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Jane Austen

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Jane Austen's life

- Born in 1775, in Steventon, the second daughter of 7 children.
- She and her sister Cassandra attended borading school for a short period, but didn't continue because of financial problems.
- Her life was not full of events: she didn't marry, but lived in an intellectual and lively family. She occasionally visited her brothers in London and Bath.

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In 1801 her family moved to Bath.

In 1805 her father died and they moved to Southampton first and then to her brother's house in Chawton, near her birthplace.

She wrote her first work (Love and friendship) when she was 14 and at 15 she wrote A History of England.

Her main works are

SENSE and SENSIBILITY (1811), PRIDE AND PREJUDICE (1813), MANSFIELD PARK (1814), EMMA (1816), PERSUASION and NORTHANGER ABBEY (published postumously in 1818).

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Anonymity

- However, she didn't write her name on them. They were signed «By a lady».
- Only when she died, did her brother add a biographical note identifying Jane as the author of her postumous novels.
- Austen wanted anonimity because writing was still considered an activity for men. In fact, she was the FIRST woman in England to transform writing into her profession.

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The Novel of Manners

- Austen's novels are the best example of the novel of manners. This type of novel was born in the 18° century and focused on the analysis of social conventions of the middle class and of the gentry.
- They are set in the countryside; the characters are rich people who interact at tea parties, dinners and balls.

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Microcosms

- Austen put her characters under a lens and observed them while they interacted. The focus was not on their manners, but on how they REVEALED themselves through them.
- They were set in SMALL COMMUNITIES, in MICROCOSMS. The themes were self-realisation, prejudice, social conventions and class prejudices.

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Narrative features

- Her novels were between the Augustan novel and the new Romantic prose.
- Like Richardson and Fielding, she built characters through dialogue.
- Her main interest was the POSSIBILITY of WOMEN to have SOCIAL PROGRESS.
- The main theme was the CONTRAST BETWEEN EMOTION/ROMANTIC LOVE and RIGID SOCIAL CODES, set in a limited microcosm of society.

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PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

- Austen used the FREE INDIRECT SPEECH, which means there was a 3° person narrator, but with the advantages of a 1° person.
- With this new style, she explored the character's psychology.
- She also used long narrative and scenic descriptions and DIALOGUE.

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IRONY and HAPPY ENDING

- Austen used IRONY to highlight social hypocrisy, to critique how women were described in sentimental and in Gothic novels.
- Another typical element was the HAPPY ENDING, generally the wedding of the protagonists of the story.
- The happy ending came after a series of events that made women face prejudices and social conventions. So the wedding was a PERSONAL DECISION and the sign of the character's GROWTH and MATURITY.