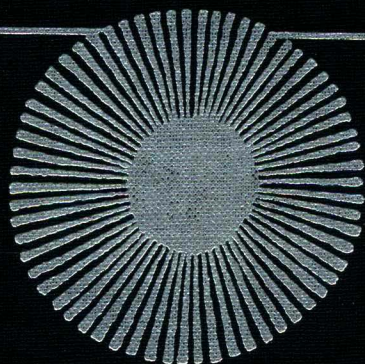

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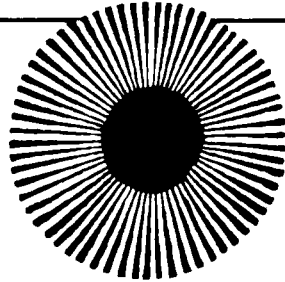
The
MAJOR AUTHORS EDITION

Volume 4

HAROLD BLOOM

General Editor

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General Editor
HAROLD BLOOM

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JANE AUSTEN

1775–1817

Jane Austen was born at Steventon, Hampshire, on December 16, 1775, the seventh child of the Reverend George Austen and Cassandra Leigh. She was educated at home by her father, with the exception of one year (1784–85) spent at the Abbey School in Reading, and lived an uneventful life centered around her family. In 1801 the family moved to Bath, and then, after the death of her father in 1805, to Southampton, and finally to the village of Chawton, near Alton in Hampshire. Here she lived quietly until May 1817, when the family went to Winchester to seek medical attention for Jane, who had been in ill health for several months. She died, however, two months later, on July 18, 1817.

Jane Austen began to write for recreation while still in her early teens. Her juvenilia include *Love and Friendship*, *A History of England* (by “a partial, ignorant and prejudiced historian”), *A Collection of Letters*, and *Leslie Castle*, all written between the ages of fourteen and sixteen. *Lady Susan* is also an early work probably written sometime between 1793 and 1795. *Elinor and Marianne*, written in 1795, was followed in 1797 by *First Impressions*, offered to the publisher Cadell but rejected by him without a reading. Austen then began rewriting *Elinor and Marianne* as *Sense and Sensibility*; it was completed in 1798, revised in 1809, and published in 1811. This in turn was followed by *Northanger Abbey* (written around 1798; published 1818); *The Watsons* (first published in 1923), an unfinished novel written sometime between 1804 and 1807; and a reworking of *First Impressions* under the title *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). *Mansfield Park*, begun in 1811, was published in 1814, and was followed by *Emma* (1815), written between 1814 and 1815, and *Persuasion* (1818), written between 1815 and 1816. *Sanditon*, begun in 1817, was left incomplete after Austen’s death and later edited by R. W. Chapman, who published it in 1925. Other posthumous publications include *Love and Friendship and Other Early Works* (1922) and *Plan of a Novel According to Hints from Various Quarters* (1926). There are several editions of her collected letters, including those by Edward Lord Brabourne (2 vols., 1884), R. Brimley Johnson (1926), and R. W. Chapman (1952).

Personal

Apropos to novels, I have discovered that our great favorite, Miss Austen, is my countrywoman; that mamma knew all her family very intimately; and that she herself is an old maid (I beg her pardon—I mean a young lady) with whom mamma before her marriage was acquainted. Mamma says that she was then the prettiest, silliest, most affected husband-hunting butterfly she ever remembers; and a friend of mine, who visits her now, says that she has stiffened into the most perpendicular, precise, taciturn piece of “single blessedness” that ever existed, and that, till *Pride and Prejudice* showed what a precious gem was hidden in that unbending case, she was no more regarded in society than a poker or a fire-screen, or any other thin, upright piece of wood or iron that fills its corner in peace and quietness. The case is very different now; she is still a poker, but a poker of whom every one is afraid. It must be confessed that this silent observation from such an observer is rather formidable. Most writers are good-humored chatterers—neither very wise nor very witty; but, nine times out of ten (at least in the few that I have known), unaffected and pleasant, and quite removing by their conversation any awe that may have been excited by their works. But a wit, a delineator of character, who does not talk, is terrific indeed!

After all, I do not know that I can quite vouch for this account, though the friend from whom I received it is truth itself; but her family connections must render her disagreeable to Miss Austen, since she is the sister-in-law of a gentleman who is at law with Miss A.’s brother for the greater part of his fortune.—MARY RUSSELL MITFORD, Letter to Sir William Elford (April 3, 1815)

I remember Jane Austen, the novelist, a little child: she was

very intimate with Mrs. Lefroy, and much encouraged by her. Her mother was a Miss Leigh, whose paternal grandmother was a sister of the first Duke of Chandos. Mr. Austen was of a Kentish family, of which several branches have been settled in the Weald, and some are still remaining there. When I knew Jane Austen I never suspected that she was an authoress; but my eyes told me that she was fair and handsome, slight and elegant, but with cheeks a little too full. The last time I think that I saw her was at Ramsgate in 1803: perhaps she was then about twenty-seven years old. Even then I did not know that she was addicted to literary composition.—SIR SAMUEL EGERTON BRYDGES, *Autobiography*, 1834, Vol. 2, p. 41

In person she was very attractive; her figure was rather tall and slender, her step light and firm, and her whole appearance expressive of health and animation. In complexion she was a clear brunette with a rich colour; she had full round cheeks, with mouth and nose small and well formed, bright hazel eyes, and brown hair forming natural curls close round her face. If not so regularly handsome as her sister, yet her countenance had a peculiar charm of its own to the eyes of most beholders. At the time of which I am now writing, she never was seen, either morning or evening, without a cap; I believe that she and her sister were generally thought to have taken to the garb of middle age earlier than their years or their looks required; and that, though remarkably neat in their dress as in all their ways, they were scarcely sufficiently regardful of the fashionable, or the becoming.

She was not highly accomplished according to the present standard. Her sister drew well, and it is from a drawing of hers that the likeness prefixed to this volume has been taken. Jane herself was fond of music, and had a sweet voice, both in

singing and in conversation; in her youth she had received some instruction on the pianoforte; and at Chawton she practised daily, chiefly before breakfast. I believe she did so partly that she might not disturb the rest of the party who were less fond of music. In the evening she would sometimes sing, to her own accompaniment, some simple old songs, the words and airs of which, now never heard, still linger in my memory.

She read French with facility, and knew something of Italian. In those days German was no more thought of than Hindostanee, as part of a lady's education. In history she followed the old guides—Goldsmith, Hume, and Robertson. Critical enquiry into the usually received statements of the old historians was scarcely begun. The history of the early kings of Rome had not yet been dissolved into legend. Historic characters lay before the reader's eyes in broad light or shade, not much broken up by details. The virtues of King Henry VIII. were yet undiscovered, nor had much light been thrown on the inconsistencies of Queen Elizabeth; the one was held to be an unmitigated tyrant, and an embodied Blue Beard; the other a perfect model of wisdom and policy. Jane, when a girl, had strong political opinions, especially about the affairs of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. She was a vehement defender of Charles I. and his grandmother Mary; but I think it was rather from an impulse of feeling than from any enquiry into the evidences by which they must be condemned or acquitted. As she grew up, the politics of the day occupied very little of her attention, but she probably shared the feeling of moderate Toryism which prevailed in her family. She was well acquainted with the old periodicals from the *Spectator* downwards. Her knowledge of Richardson's works was such as no one is likely again to acquire, now that the multitude and the merits of our light literature have called off the attention of readers from that great master. Every circumstance narrated in *Sir Charles Grandison*, all that was ever said or done in the cedar parlour, was familiar to her; and the wedding days of Lady L. and Lady G. were as well remembered as if they had been living friends. Amongst her favourite writers, Johnson in prose, Crabbe in verse, and Cowper in both, stood high. It is well that the native good taste of herself and of those with whom she lived, saved her from the snare into which a sister novelist had fallen, of imitating the grandiloquent style of Johnson. She thoroughly enjoyed Crabbe; perhaps on account of a certain resemblance to herself in minute and highly finished detail; and would sometimes say, in jest, that, if she ever married at all, she could fancy being Mrs. Crabbe; looking on the author quite as an abstract idea, and ignorant and regardless what manner of man he might be. Scott's poetry gave her great pleasure; she did not live to make much acquaintance with his novels.—JAMES EDWARD AUSTEN-LEIGH, *A Memoir of Jane Austen*, 1870, Ch. 5

General

By the way did you know Miss Austen Authoress of some novels which have a great deal of nature in them—nature in ordinary and middle life to be sure but valuable from its strong resemblance and correct drawing.—SIR WALTER SCOTT, Letter to Joanna Baillie (Feb. 10, 1822)

Miss Austen has never been so popular as she deserved to be. Intent on fidelity of delineation, and averse to the commonplace tricks of her art, she has not; in this age of literary quackery, received her reward. Ordinary readers have been apt to judge of her as Partridge, in Fielding's novel, judged of Garrick's acting. He could not see the merit of a man who merely behaved on the stage as any body might be expected to

behave under similar circumstances in real life. He infinitely preferred the 'robustious periwig-pated fellow,' who flourished his arms like a windmill, and ranted with the voice of three. It was even so with many of the readers of Miss Austen. She was too natural for them. It seemed to them as if there could be very little merit in making characters act and talk so exactly like the people whom they saw around them every day. They did not consider that the highest triumph of art consists in its concealment; and here the art was so little perceptible, that they believed there was none. Her works, like well-proportioned rooms, are rendered less apparently grand and imposing by the very excellence of their adjustment. It must perhaps be confessed, that she availed herself too little of the ordinary means of attracting attention and exciting interest. Her plots are very simple, formed upon the most rigid view of probabilities, excluding every thing romantic or surprising, or calculated to produce a very powerful emotion, and including only such events as occur in every-day life. Her characters are, for the most part, commonplace people, little distinguished by their mental qualities from the mass of their fellow-creatures, of secondary station, and hardly ever exhibited through that halo of rank and wealth which makes many an ill-drawn sketch pass current with a credulous public. '*Materiam superabat opus*,' may be said of her works. No novelist perhaps ever employed more unpromising materials, and by none have those materials been more admirably treated. Her *forté* lay not so much in describing events, as in drawing characters; and in this she stands almost alone. She possessed the rare and difficult art of making her readers intimately acquainted with the characters of all whom she describes. We feel as if we had lived among them; and yet she employs no elaborate description—no metaphysical analysis—no antithetical balance of their good and bad qualities. She scarcely does more than make them act and talk, and we know them directly. In dialogue she also excelled. Her conversations are never *bookish*—they are just what might have been said; and they are eminently characteristic. We have seen a good deal of spirited dialogue, in which the parts might be transposed and given to other interlocutors, with very little injury to the effect of the whole. This is never the case in the conversations introduced by Miss Austen. Every thing that is said, however short and simple, belongs peculiarly to the person by whom it is uttered, and is indicative of their situation, or turn of mind: And yet they do not seem to talk for effect; they merely say just what it seems most natural that they should have said. In the ridicule of human foibles, she showed great delicacy and address. She never railed in set terms, and seldom launched the shafts of direct satire; but she made us equally sensible of the absurdity or unreasonableness which she wished to expose,—perhaps without even having recourse to one single condemnatory expression. A nicely-regulated vein of humour runs through her writings, never breaking out into broad mirth, but ever ready to communicate a pleasing vivacity to the current of her story. To the above merits may be added those of the purest morality, and most undeviating good sense. Few, if any, fictitious writings have a more decided tendency to improve the hearts of those who read them; and this end is gained without any thing that could be called sermonizing even by the most impatient.—UNSIGNED, "Mrs. Gore's *Women as They Are*; or, *The Manners of the Day*," *Edinburgh Review*, July 1830, pp. 449–50

Our dinner-party this evening was like nothing but a chapter out of one of Miss Austen's novels. What wonderful books those are! She must have written down the very conversations

she heard *verbatim*, to have made them so like, which is Irish.—FRANCES ANN KEMBLE, *Record of a Girlhood*, July 31, 1831

(. . .) the delicate mirth, the gently-hinted satire, the feminine decorous humour of Jane Austen, who, if not the greatest, is surely the most faultless of female novelists. My Uncle Southey and my father had an equally high opinion of her merits, but Mr. Wordsworth used to say that though he admitted that her novels were an admirable copy of life, he could not be interested in productions of that kind; unless the truth of nature were presented to him clarified, as it were, by the pervading light of imagination, it had scarce any attractions in his eyes.—SARA COLERIDGE, Letter to Emily Trevenen (Aug. 1834), *Memoirs and Letters of Sara Coleridge*, ed. Edith Coleridge, 1874, Vol. 1, p. 75

I am amusing myself with Miss Austen's novels. She has great power and discrimination in delineating common-place people; and her writings are a capital picture of real life, with all the little wheels and machinery laid bare like a patent clock. But she explains and fills out too much. Those who have not power to fill up gaps and bridge over chasms as they read, must therefore take particular delight in such minuteness of detail. It is a kind of Bowditch's Laplace in the romantic astronomy. But readers of lively imagination naturally prefer the original with its unexplained steps, which they so readily supply.—HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW, *Journal*, May 23, 1839

(. . .) it is the constant manner of Shakspeare to represent the human mind as lying, not under the absolute dominion of one despotic propensity, but under a mixed government, in which a hundred powers balance each other. Admirable as he was in all parts of his art, we most admire him for this, that while he has left us a greater number of striking portraits than all other dramatists put together, he has scarcely left us a single caricature.

Shakspeare has had neither equal nor second. But among the writers who, in the point which we have noticed, have approached nearest to the manner of the great master, we have no hesitation in placing Jane Austen, a woman of whom England is justly proud. She has given us a multitude of characters, all, in a certain sense, commonplace, all such as we meet every day. Yet they are all as perfectly discriminated from each other as if they were the most eccentric of human beings. There are, for instance, four clergymen, none of whom, we should be surprised to find in any parsonage in the kingdom, Mr. Edward Ferrars, Mr. Henry Tilney, Mr. Edmund Bertram, and Mr. Elton. They are all specimens of the upper part of the middle class. They have all been liberally educated. They all lie under the restraints of the same sacred profession. They are all young. They are all in love. Not one of them has any hobbyhorse, to use the phrase of Sterne. Not one has a ruling passion, such as we read of in Pope. Who would not have expected them to be insipid likenesses of each other? No such thing. Harpagon is not more unlike to Jourdain, Joseph Surface is not more unlike to Sir Lucius O'Trigger, than every one of Miss Austen's young divines to all his reverend brethren. And almost all this is done by touches so delicate, that they elude analysis, that they defy the powers of description, and that we know them to exist only by the general effect to which they have contributed.—THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY, "Madame D'Arblay" (1843), *Critical, Historical, and Miscellaneous Essays*, 1860, Vol. 5, pp. 307–8

What we most heartily enjoy and applaud, is truth in the delineation of life and character: incidents however wonderful,

adventures however perilous, are almost as naught when compared with the deep and lasting interest excited by any thing like a correct representation of life. That, indeed, seems to us to be Art, and the only Art we care to applaud. To make our meaning precise, we should say that Fielding and Miss Austen are the greatest novelists in our language. (. . .) Now Miss Austen has been called a prose Shakspeare; and, among others, by Macaulay. In spite of the sense of incongruity which besets us in the words *prose Shakspeare*, we confess the greatness of Miss Austen, her marvellous dramatic power, seems more than any thing in Scott akin to the greatest quality in Shakspeare.—GEORGE HENRY LEWES, "Recent Novels: French and English," *Fraser's Magazine*, Dec. 1847, p. 687

You say I must familiarise my mind with the fact that 'Miss Austen is not a poetess, has no "sentiment"' (you scornfully enclose the word in inverted commas), 'no eloquence, none of the ravishing enthusiasm of poetry'; and then you add, I *must* 'learn to acknowledge her as one of the greatest artists, of the greatest painters of human character, and one of the writers with the nicest sense of means to an end that ever lived.'

The last point only will I ever acknowledge.

Can there be a great artist without poetry?—CHARLOTTE BRONTË, Letter to George Henry Lewes (Jan. 18, 1848)

Without brilliancy of any kind—without imagination, depth of thought, or wide experience, Miss Austin, by simply describing what she knew and had seen, and making accurate portraits of very tiresome and uninteresting people, is recognised as a true artist, and will continue to be admired, when many authors more ambitious, and believing themselves filled with a much higher inspiration, will be neglected and forgotten. There is an instinct in every unwarped mind which prefers truth to extravagance, and a photographic picture, if it be only of a kitten or a hay-stack, is a pleasanter subject in the eyes of most persons (were they brave enough to admit it), than many a glaring piece of mythology, which those who profess to worship High Art find themselves called upon to pronounce divine. People will persist in admiring what they can appreciate and understand, and Wilkie will keep his place among national favourites when poor Haydon's Dentatus is turned to the wall. But Miss Austin's accurate scenes from dull life, and Miss Burney's long histories of amiable and persecuted heroines, though belonging to the modern and reformed school of novels, must still be classed in the lower division. As pictures of manners, they are interesting and amusing, but they want the broader foundation, the firm granite substratum, which the great masters who have followed them have taught us to expect. They show us too much of the littlenesses and trivialities of life, and limit themselves so scrupulously to the sayings and doings of dull, ignorant, and disagreeable people, that their very truthfulness makes us yawn.—GEORGE ELIOT (?), "The Progress of Fiction as an Art," *Westminster Review*, Oct. 1853, p. 358

She (Mary Russell Mitford) never taught *me* anything but a very limited admiration of Miss Austen, whose people struck me as wanting souls, even more than is necessary for men and women of the world. The novels are perfect as far as they go—that's certain. Only they don't go far, I think. It may be my fault.—ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING, Letter to John Ruskin (Nov. 5, 1855)

Among these lady-novelists, Miss Edgeworth and Miss Austen were, undoubtedly, the first in talent. So far as they remind us of previous novelists of the other sex, it is most, as might be expected, of Richardson; but, while resembling him in mi-

nuteness of observation, in good sense, and in clear moral aim, they present many differences. All in all, as far as my information goes, the best judges unanimously prefer Miss Austen to any of her contemporaries of the same order. They reckon her *Sense and Sensibility*, her *Pride and Prejudice*, her *Mansfield Park* and her *Emma* (which novels were published in her life-time), and also her *Northanger Abbey* and her *Persuasion* (which were published posthumously) as not only better than anything else of the kind written in her day, but also among the most perfect and charming fictions in the language. I have known the most hard-headed men in ecstasies with them; and the only objection I have heard of as brought against them by ladies is, that they reveal too many of their secrets.—DAVID MASSON, *British Novelists and Their Styles*, 1859, pp. 188–89

Pride and Prejudice, the first of Miss Austen's half-dozen novels, which will be read so long as any one cares for English domestic fiction, was begun when its writer was twenty-one years of age, in October, 1796,—and completed in about ten months. *Sense and Sensibility* was commenced immediately after the completion of *Pride and Prejudice* (1797), and *Northanger Abbey* was composed in the following year (1798). The courageous self-knowledge which could prompt and carry through such undertakings, under such circumstances, is a noticeable fact. These stories were written in the time of supernatural fiction, made popular by Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* and by the writings of Anne Radcliffe—a time, it might have been predicated, when the appeal of so delicate a voice and so delicate a touch as Miss Austen's would entirely fail of effect. But we are proud to believe, that, in England at least, everything which is real makes a way, not to be closed up, but to be widened as years go on, and as with them the powers of comparison are developed. These quiet novels have become classics. So much can hardly be said of many of the works by the other female novelists. By the side of *Emma* and *Persuasion*, *Evelina*—ushered into fame by a patron no less authoritative and powerful than Dr. Johnson—as a work of art, is coarse and farcical. The Austen novels have outlasted the tales of Mrs. Bennet and Charlotte Smith, and that kind-hearted, illicit Quakeress, Amelia Opie; though each of these as it came was the delight of novel readers, and all appealed to emotions more serious and to passions more high-flown than can be excited by the cares and concerns of everyday people in country villages, passing lives sparingly marked by sin or sorrow.

(. . .) By those who have studied character distinct from its outward manifestations, as expressed in conformity to uses and customs, there will be found in Miss Austen's novels an expression of firm and original courage as clear as if she had braved society, whether theoretically or practically. The boldness which will vindicate for persons of mediocre intellect souls to be saved and feelings to be tortured, and which by such vindication can interest and compel a jaded, hurrying public, eager for changing excitements, to pause and to listen—is surely no common quality; but it has within itself a promise and an assurance of enduring reputation.—G. F. CHORLEY, "Miss Austen and Miss Mitford," *Quarterly Review*, Jan. 1870, pp. 200–203

No doubt Miss Austen belongs essentially to the eighteenth-century school of literature. There is little we should now call romance in any one of her five novels. They are good genteel-comedies. They play over the surface of life, and represent its phenomena with the most finished elegance. But they do not stir the deeper passions, or more tumultuous

emotions of our nature. We should question if a single page that Miss Austen has written has ever moistened the eyelid of the most impressionable man, woman, or child who has lived since she first began to write. On the other hand, the quiet fun, the inexhaustible sly humour, the cheerful healthy tone, the exquisite purity, and the genuine goodness which are reflected in every line she wrote, carry us down the sluggish stream of her stories without either weariness or excitement, and with a constant sense of being amused, refreshed, and benefited. In these respects she has been compared to Addison. And we think the comparison a just one. (. . .)

It was a necessity of Miss Austen's method that her plots should be less interesting than her persons. In fact, of the plot regular, with a mystery, an explosion, and a reconciliation, she presents no specimen; and our curiosity, we must own, is but faintly stimulated by the doubts and fears which beset her heroes and heroines *en route* for the altar. And it is a most remarkable circumstance that there is no other interest in her novels but what arises out of a passion to which she was herself a stranger. So many young men and so many young ladies stand up in couples as if they were going to dance a quadrille, and the various entanglements which await them form the whole action of the piece. Now one goes wrong, and now another, sometimes with serious, but oftener with comic, consequences. A few dresses are torn, and once a lady has a fall. But there are no bad hearts, and all winds up comfortably with the usual refreshments. Crime, calamity, and anguish enter not this placid sphere. Tragedy is not allowed to show even the tip of her buskin. Poverty and disgrace are hinted at, but, like murder, are excluded from the stage. In three words, the story is redolent always of the quiet respectability, the prosperous dullness, and the ignorance of passion which encircled Miss Austen's existence, and narrowed the range of her experience. But as soon as her personages begin to talk and unfold their own characters to our gaze, we cease to care how they act, how they are situated, or what is in store for them. The exhibition of human nature, unadulterated by sensational incidents, is the purest of treats. And that is what she gives to perfection.

To those critics who would ask us what moral purpose Miss Austen proposed to herself in these delineations of common-place society, it is perhaps enough to reply that every picture of human life, however trite or conventional, must have a moral of its own if we have only eyes to see it. Without plunging into any such profound question as the ethics of art in general, we may affirm that nearly all Miss Austen's novels have a very plain moral, and one that admits of easy application. All of them have a family likeness, and a general tendency to bring out into prominent relief the peril of being guided by appearances. The danger to which a young lady is exposed by imagining too readily that a polite gentleman is in love with her; and the danger to which a young gentleman is exposed by imagining too readily that a good-natured girl is in love with him; the misunderstandings that arise from careless conversation, from exaggerated reserve, from overrated pretensions, from all the little mistakes which create the common embarrassments of ordinary society; these are the minor mischiefs which her pen is devoted to setting in their proper light, and no man or woman turned forty will deny that such work may be of great utility, or that anybody who chooses to read her novels with a view to practical instruction may learn a great deal from them. Our space will not allow us to illustrate these remarks by examples. But we refer our readers more particularly to *Emma* and *Persuasion* in confirmation of the truth of them.

We have yet to mention two of Miss Austen's most characteristic excellencies—her dialogue and her style. In regard to the former we must of course remember what a vast change in this respect has passed over society since she wrote. For all that, the dialogues in Miss Austen's novels strike us as much more natural than the dialogues in Richardson's, upon whom she had apparently endeavored to form her own. But her genius was too strong for her. She wrote, moreover, only upon those scenes of life with which she was perfectly familiar; whereas Richardson was in total ignorance of the habits and conversation of that society which it was his ambition to describe. There is something very quaint about the conversations in Miss Austen's novels, but we cannot help feeling certain that it was exactly what people of that class in those days would have said. When Anne Elliott, a young lady of the period, advises Captain Bennick, a young officer in the navy, who is given to quoting Byron, to go through a course of our best English moralists, she does so in perfect good faith, and without a suspicion of wrong. But how charming is the art that can make us accept this as the perfectly natural thing for her to have said on the occasion. The conversation between Henry Tilney and Catherine Morland, on the first night of their meeting in the Bath ball-rooms, is another instance of the same kind, though not so striking perhaps at the first. There is, of course, always a difficulty in placing one's self entirely *en rapport* with any writer who describes the living manners of his or her own age, which is at a long distance from his own. Do what we can, we feel solitary in their company. When we read a writer of our own day who describes the manner of a hundred years ago, we feel that we have a companion in our enjoyment. That cannot be felt by any one who reads Miss Austen.

Her style deserves the highest commendation. It has all the form and finish of the eighteenth century, without being in the least degree stilted or unnatural. It has all the tone of good society without being in the least degree insipid. For a specimen of crisp, rich English, combining all the vigour of the masculine with all the delicacy of the feminine style, we suggest the opening chapter of *Northanger Abbey* as a model for any young lady writer of the present age.—T. E. KEBBEL, "Jane Austen," *Fortnightly Review*, Feb. 1870, pp. 190–193

As to which is the best of all I can't say: that Richardson (with all his twaddle) is better than Fielding, I am quite certain. There is nothing at all comparable to Lovelace in all Fielding, whose Characters are common and vulgar types—of Squires, Ostlers, Ladies' maids, etc., very easily drawn. I am equally sure that Miss Austen cannot be third, any more than first or second: I think you were rather drawn away by a fashion when you put her there: and really old Spedding seems to me to have been the *Stag* whom so many followed in that fashion. She is capital as far as she goes: but she never goes out of the Parlour; if but Magnus Troil, or Jack Bunce, or even one of Fielding's Brutes, would but dash in upon the Gentility and swear a round Oath or two! I must think the *Woman in White*, with her Count Fosco, far beyond all that. Cowell constantly reads Miss Austen at night after his Sanskrit Philology is done: it composes him—like Gruel: or like Paisiello's Music, which Napoleon liked above all other, because he said it didn't interrupt his Thoughts.—EDWARD FITZGERALD, Letter to W. F. Pollock (Dec. 24, 1870)

Miss Austen is without a rival in the field she occupied. In any of the highest creative ages Scott would assuredly have taken an eminent place. But in comprehensiveness of power can either of these immortal artists be ranked above Chaucer? What we wish to emphasize is not only the depth but the breadth of

Chaucer's genius. It was a mere fragment of human life that Miss Austen saw with a clearness and an intelligence and a reproductive power that defy panegyric.—JOHN W. HALES, *Notes and Essays on Shakespeare*, 1873, p. 72

They (her novels) are perfectly simple and intelligible. The course of the tale is not clogged with description or moralizing. They deal with the great theme of the novelist, match-making, and no writer ever attended more strictly than Miss Austen to the business in hand. Her novels are marvels of clearness, and they have a delightfully shrewd humor. The Austen stories have all the misunderstandings and embarrassments and doubts and delays which become the course of true love. There are no extravagances in them, no sublimated raptures and dark despairs. It is good, honest, every-day match-making among every-day people, and the unintelligent reader does not find himself in the least degree bewildered by the style or the characters. The very finish, the cabinet and microscopic completeness, facilitate the comprehension and the enjoyment of them by unintelligence, while the shrewd humor, and the neat touches of characterization, and the portraiture of certain aspects of English country life and society, commend them to the most intelligent. A distinguished English scholar said to a lecturer who had extolled the tales of Charlotte Brontë, "I am afraid you do not know that Miss Austen is the better novelist."

If the scholar had explained, doubtless he would have said, in comparing Miss Brontë or George Eliot with Miss Austen—and the three are the chief of their sex in this form of English literature—that her distinction and superiority lie in her more absolute artistic instinct. She writes wholly as an artist, while George Eliot advocates views, and Miss Brontë's fiery page is often a personal protest. In Miss Austen, on the other hand, there is in kind, but infinitely less in degree, the same clear atmosphere of pure art which we perceive in Shakespeare and Goethe. It is a thread of exceeding fineness with which she draws us, but it is spun of pure gold. There are no great characters, no sweep of passion, no quickening of soul and exaltation of purpose and sympathy, upon her page, but there is the pure pleasure of a Watteau.—GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS, "Editor's Easy Chair," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, Jan. 1881, pp. 308–9

She painted such pictures of real life as she had seen as a girl in a quiet country parsonage. Like Wordsworth, she sought to show the charm that lies under the common things about us, and with a fine feminine humour, under sentences clear, simple, and exactly fitted to expression of a shrewd good sense, she came nearer to Fielding than any novelist who wrote before the reign of Queen Victoria.—HENRY MORLEY, *Of English Literature in the Reign of Victoria*, 1881, pp. 111–12

The principal reasons (. . .) for Miss Austen's hold upon the reading public—a hold which we may reasonably believe will be constant and enduring—are not far to seek. Adopting a totally different course from Mrs. Radcliffe and her school, she substituted reality for excitement. The change was agreeable and refreshing. It has been observed that, although novels are supposed to give a false picture of life and manners, this is not necessarily so. As regards many novelists, unquestionably the accusation is true, but no one can really feel its applicability to the works of Jane Austen. Her characters are not unnatural, neither are her incidents in the least degree improbable. She too thoroughly understands human nature to exaggerate its sentiments beyond recognition. Miss Austen is also a moral writer in the highest sense—that is, there is a high tone pervading all her works; this is no more than the natural

outcome of her own life and character. But she has also great literary claims. Besides her capacity for minute detail as affecting her *dramatis personæ*, already insisted upon, she has vivid powers of description, all the more effective, perhaps, because they are held in check by a sound judgment and a well-balanced imagination. She never exhausts a scene by what is called word-painting. She indicates its main features, and describes the general effect it produces upon the spectator, rather than recapitulates the size, weight, and colour of its various component elements. To say that she has a strong insight into female character is almost superfluous. George Eliot does not enter more deeply into the workings of the female mind and heart than she does. Add to all these claims that our author's novels are perfectly unexceptionable from every point of view, and that they combine rational amusement with no small degree of instruction, and we have advanced tolerably sufficient grounds for the continuous favour with which they have been and are still regarded.

The critic who said that these novels added a new pleasure to existence was not wide of the mark. In Miss Austen's later books, the most exacting may discover a maturity of thought and a felicity of expression seldom attained by members of her craft; and these augured still greater achievements in the future had her life been spared. In no instance is it possible to sum up the claims and characteristics of a writer of the first rank in a single phrase; but if it were demanded that we should attempt this in the case of Jane Austen, we should aver that her writings have not become obsolete, and never will become obsolete, because they are just and faithful transcripts of human nature. It is in this all-important respect that she is able to touch the hand of Shakespeare.—GEORGE BARNETT SMITH, "More Views of Jane Austen," *Gentleman's Magazine*, Jan. 1885, pp. 44–45

It is a curious fact that Paris, to which the works of Jane Austen were lately as unknown as if she were an English painter, has just discovered her existence. Moreover, it has announced that she, and she only, is the founder of that realistic school which is construed to include authors so remote from each other as the French Zola and the American Howells. The most decorous of maiden ladies is thus made to originate the extreme of indecorum; and the good loyal Englishwoman, devoted to Church and King, is made sponsor for the most democratic recognition of persons whom she would have loathed as vulgar. There is something extremely grotesque in the situation; and yet there is much truth in the theory. It certainly looked at one time as if Miss Austen had thoroughly established the claim of her sex to the minute delineation of character and manners, leaving to men the bolder school of narrative romance. She herself spoke of her exquisitely wrought novels as her "little bit of ivory, two inches wide, on which," she said, "I work with a brush so fine as to produce little effect after much labor." Yet in the opinion of Sir Walter Scott and all succeeding critics, the result was quite worth the effort, Scott saying that he himself did the "big bow-wow style as well as anybody," but that all the minuter excellences were peculiarly her province. As a result, she has far surpassed in fame her immediate contemporaries of her own sex. Madame D'Arblay (Fanny Burney), Miss Porter, Mrs. Opie, and even Miss Edgeworth, are now little read, while Miss Austen's novels seem as if they were written yesterday.

But the curious thing is that of the leading novelists in the English tongue to-day it is the men, not the women, who have taken up Miss Austen's work, while the women show more inclination, if not to the "big bow-wow style" of Scott, at least to the novel of plot and narrative. Anthony Trollope among

the lately dead, James and Howells among the living, are the lineal successors of Miss Austen. Perhaps it is an old-fashioned taste which leads me to think that neither of these does his work quite so well as she; but they all belong to the same photographic school; each sets up his apparatus and takes what my little nephew called a "flannelly group" of a household, or a few households, leaving the great world of adventure untouched.—THOMAS WENTWORTH HIGGINSON, *Women and Men*, 1887, pp. 156–57

Her work displays creative imagination, wonderful power of observing, fine feeling for dramatic situation, and perfect command of her literary vehicle; but we cannot help feeling conscious of a certain lack of weight which comes of her steady avoidance of the heights and the depths of human nature. We are charmed always, but seldom, if ever, deeply moved. Though in various respects Jane Austen may be compared favourably with George Sand, George Eliot, and Charlotte Brontë, we feel that these writers have spells of which she knew not the secret. It is in virtue of their combination of veracious and uncompromising realism with unfailing vivacity and ever-present grace that the novels of Jane Austen are unique in literature.—JAMES ASHCROFT NOBLE, *Academy*, Aug. 11, 1889, pp. 96–97

Which brings us again, after this long way about, to the divine Jane and her novels, and that troublesome question about them. She was great and they were beautiful, because she and they were honest, and dealt with nature nearly a hundred years ago as realism deals with it to-day. Realism is nothing more and nothing less than the truthful treatment of material and Jane Austen was the first and the last of the English novelists to treat material with entire truthfulness. Because she did this, she remains the most artistic of the English novelists, and alone worthy to be matched with the great Scandinavian and Slavic and Latin artists.—WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS, *Criticism and Fiction*, 1891, Sec. 15

They (her novels) had no enormous or sudden popularity, but the best judges, from Scott downwards, at once recognised their extraordinary merit; and it is not too much to say that by the best judges, with rare exceptions, that merit has been acknowledged with ever increasing fulness at once of enthusiasm and discrimination to the present day. With Scott, Miss Austen is the parent of nineteenth century fiction; or, to speak with greater exactness, she is the mother of the nineteenth century novel, just as he is the father of the nineteenth century romance.

One indeed of the most wonderful things about her is her earliness. Even the dates of publication of her first books precede those of any novelist of the same rank and the same modernity; but these dates are misleading. *Northanger Abbey* was written more than twenty years before it appeared, and the bulk of *Pride and Prejudice* (which some hold to be the best and most characteristic of all) is known to have been as old at least as *Northanger Abbey*. That is to say, almost at the very time of the appearance of *Camilla* (to which, by the way, Miss Austen was an original subscriber), a book not strikingly more nineteenth century in tone than the novels of Richardson, though a little more so in manners, a girl even younger than Miss Burney herself had been when she wrote *Evelina* was drawing other girls, who, putting aside the most trivial details of dress, speech, and so forth, might be living girls to-day.

The charm and the genius of Miss Austen are not universally admitted; the touch of old fashion in external detail apparently discontenting some readers, the delicate and ever-

present irony either escaping or being distasteful to others, while the extreme quietness of the action and the entire absence of excitement probably revolt a third class. But the decriers do not usually attempt formal criticism. However, they sometimes do, and such an attempt once came under the notice of the present historian. It was urged that to extol Miss Austen's method is a masculine delusion, that method being nothing but the throwing into literature of the habit of minute and semi-satiric observation natural to womankind. It did not apparently occur to this critic that he (or she) was in the first place paying Miss Austen an extraordinarily high compliment—a compliment almost greater than the most enthusiastic “Janites” have ventured—inasmuch as no higher literary triumph can be even conceived than thus to focus, formulate, and crystallise the special talent and gift of an entire sex into a literary method. Nor did it probably occur to him that he was laying himself open to the damaging, or rather ruinous retort, “Then how is it that, of all the women who have preceded and followed Miss Austen as novelists, no other has displayed this specially and universally feminine gift?”

It is no doubt true that there is something feminine about the method, which, with the addition of a certain *nescio quid*, giving it its modern difference, may be said to combine the peculiarities of Fielding and of Richardson, though it works on a much smaller scale than either. It has the intense and pervading, though not the exuberant and full-blooded, *livingness* of Fielding, and it also has something not unlike a feminine counterpart and complement of his pervading irony; while it is not unlike Richardson in building up the characters and the stories partly by an infinity of tiny strokes of detail, often communicated in conversation, partly by the use of an exceedingly nice and delicate analysis of motive and temperament. It is in the former respect that Miss Austen stands apart from most, if not from all, women who have written novels. Irony is by no means a frequent feminine gift; and as women do not often possess it in any great degree, so they do not as a rule enjoy it. Miss Austen is only inferior among English writers to Swift, to Fielding, and to Thackeray—even if it be not improper to use the term inferiority at all for what is after all not much more than difference—in the use of this potent but most double-edged weapon. Her irony indeed is so subtle that it requires a certain dose of subtlety to appreciate it, and it is not uncommon to find those who consider such personages as Mr. Collins in *Pride and Prejudice* to be merely farcical, instead of, as they are in fact, preachers of the highest and most Shakespearian comedy. But there would be no room here to examine Miss Austen's perfections in detail; the important thing for the purposes of this history is to observe again that she “set the clock,” so to speak, of pure novel writing to the time which was to be nineteenth century time to this present hour. She discarded violent and romantic adventure. She did not rely in the very least degree on describing popular or passing fashions, amusements, politics; but confined herself to the most strictly ordinary life. Yet she managed in some fashion so to extract the characteristics of that life which are perennial and human, that there never can be any doubt to fit readers in any age finding themselves at home with her, just as they find themselves at home with all the greatest writers of bygone ages. And lastly, by some analogous process she hit upon a style which, though again true to the ordinary speech of her own day, and therefore now reviled as “stilted” and formal by those who have not the gift of literary detachment, again possesses the universal quality, and, save in the merest externals, is neither ancient nor modern.—GEORGE SAINTSBURY, *A History of Nineteenth Century Literature*, 1896, pp. 128–31

It has long been seen, it was noted even by Macaulay, that the only writer with whom Jane Austen can fairly be compared is Shakespeare. It is obvious that she has nothing of his width of range or sublimity of imagination; she keeps herself to that two-inch square of ivory of which she spoke in her proud and simple way. But there is no other English writer who possesses so much of Shakespeare's inevitability, or who produces such evidence of a like omniscience. Like Balzac, like Tourgenieff at his best, Jane Austen gives the reader an impression of knowing everything there was to know about her creations, of being incapable of error as to their acts, thoughts, or emotions. She presents an absolute illusion of reality; she exhibits an art so consummate that we mistake it for nature. She never mixes her own temperament with those of her characters, she is never swayed by them, she never loses for a moment her perfect, serene control of them. Among the creators of the world, Jane Austen takes a place that is with the highest and that is purely her own.

(. . .) It is difficult to say that she was influenced by any predecessor, and, most unfortunately, of the history of her mind we know almost nothing. Her reserve was great, and she died before she had become an object of curiosity even to her friends. But we see that she is of the race of Richardson and Marivaux, although she leaves their clumsy construction far behind. She was a satirist, however, not a sentimentalist. One of the few anecdotes preserved about her relates that she refused to meet Madame de Staël, and the Germanic spirit was evidently as foreign to her taste as the lyricism born of Rousseau. She was the exact opposite of all which the cosmopolitan critics of Europe were deciding that English prose fiction was and always would be. Lucid, gay, penetrating, exquisite, Jane Austen possessed precisely the qualities that English fiction needed to drag it out of the Slough of Despond and start it wholesomely on a new and vigorous career.—EDMUND GOSSE, *A Short History of Modern English Literature*, 1897, pp. 295–97

Miss Austen, in the last generation, in the very heyday of the romantic imagination, had written her modest and undying sketches of the life she knew, the tranquil life that lingered unchanged in the by-ways of England. Her conditions and temperament conspired to impose limitations which make her art perhaps more enduring than that of her great successors, since from very scarcity of material she was forced to individualize after much our present manner. But on account of these very limitations, her work has slight value as social evidence to the wider phases of contemporary life.—VIDA D. SCUDDER, *Social Ideals in English Letters*, 1898; pp. 129–30

As to Miss Austen's style, we can scarcely define its attraction, for in it we get no music, no magic, no caressing phrases; it is not trenchant; we carry away no glittering epigrams, but it is apt and spirited, and has that indefinable felicitous touch that genius alone gives. The qualities without which no sustained writing can exist—knowledge, observation, toleration, and expression—are all there, deepening and mellowing towards the end, and make a solid foundation on which to rest her easy, graceful dialogue, in which part of her art she might be said to be without a rival.—JANET HARPER, “The Renaissance of Jane Austen,” *Westminster Review*, April 1900, p. 445

Works

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY
PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

The want of elegance is almost the only want in Miss Austen. I have not read her *Mansfield Park*; but it is impossible not to

feel in every line of *Pride and Prejudice*, in every word of Elizabeth, the entire want of taste which could produce so pert, so worldly a heroine as the beloved of such a man as Darcy. Wickham is equally bad. Oh! they were just fit for each other, and I cannot forgive that delightful Darcy for parting them. Darcy should have married Jane. He is of all the admirable characters the best designed and the best sustained. I quite agree with you in preferring Miss Austen to Miss Edgeworth. If the former had a little more taste, a little more perception of the graceful, as well as of the humorous, I know not indeed any one to whom I should not prefer her. There is none of the hardness, the cold selfishness, of Miss Edgeworth about her writings; she is in a much better humour with the world; she preaches no sermons; she wants nothing but the *beau idéal* of the female character to be a perfect novel-writer; and perhaps even that *beau idéal* would only be missed by such a *petite maîtresse* in books as myself, who would never admit a muse into my library till she had been taught to dance by the Graces.—MARY RUSSELL MITFORD, Letter to Sir William Eford (Dec. 20, 1814)

I sat up till two, as I did last night, to finish *Pride and Prejudice*. This novel I consider as one of the most excellent of the works of our female novelists. Its merit lies in the characters, and in the perfectly colloquial style of the dialogue. Mrs. Bennet, the foolish mother, who cannot conceal her projects to get rid of her daughters, is capitally drawn. There is a thick-headed servile parson, also a masterly sketch. His stupid letters and her ridiculous speeches are as delightful as wit. The two daughters are well contrasted—the gentle and candid Jane and the lively but prejudiced Elizabeth, are both good portraits, and the development of the passion between Elizabeth and the proud Darcy, who at first hate each other, is executed with skill and effect.—HENRY CRABB ROBINSON, *Diary*, Jan. 12, 1819

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 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. What a pity such a gifted creature died so early!—SIR WALTER SCOTT, *Journal*, March 14, 1826

I was reading yesterday and today *Sense and Sensibility*, which I resumed at the second volume. The last volume greatly improves on the first, but I still think it one of the poorest of Miss Austen's novels—that is, inferior to *Mansfield Park* and *Pride and Prejudice*, which is all I have read.—HENRY CRABB ROBINSON, *Diary*, Sept. 22, 1839

Why do you like Miss Austen so very much? I am puzzled on that point. What induced you to say that you would have rather written *Pride and Prejudice* or *Tom Jones*, than any of the Waverley Novels?

I had not seen *Pride and Prejudice* till I read that sentence of yours, and then I got the book. And what did I find? An accurate daguerreotyped portrait of a commonplace face; a carefully fenced, highly cultivated garden, with neat borders and delicate flowers; but no glance of a bright, vivid physiognomy, no open country, no fresh air, no blue hill, no bonny beck. I should hardly like to live with her ladies and gentlemen, in their elegant but confined houses.—CHARLOTTE BRONTË, Letter to George Henry Lewes (Jan. 12, 1848)

This delicate and yet direct power of character is still more

forcibly displayed in *Sense and Sensibility*, a far better tale than *Northanger Abbey*, but not one of Miss Austen's best. The two heroines of this tale are somewhat deficient in reality. Elinor Dashwood is Judgment—her sister Marianne is Imagination. We feel it too plainly. And the triumph of *Sense* over *Sensibility*, shown by the different conduct they hold under very similar trials, is all the weaker that it is the result of the author's will.—JULIA KAVANAGH, "Miss Austen's Six Novels," *English Women of Letters*, 1863, Vol. 2, pp. 195–96

MANSFIELD PARK

EMMA

Finished Miss Austen's *Emma*, which amused me very much, impressing me with a high opinion of her powers of drawing and sustaining character, though not satisfying me always with the end and aim of her labours. She is successful in painting the ridiculous to the life, and while she makes demands on our patience for the almost intolerable absurdities and tediousness of her well-meaning gossips, she does not recompense us for what we suffer from her conceited and arrogant nuisances by making their vices their punishments. We are not much better, but perhaps a little more prudent for her writings. She does not probe the vices; but lays bare the weaknesses of character: the blemish on the skin, and not the corruption at the heart is what she examines. Mrs. Brunton's books have a far higher aim; they try to make us better, and it is an addition to our previous faults if they do not. The necessity, the comfort and the elevating influence of piety is continually inculcated throughout her works—which never appear in Miss Austen's.—WILLIAM C. MACREADY, *Diary*, Feb. 15, 1834

Finished *Mansfield Park*, which hurries with a very inartificial and disagreeable rapidity to its conclusion, leaving some opportunities for most interesting and beautiful scenes, particularly the detailed expression of the "how and the when" Edward's love was turned from Miss Crawford to Fanny Price. The great merit of Miss Austen is in the finishing of her characters; the action and conduct of her stories I think frequently defective.—WILLIAM C. MACREADY, *Diary*, July 10, 1836

I have likewise read one of Miss Austen's works *Emma*—read it with interest and with just the degree of admiration which Miss Austen herself would have thought sensible and suitable—anything like warmth or enthusiasm; anything energetic, poignant, heartfelt, is utterly out of place in commending these works: all such demonstration the authoress would have met with a well-bred sneer, would have calmly scorned as outré and extravagant. She does her business of delineating the surface of the lives of genteel English people curiously well; there is a Chinese fidelity, a miniature delicacy in the painting: she ruffles her reader by nothing vehement, disturbs him by nothing profound: the Passions are perfectly unknown to her; she rejects even a speaking acquaintance with that stormy Sisterhood; even to the Feelings she vouchsafes no more than an occasional graceful but distant recognition; too frequent converse with them would ruffle the smooth elegance of her progress. Her business is not half so much with the human heart as with the human eyes, mouth, hands and feet; what sees keenly, speaks aptly, moves flexibly, it suits her to study, but what throbs fast and full, though hidden, what the blood rushes through, what is the unseen seat of Life and the sentient target of death—this Miss Austen ignores; she no more, with her mind's eye, beholds the heart of her race than each man, with bodily vision sees the heart in his heaving breast. Jane Austen was a complete and most sensible lady, but a very

incomplete, and rather insensible (*not senseless*) woman, if this is heresy—I cannot help it. If I said it to some people (Lewes for instance) they would directly accuse me of advocating exaggerated heroics, but I am not afraid of your falling into any such vulgar error.—CHARLOTTE BRONTË, Letter to W. S. Williams (April 12, 1850)

Emma, perhaps, is the work upon which most suffrages would meet as the most perfect of all her performances. It is again the story of a girl, full of mistakes and foolishness, but of a girl very different from Catherine Morland. That delightful little maiden was very young, very simple, at the age when life is all one sweet wonder and surprise to the novice; but Emma is more mature and her own mistress, used to a certain supremacy, and to know her own importance and feel herself a power in her little world. Perhaps the author has scarcely the same sympathy for her that she had for her younger heroine, for some of Emma's mistakes are sharply punished, and her own movements of self-reproach and self-conviction are very keen; but then her errors are of a graver kind altogether, and involve the comfort of others, as only the actions of an important personage with some responsibility on her shoulders could do. But Emma's wilful womanhood, and her busy schemes and plans for the settlement of other people's fortunes, are scarcely less attractive than the infantine freshness of Catherine: and the group round her are drawn—we would say with greater perfection of experience and knowledge of the world, did we not remember that *Pride and Prejudice*, the first of the series, was as wealthy and varied in character. But, at least, if *Emma* is little advanced in power of conception from that wonderful work, there are traces of a maturing mind in the softened medium through which the author contemplates her *dramatis personæ*. In her earlier work, excepting and not always excepting her pair of lovers, she has an impartial and amiable contempt for all, and laughs at every one of them with a soft cynicism which sees in the world chiefly an assemblage of delightfully absurd persons, who lay themselves out to ridicule, turn where you will and from every point of view. Even Darcy himself, though he imposes upon her by his grandeur and heroic qualities, is not always safe from her dart of keen and smiling derision, and nobody but Elizabeth, who occupies in the book something of her own position, escapes her amused perception of universal weakness. But by the time she reaches the length of *Emma*, those eyes full of insight have acquired a deeper view. Amusement is no longer the chief inspiration of her observant vision. She laughs still, but it is in another key. Mrs. Bennet was vulgar and heartless, despicable as well as ridiculous; but Miss Bates, though we laugh at her, excites none of the feelings of repulsion which move us for almost all Elizabeth Bennet's family, except Jane. The broken stream of talk, the jumbled ideas, and everlasting repetitions of the village busybody, touch us with an affectionate amusement. We are never so angry with Emma as when, in her irritation after one of her failures, she is unkind to Miss Bates. This good woman is managed with such skill and tenderness that she cannot be too diffuse and wandering, too confused and tedious, for the kindness we have for her. Her author laughs too, but softly, with a glimmer of moisture in those keen eyes which had no sympathy to spare for the Bennets; and in all Mr. Woodhouse's maunderings there is the same touch of humorous charity. They are respectable to her in their weakness, as their predecessors were not. It is no longer saucy youth, remorseless, amused with everything, picking up every human creature about on the point of its dazzling spear for the ridicule of the world—but a sweeter, chastened faculty, not less capable

of penetrating and divining, but finding something more to divine and penetrate than is dreamt of in the philosophy of twenty. With such a deepening and ripening of moral perception, what might we not have had if this wonderful observer of the human comedy had lived to the full extent of mortal life? But this is a vain question, and we may console ourselves with the belief that the supply of living energy in us is proportioned to the time we have to use it in.—MARGARET OLIPHANT, *The Literary History of England, 1790–1825, 1882*, Vol. 3, pp. 231–33

Very different is the tone of *Mansfield Park*, justly considered its author's most finished production. But in reading we are conscious that half our wonder is gone. The result may be, and in some ways is, more considerable than anything achieved by the earlier efforts. In *Mansfield Park*, Miss Austen's art is seen in its most delicate form, her style is quieter, the effects she produces with it are even subtler than before. Nevertheless it is the mature fruit of a mature tree. What delights incomparably in the books of the first period, is the union of girlish freshness, of youthful zest, with the admirable mental balance which only experience can give. "Is it possible," asks Mr. Jowett in his diary, "for youth to have the experience and observation and moderation of age, or for age to retain the force of youth?" Miss Austen's powers grew and deepened, but in her first books we find the sense and discrimination of her last, and it is this which taken together with their gaiety gives to them their peculiar charm. It is as if it were possible to be at once old and young, as if a girl were to go to a ball, dance it out, and enjoy everything as much as any one there, with the full unreflecting reception essential for perfect enjoyment, and yet immediately after see the matter with the eyes of one who had gone to judge of the characters. This union of youth and age then, of things hardly ever found together, gives a mark even more distinguishing than excellence to such a novel as *Pride and Prejudice*. *Mansfield Park* is altogether an old book, perfect perhaps if we leave out of account the melodrama of the conclusion, and the occasional flapping of an extremely white white choker, but still old, with all its merit with none of the merit of youth.

Pride and Prejudice is gay, *Mansfield Park* is almost sombre; in *Pride and Prejudice* the minute touches are dashed in with laughing haste; in *Mansfield Park* everything is laboriously minute; in *Pride and Prejudice* there is a smile for every one, and every one deserves a smile; in *Mansfield Park* Mrs. Norris is a character altogether repulsive, on whom sympathy would be wasted. A real figure enough this petty tyrant of a paltry sphere, but from *Pride and Prejudice* one would not have learnt that Miss Austen had her acquaintance, or that of the set which surrounds her. Sir Thomas Bertram is of a genus extinct, Lady Bertram the most indolently selfish of stupid ladies, and Edmund Bertram with his "principles," his reputable and shallow judgments, the most exasperating of heroes, so exasperating that one thinks not once of the old saying that in the beginning there were three species, men, women, and curates. From these one turns with relief to find no relief in Julia and Maria, Thomas Bertram, Yates, and the "lady-killer" Crawford. But how delightedly one discovers among them Mary Crawford and Fanny Price, the two most delicately-drawn figures in the whole of Miss Austen's delicate gallery. Nothing could be happier than their juxtaposition—the friendless Fanny doing in the plain innocence of her nature the offices of an universal friendship, and Mary fingering her harp in the seat of the parsonage window and weaving the spells of beauty and mirth. One is pleased too with the fitness

of things that arranges for Cinderella having enough of the heaven of Cinderella in her to find in Edmund the fairy prince, and provides for the princess, a rather mundane one who thinks much of her lover's chance of a baronetcy, ultimately escaping him. One is pleased with the *dénouement*, however little with the means by which it is brought about. Mary's brother and Bertram's sister, who is married to a certain Mr. Rushworth, elope together, and the light comments and practical suggestions of Mary result in a final quarrel between her and her *fiancé*. The reader familiar with Miss Austen's earlier novels exclaims in mild astonishment when he is brought up by an incident of this texture, a violent departure from ordinary conduct, with neither passion nor seriousness to explain it. It is true that occurrences of this kind have given opportunity not only to tragedians, but in *Mansfield Park* the incident, narrated with the precision of a newspaper, brings us too near to the atmosphere of the divorce court, and Miss Austen's treatment of it to that of the Sunday-school. There is no serious medium, she would give us to understand, between talking extravagantly of sin, and treating such matters as of little account. "Let other pens dwell on guilt and misery," she concludes near the end of the book, "I quit such odious subjects as soon as I can, impatient to restore everybody, not greatly in fault themselves, to tolerable comfort, and to have done with all the rest." There must be a strange comfort in Pharisaism, else sympathy with the sect had not survived. —ADOLPHUS ALFRED JACK, "Miss Austen," *Essays on the Novel*, 1897, pp. 263–67

NORTHANGER ABBEY PERSUASION

I entirely agree with you, my dearest aunt, on one subject, as indeed I generally do on most subjects, but particularly about *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*. The behaviour of the General in *Northanger Abbey*, packing off the young lady without a servant or the common civilities which any bear of a man, not to say gentleman, would have shown, is quite outrageously out of drawing and out of nature. *Persuasion*—excepting the tangled, useless histories of the family in the first fifty pages—appears to me, especially in all that relates to poor Anne and her lover, to be exceedingly interesting and natural. The love and the lover admirably well drawn: don't you see Captain Wentworth, or rather don't you in her place feel him taking the boisterous child off her back as she kneels by the sick boy on the sofa? And is not the first meeting after their long separation admirably well done? And the overheard conversation about the nut? But I must stop: we have got no further than the disaster of Miss Musgrave's jumping off the steps. —MARIA EDGEWORTH, Letter to Mrs. Ruxton (Feb. 21, 1818)

I went on with *Persuasion*, finished it, began *Northanger Abbey*, which I have now finished. These two novels have sadly reduced my estimation of Miss Austen. They are little more than galleries of disagreeables and the would-be heroes and heroines are scarcely out of the class of insignificants. Yet I ought to be suspicious perhaps of my own declining judgment. —HENRY CRABB ROBINSON, *Diary*, Sept. 23, 1842

Home, and finished *Persuasion*. I have now read over again all Miss Austin's novels. Charming they are; but I found a little more to criticise than formerly. Yet there are in the world no compositions which approach nearer to perfection. —THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY, *Journal* (May 1, 1851), cited in G. Otto Trevelyan, *The Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay*, 1876, Vol. 2, p. 249

I read Dickens's *Hard Times*. One excessively touching, heart-breaking passage, and the rest sullen socialism. The evils which he attacks he caricatures grossly, and with little humor. Another book of Pliny's letters. Read *Northanger Abbey*; worth all Dickens and Pliny together. Yet it was the work of a girl. She was certainly not more than twenty-six. Wonderful creature! —THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY, *Journal* (Aug. 12, 1854), cited in G. Otto Trevelyan, *The Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay*, 1876, Vol. 2, p. 320

Northanger Abbey is once more on the higher level. Such a picture of delightful youth, simplicity, absurdity, and natural sweetness, it is scarcely possible to parallel. Catherine Morland, with all her enthusiasm and her mistakes, her modest tenderness and right feeling, and the fine instinct which runs through her simplicity, is the most captivating picture of a very young girl which fiction, perhaps, has ever furnished. Her biographer informs us that when Miss Austen was very young she amused herself with writing burlesques, "ridiculing the improbable events and exaggerated sentiments which she had met with in sundry silly romances." It is to be hoped that he did not rank the *Mysteries of Udolpho* among these silly romances; for certainly it is with no ungenial criticism that the young author describes the effect upon her Catherine's ingenuous mind of the mysterious situations and thrilling incidents in the books she loves. It is, on a small scale, like the raid of Cervantes upon the books of chivalry which were so dear to him, and which the simple reader believes, and the heavy critic assures him, that great romancer wrote *Don Quixote* to overthrow. Miss Austen makes her laughing assault upon Mrs. Radcliffe with all the affectionate banter of which she was mistress—the genial fun and tender ridicule of a mind which in its day had wondered and worshipped like Catherine. And she makes that innocent creature ridiculous, but how lovable all through!—letting us laugh at her indeed, but tenderly, as we do at the follies of our favourite child. All her guileless thoughts are open before us—her half childish love, her unconscious candour, her simplicity and transparent truth. The gentle fun is of the most exquisite description, fine and keen, yet as soft as the touch of a dove. The machinery of the story is wonderfully bad, and General Tylney an incredible monster; but all the scenes in Bath—the vulgar Thorpes, the good-humoured Mrs. Allen—are clear and vivid as the daylight, and Catherine herself throughout always the most delightful little gentlewoman, never wrong in instinct and feeling, notwithstanding all her amusing foolishness. —MARGARET OLIPHANT, *The Literary History of England*, 1790–1825, 1882, Vol. 3, pp. 228–29

I am one of the regular Austen vassals, and consider her as without a rival among English writers, in her own line and within her own limits. I should not say, as Macaulay says, that she ranks next to Shakspeare, any more than I should put a first-rate miniature painter on the same level with Raphael or Titian. It is enough for me that she stands alone as a first-rate miniature painter in her own particular school of design.

When Lord Brabourne picks out *Pride and Prejudice* as her best piece of work, he must excuse me for differing from him. If he had said it was likely to amuse ordinary novel readers more than *Persuasion*, or *Mansfield Park*, or *Northanger Abbey*, well and good. But to my mind, it is not equal to any one of those three works, if we are on the look out for her special excellences; I mean exquisiteness of finish, delicacy of humour, and sureness of touch. Lady Catherine de Burgh is a caricature, Sir William Lucas is a caricature, nay Mr. Collins himself, full of glorious humour as the sketch of

him is, still seems to me something of a caricature. Yes, and worse than this, Elizabeth Bennet, the heroine, is more than once, without the authoress intending anything of the kind, pert and vulgar, an accusation which no one would dream of bringing against Anne Elliot in *Persuasion*, Fanny Price in *Mansfield Park*, or Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey*. My belief is that Jane Austen, disappointed at the poor success of *Northanger Abbey*, abandoned her own natural manner in *Pride and Prejudice*, and tried to catch the public eye by the adoption of a broader style of drawing, and more decided colours. I am far from saying that we gain nothing by this effort of hers, but we also lose something, and what we lose is some of that peculiar quality distinguishing her from all other novelists. To me, *Persuasion* is the most beautiful and the most interesting of her stories. Especially do I think it the most interesting, because it contains, unless I am mistaken, more of herself, more of her own feelings, hopes, and recollections, than the rest of her books put together. And this brings me to my main reason for touching upon Miss Austen at all, since as an authoress she needs no help or recommendation from anyone. If you draw your inference from what she has written, you would suppose she had never been out of England, but so far from this being the case, unless my informant made a most unaccountable blunder, the one romance belonging to her brief career, the one event which darkened, and possibly shortened her life, took place after the peace of 1802, and took place in Switzerland.

A friend of mind, Miss Ursula Mayow, being on a visit at a country house in the Austen district, was taken to an afternoon party by her friends. Whilst there, some of the guests began to talk of Mrs. Gaskell's *Cranford*, then just published, and a voice was heard in the distance saying this: 'Yes, I like it very much; it reminds me of my Aunt Jane.' To Miss Mayow, a devoted Austenite, there could be no doubt who was meant by 'my Aunt Jane,' and accordingly she went as soon as she could and introduced herself to the speaker. This was the story told her, and if it be true, why Mr. Austen Leigh and Lord Brabourne say nothing, and apparently knew nothing about it, I cannot explain. Mr. Austen, accompanied by his two daughters, Cassandra and Jane, took advantage of the long delayed peace to undertake a foreign tour. Whilst in Switzerland they fell in with a young naval officer, the Captain Wentworth we may assume, afterwards delineated with such tenderness and skill in the novel of 'Persuasion,' a novel not given to the world till after her death. This course of true love ran perfectly smooth, and but for the cruelty of fate, Jane Austen's career would probably have been altogether a different one, happier perhaps for herself, if less important to the world. But before the arrangements for this marriage were taken in hand, so at least in their blindness Jane and her lover imagined, a momentary separation was agreed upon between them. Mr. Austen and his daughters settled for themselves, that whilst their friend enjoyed himself in climbing mountains, and threading difficult passes, they would jog on to Chamouni, and wait quietly there till he rejoined them. This was done, but they did not find him on their arrival, nor did any tidings of his whereabouts reach them. Anxiety passed into alarm, and alarm into sickening terror; then at last, just as the Austens were about to return home, full of the gloomiest apprehensions, the fatal message they had been expecting came to them from a remote mountain village. Jane's lover had over-walked and over-tasked himself. After a short illness he died of brain fever, but he had just managed, before his senses left him, to prepare a message for the Austens to tell them of his coming end. They returned to England, and according to

the narrator, 'Aunt Jane' resumed her ordinary life as the rector's daughter, never recurring to her adventures abroad. She seems as it were to have turned a key on the incidents of that year, and shut them away from her for ever. She had a desk which her niece promised to show to Miss Mayow, if she would come over to their house, and to this desk 'Aunt Jane' retired whenever the work of the parish left her any leisure, and wrote a letter or a chapter in a novel as the case might be. This story lends a great charm to *Persuasion*. When we think of this woman of genius, at once delicate and strong, who had determined to live a life of duty and patient submission to the inevitable, unlocking her heart once more as she felt the approach of death, and calling back to cheer her last moments those recollections which she had thought it her duty to put aside, whilst there was yet work to do on earth, we are drawn to her by a new impulse, which heightens our admiration, and warms it into a real personal affection.—SIR FRANCIS HASTINGS DOYLE, *Reminiscences*, 1886, pp. 353–57

SIR WALTER SCOTT

From "*Emma*"

Quarterly Review, October 1815, pp. 192–200

Accordingly a style of novel has arisen, within the last fifteen or twenty years, differing from the former in the points upon which the interest hinges; neither alarming our credulity nor amusing our imagination by wild variety of incident, or by those pictures of romantic affection and sensibility, which were formerly as certain attributes of fictitious characters as they are of rare occurrence among those who actually live and die. The substitute for these excitements, which had lost much of their poignancy by the repeated and injudicious use of them, was the art of copying from nature as she really exists in the common walks of life, and presenting to the reader, instead of the splendid scenes of an imaginary world, a correct and striking representation of that which is daily taking place around him.

In adventuring upon this task, the author makes obvious sacrifices, and encounters peculiar difficulty. He who paints from *le beau idéal*, if his scenes and sentiments are striking and interesting, is in a great measure exempted from the difficult task of reconciling them with the ordinary probabilities of life: but he who paints a scene of common occurrence, places his composition within that extensive range of criticism which general experience offers to every reader. The resemblance of a statue of Hercules we must take on the artist's judgment; but every one can criticize that which is presented as the portrait of a friend, or neighbour. Something more than a mere sign-post likeness is also demanded. The portrait must have spirit and character, as well as resemblance; and being deprived of all that, according to Bayes, goes 'to elevate and surprize,' it must make amends by displaying depth of knowledge and dexterity of execution. We, therefore, bestow no mean compliment upon the author of *Emma*, when we say that, keeping close to common incidents, and to such characters as occupy the ordinary walks of life, she has produced sketches of such spirit and originality, that we never miss the excitation which depends upon a narrative of uncommon events, arising from the consideration of minds, manners, and sentiments, greatly above our own. In this class she stands almost alone; for the scenes of Miss Edgeworth are laid in higher life, varied by more romantic incident, and by her remarkable power of embodying and illustrating national character. But the author of *Emma*

confines herself chiefly to the middling classes of society; her most distinguished characters do not rise greatly above well-bred country gentlemen and ladies; and those which are sketched with most originality and precision, belong to a class rather below that standard: The narrative of all her novels is composed of such common occurrences as may have fallen under the observation of most folks; and her dramatis personæ conduct themselves upon the motives and principles which the readers may recognize as ruling their own and that of most of their acquaintances. The kind of moral, also, which these novels inculcate, applies equally to the paths of common life, as will best appear from a short notice of the author's former works, with a more full abstract of that which we at present have under consideration.

Sense and Sensibility, the first of these compositions, contains the history of two sisters. The elder, a young lady of prudence and regulated feelings, becomes gradually attached to a man of an excellent heart and limited talents, who happens unfortunately to be fettered by a rash and ill-assorted engagement. In the younger sister, the influence of sensibility and imagination predominates; and she, as was to be expected, also falls in love, but with more unbridled and wilful passion. Her lover, gifted with all the qualities of exterior polish and vivacity, proves faithless, and marries a woman of large fortune. The interest and merit of the piece depend altogether upon the behaviour of the elder sister, while obliged at once to sustain her own disappointment with fortitude, and to support her sister, who abandons herself, with unsuppressed feelings, to the indulgence of grief. The marriage of the unworthy rival at length relieves her own lover from his imprudent engagement, while her sister, turned wise by precept, example, and experience, transfers her affection to a very respectable and somewhat too serious admirer, who had nourished an unsuccessful passion through the three volumes.

In *Pride and Prejudice* the author presents us with a family of young women, bred up under a foolish and vulgar mother, and a father whose good abilities lay hid under such a load of indolence and insensibility, that he had become contented to make the foibles and follies of his wife and daughters the subject of dry and humorous sarcasm, rather than of admonition, or restraint. This is one of the portraits from ordinary life which shews our author's talents in a very strong point of view. A friend of ours, whom the author never saw or heard of, was at once recognized by his own family as the original of Mr. Bennet, and we do not know if he has yet got rid of the nickname. A Mr. Collins, too, a formal, conceited, yet servile young sprig of divinity, is drawn with the same force and precision. The story of the piece consists chiefly in the fates of the second sister, to whom a man of high birth, large fortune, but haughty and reserved manners, becomes attached, in spite of the discredit thrown upon the object of his affection by the vulgarity and ill-conduct of her relations. The lady, on the contrary, hurt at the contempt of her connections, which the lover does not even attempt to suppress, and prejudiced against him on other accounts, refuses the hand which he ungraciously offers, and does not perceive that she has done a foolish thing until she accidentally visits a very handsome seat and grounds belonging to her admirer. They chance to meet exactly as her prudence had begun to subdue her prejudice; and after some essential services rendered to her family, the lover becomes encouraged to renew his addresses, and the novel ends happily.

Emma has even less story than either of the preceding novels. Miss Emma Woodhouse, from whom the book takes its name, is the daughter of a gentleman of wealth and conse-

quence residing at his seat in the immediate vicinage of a country village called Highbury. The father, a good-natured, silly valetudinary, abandons the management of his household to Emma, he himself being only occupied by his summer and winter walk, his apothecary, his gruel, and his whist table. The latter is supplied from the neighbouring village of Highbury with precisely the sort of persons who occupy the vacant corners of a regular whist table, when a village is in the neighbourhood, and better cannot be found within the family. We have the smiling and courteous vicar, who nourishes the ambitious hope of obtaining Miss Woodhouse's hand. We have Mrs. Bates, the wife of a former rector, past every thing but tea and whist; her daughter, Miss Bates, a good-natured, vulgar, and foolish old maid; Mr. Weston, a gentleman of a frank disposition and moderate fortune, in the vicinity, and his wife an amiable and accomplished person, who had been Emma's governess, and is devotedly attached to her. Amongst all these personages, Miss Woodhouse walks forth, the princess paramount, superior to all her companions in wit, beauty, fortune, and accomplishments, doated upon by her father and the Westons, admired, and almost worshipped by the more humble companions of the whist table. The object of most young ladies is, or at least is usually supposed to be, a desirable connection in marriage. But Emma Woodhouse, either anticipating the taste of a later period of life, or, like a good sovereign, preferring the weal of her subjects of Highbury to her own private interest, sets generously about making matches for her friends without thinking of matrimony on her own account. We are informed that she had been eminently successful in the case of Mr. and Miss Weston; and when the novel commences she is exerting her influence in favour of Miss Harriet Smith, a boarding-school girl without family or fortune, very good humoured, very pretty, very silly, and, what suited Miss Woodhouse's purpose best of all, very much disposed to be married.

In these conjugal machinations Emma is frequently interrupted, not only by the cautions of her father, who had a particular objection to any body committing the rash act of matrimony, but also by the sturdy reproof and remonstrances of Mr. Knightley, the elder brother of her sister's husband, a sensible country gentleman of thirty-five, who had known Emma from her cradle, and was the only person who ventured to find fault with her. In spite, however, of his censure and warning, Emma lays a plan of marrying Harriet Smith to the vicar; and though she succeeds perfectly in diverting her simple friend's thoughts from an honest farmer who had made her a very suitable offer, and in flattering her into a passion for Mr. Elton, yet, on the other hand, that conceited divine totally mistakes the nature of the encouragement held out to him, and attributes the favour which he found in Miss Woodhouse's eyes to a lurking affection on her own part. This at length encourages him to a presumptuous declaration of his sentiments; upon receiving a repulse, he looks abroad elsewhere, and enriches the Highbury society by uniting himself to a dashing young woman with as many thousands as are usually called ten, and a corresponding quantity of presumption and ill breeding.

While Emma is thus vainly engaged in forging wedlock-fetters for others, her friends have views of the same kind upon her, in favour of a son of Mr. Weston by a former marriage, who bears the name, lives under the patronage, and is to inherit the fortune of a rich uncle. Unfortunately Mr. Frank Churchill had already settled his affections on Miss Jane Fairfax, a young lady of reduced fortune; but as this was a concealed affair, Emma, when Mr. Churchill first appears on

the stage, has some thoughts of being in love with him herself; speedily, however, recovering from that dangerous propensity, she is disposed to confer him upon her deserted friend Harriet Smith. Harriet has, in the interim, fallen desperately in love with Mr. Knightley, the sturdy, advice-giving bachelor; and, as all the village supposes Frank Churchill and Emma to be attached to each other, there are cross purposes enough (were the novel of a more romantic cast) for cutting half the men's throats and breaking all the women's hearts. But at Highbury Cupid walks decorously, and with good discretion, bearing his torch under a lanthorn, instead of flourishing it around to set the house on fire. All these entanglements bring on only a train of mistakes and embarrassing situations, and dialogues at balls and parties of pleasure, in which the author displays her peculiar powers of humour and knowledge of human life. The plot is extricated with great simplicity. The aunt of Frank Churchill dies; his uncle, no longer under her baneful influence, consents to his marriage with Jane Fairfax. Mr. Knightley and Emma are led, by this unexpected incident, to discover that they had been in love with each other all along. Mr. Woodhouse's objections to the marriage of his daughter are overpowered by the fears of house-breakers, and the comfort which he hopes to derive from having a stout son-in-law resident in the family; and the facile affections of Harriet Smith are transferred, like a bank bill by indorsation, to her former suitor, the honest farmer, who had obtained a favourable opportunity of renewing his addresses. Such is the simple plan of a story which we peruse with pleasure, if not with deep interest, and which perhaps we might more willingly resume than one of those narratives where the attention is strongly riveted, during the first perusal, by the powerful excitement of curiosity.

The author's knowledge of the world, and the peculiar tact with which she presents characters that the reader cannot fail to recognize, reminds us something of the merits of the Flemish school of painting. The subjects are not often elegant, and certainly never grand; but they are finished up to nature, and with a precision which delights the reader. This is a merit which it is very difficult to illustrate by extracts, because it pervades the whole work, and is not to be comprehended from a single passage.

(. . . Her merit) consists much in the force of a narrative conducted with much neatness and point, and a quiet yet comic dialogue, in which the characters of the speakers evolve themselves with dramatic effect. The faults, on the contrary, arise from the minute detail which the author's plan comprehends. Characters of folly or simplicity, such as those of old Woodhouse and Miss Bates, are ridiculous when first presented, but if too often brought forward or too long dwelt upon, their prosing is apt to become as tiresome in fiction as in real society. Upon the whole, the turn of this author's novels bears the same relation to that of the sentimental and romantic cast, that cornfields and cottages and meadows bear to the highly adorned grounds of a show mansion, or the rugged sublimities of a mountain landscape. It is neither so captivating as the one, nor so grand as the other, but it affords to those who frequent it a pleasure nearly allied with the experience of their own social habits; and what is of some importance, the youthful wanderer may return from his promenade to the ordinary business of life, without any chance of having his head turned by the recollection of the scene through which he has been wandering.

HENRY AUSTEN

"Biographical Notice of the Author"

Northanger Abbey and Persuasion

1818

The following pages are the production of a pen which has already contributed in no small degree to the entertainment of the public. And when the public, which has not been insensible to the merits of *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, and *Emma*, shall be informed that the hand which guided that pen is now mouldering in the grave, perhaps a brief account of Jane Austen will be read with a kindlier sentiment than simple curiosity.

Short and easy will be the task of the mere biographer. A life of usefulness, literature, and religion, was not by any means a life of event. To those who lament their irreparable loss, it is consolatory to think that, as she never deserved disapprobation, so, in the circle of her family and friends, she never met reproof; that her wishes were not only reasonable, but gratified; and that to the little disappointments incidental to human life was never added, even for a moment, an abatement of goodwill from any who knew her.

Jane Austen was born on the 16th of December, 1775, at Steventon, in the county of Hants. Her father was Rector of that parish upwards of forty years. There he resided, in the conscientious and unassisted discharge of his ministerial duties, until he was turned of seventy years. Then he retired with his wife, our authoress, and her sister, to Bath, for the remainder of his life, a period of about four years. Being not only a profound scholar, but possessing a most exquisite taste in every species of literature, it is not wonderful that his daughter Jane should, at a very early age, have become sensible to the charms of style, and enthusiastic in the cultivation of her own language. On the death of her father she removed, with her mother and sister, for a short time, to Southampton, and finally, in 1809, to the pleasant village of Chawton, in the same county. From this place she sent into the world those novels, which by many have been placed on the same shelf as the works of a D'Arblay and an Edgeworth. Some of these novels had been the gradual performances of her previous life. For though in composition she was equally rapid and correct, yet an invincible distrust of her own judgement induced her to withhold her works from the public, till time and many perusals had satisfied her that the charm of recent composition was dissolved. The natural constitution, the regular habits, the quiet and happy occupations of our authoress, seemed to promise a long succession of amusement to the public, and a gradual increase of reputation to herself. But the symptoms of a decay, deep and incurable, began to shew themselves in the commencement of 1816. Her decline was at first deceitfully slow; and until the spring of this present year, those who knew their happiness to be involved in her existence could not endure to despair. But in the month of May, 1817, it was found advisable that she should be removed to Winchester for the benefit of constant medical aid, which none even then dared to hope would be permanently beneficial. She supported, during two months, all the varying pain, irksomeness, and tedium, attendant on decaying nature, with more than resignation, with a truly elastic cheerfulness. She retained her faculties, her memory, her fancy, her temper, and her affections, warm, clear, and unimpaired, to the last. Neither her love of God, nor of her fellow creatures flagged for a moment. She made a point of receiving the sacrament before excessive bodily weakness might have rendered her perception unequal