored the preoccupation with illness and health of Austen 's characters . Wiltshire addressed current theories of " the body as sexuality " , and more broadly how culture is " inscribed " on the representation of the body . There has also been a return to considerations of aesthetics with D. A. Miller 's *Jane Austen , or The Secret of Style* (2003) which connects artistic concerns with queer theory .

= = Modern popular culture = =

= = Modern Janeites = =

Critic Claudia Johnson defines " Janeitism " as " the self @-@ consciously idolatrous enthusiasm for ' Jane ' and every detail relative to her " . Janeites not only read the novels of Austen ; they also re @-@ enact them , write plays based on them , and become experts on early 19th @-@ century England and its customs . Austen scholar Deidre Lynch has commented that " cult " is an apt term for committed Janeites . She compares the practices of religious pilgrims with those of Janeites , who travel to places associated with Austen 's life , her novels and the film adaptations . She speculates that this is " a kind of time @-@ travel to the past " which , by catering to Janeites , preserves a " vanished Englishness or set of ' traditional ' values " . The disconnection between the popular appreciation of Austen and the academic appreciation of Austen that began with Lascelles has since widened considerably . Johnson compares Janeites to Trekkies , arguing that both " are derided and marginalized by dominant cultural institutions bent on legitimizing their own objects and

protocols of expertise ". However , she notes that Austen 's works are now considered to be part of both high culture and popular culture , while Star Trek can only claim to be a part of popular culture .

= = = Adaptations = = =

Sequels , prequels , and adaptations based on Jane Austen 's work range from attempts to enlarge on the stories in Austen 's own style to the soft @-@ core pornographic novel *Virtues and Vices* (1981) and fantasy novel *Resolve and Resistance* (1996) . Beginning in the middle of the 19th century , Austen family members published conclusions to her incomplete novels . By 2000 , there were over one hundred printed adaptations of Austen 's works . According to Lynch , " her works appear to have proven more hospitable to sequelisation than those of almost any other novelist " . Relying on the categories laid out by Betty A. Schellenberg and Paul Budra , Lynch describes two different kinds of Austen sequels : those that continue the story and those that return to " the world of Jane Austen " . The texts that continue the story are " generally regarded as dubious enterprises , as reviews attest " and " often feel like throwbacks to the Gothic and sentimental novels that Austen loved to burlesque " . Those that emphasise nostalgia are " defined not only by retrograde longing but also by a kind of postmodern playfulness and predilection for insider joking " , relying on the reader to see the web of Austenian allusions . Interest in Austen and adaptations of her novels have been common throughout the 20th century ; between 1900 and 1975 , more than sixty radio , television , film , and stage productions of Austen 's various works were produced .

The first feature film adaptation of an Austen novel was the 1940 MGM production of *Pride and Prejudice* starring Laurence Olivier and Greer Garson . A Hollywood adaptation was first suggested by the entertainer Harpo Marx , who had seen a dramatisation of the novel in Philadelphia in 1935 , but production was delayed . Directed by Robert Z. Leonard and written in collaboration with the English novelist Aldous Huxley and American screenwriter Jane Murfin , the film was critically well @-@ received although the plot and characterisations notably strayed from Austen 's original . Filmed in a studio and in black and white , the story 's setting was relocated to the 1830s with opulent costume designs .

In direct opposition to the Hollywood adaptations of Austen 's novels , BBC dramatisations from the 1970s onward aimed to adhere meticulously to Austen 's plots , characterisations , and settings . The 1972 BBC adaptation of *Emma* , for example , took great care to be historically accurate , but its slow pacing and long takes contrasted unfavourably to the pace of commercial films . The BBC 's 1980 adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* adopted many film techniques ? such as the use of long landscape shots ? that gave the production a greater visual sophistication . Often seen as the start of the " heritage drama " movement , this production was the first to be filmed largely on location . A push for " fusion " adaptations , or films that combined Hollywood style and British heritage style , began in the mid @-@ 1980s . The BBC 's first fusion adaptation was the 1986 production of *Northanger Abbey* , which combined authentic style and 1980s punk , with characters often veering into the surreal .

A wave of Austen adaptations began to appear around 1995 , starting with Emma Thompson 's 1995 adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility* for Columbia Pictures , a fusion production directed by Ang Lee . This star @-@ studded film departed from the novel in many ways , but it quickly became a commercial and critical success . It was nominated for numerous awards , including seven Oscars . The BBC produced two adaptations in 1995 : the traditional telefilm *Persuasion* and Andrew Davies 's immensely popular *Pride and Prejudice* . Starring Colin Firth and Jennifer Ehle , Davies 's film outshone the small @-@ scale *Persuasion* and became a runaway success , igniting " Darcymania " in Britain and launching the stars ' careers . Critics praised its smart departures from the novel as well as its sensual costuming , fast @-@ paced editing , and original yet appropriate dialogue . This BBC production sparked an explosion in the publication of printed Austen adaptations ; in addition , 200 @,@ 000 video copies of the serial were sold within a year of its airing ? 50 @,@ 000 were sold within the first week alone .

Books and scripts that use the general storyline of Austen 's novels but change or otherwise

modernise the story also became popular at the end of the 20th century . *Clueless* (1995) , Amy Heckerling 's updated version of *Emma* that takes place in Beverly Hills , became a cultural phenomenon and spawned its own television series . *Bridget Jones 's Diary* (2001) , based on the successful 1996 book of the same name by Helen Fielding , was inspired by both *Pride and Prejudice* and the 1995 BBC adaptation . The Bollywoodesque production *Bride and Prejudice* , which sets Austen 's story in present @-@ day India while including original musical numbers , premiered in 2004 . Yet another adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* was released the following year . Starring Keira Knightley , who was nominated for an Academy Award for her portrayal of Elizabeth Bennet , Joe Wright 's film marked the first feature adaptation since 1940 that aspired to be faithful to the novel .

On 10 November 2005 , Julia Day from *The Guardian* reported ITV controller of drama , Nick Elliott , had ordered three new adaptations of *Mansfield Park* , *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* . Elliot commented that the adaptations would be " important remakes for the new generation " . He explained , " About every 10 years , all the great stories need retelling . These films will be very much 2007 films ... we 've asked and pushed the production team to make them young . Her stories always make great TV drama and our Jane Austen season will feature the absolute cream of British acting talent . " The three films were also produced and distributed on DVD for home video use .

In January 2016 a film version of Austen 's early epistolary novel *Lady Susan* directed by Whit Stillman premiered at the Sundance Film Festival starring Kate Beckinsale and Chloe Sevigny under the borrowed title of another one of Austen 's early novels *Love & Friendship* .