

Classic Poetry Series

Jane Austen
- poems -

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Jane Austen(16 December 1775 – 18 July 1817)

Jane Austen was an English novelist whose works of romantic fiction, set among the landed gentry, earned her a place as one of the most widely read writers in English literature. Her realism and biting social commentary has gained her historical importance among scholars and critics.

Austen lived her entire life as part of a close-knit family located on the lower fringes of the English landed gentry. She was educated primarily by her father and older brothers as well as through her own reading. The steadfast support of her family was critical to her development as a professional writer. Her artistic apprenticeship lasted from her teenage years into her thirties. During this period, she experimented with various literary forms, including the epistolary novel which she tried then abandoned, and wrote and extensively revised three major novels and began a fourth. From 1811 until 1816, with the release of *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814) and *Emma* (1816), she achieved success as a published writer. She wrote two additional novels, *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, both published posthumously in 1818, and began a third, which was eventually titled *Sanditon*, but died before completing it.

Austen's works critique the novels of sensibility of the second half of the 18th century and are part of the transition to 19th-century realism. Her plots, though fundamentally comic, highlight the dependence of women on marriage to secure social standing and economic security. Her work brought her little personal fame and only a few positive reviews during her lifetime, but the publication in 1869 of her nephew's *A Memoir of Jane Austen* introduced her to a wider public, and by the 1940s she had become widely accepted in academia as a great English writer. The second half of the 20th century saw a proliferation of Austen scholarship and the emergence of a Janeite fan culture.

Biographical information concerning Jane Austen is "famously scarce", according to one biographer. Only some personal and family letters remain (by one estimate only 160 out of Austen's 3,000 letters are extant), and her sister Cassandra (to whom most of the letters were originally addressed) burned "the greater part" of the ones she kept and censored those she did not destroy. Other letters were destroyed by the heirs of Admiral Francis Austen, Jane's brother. Most of the biographical material produced for fifty years after Austen's death was written by her relatives and reflects the family's biases in favour of "good quiet Aunt Jane". Scholars have unearthed little information since.

Family

Austen's parents, George Austen (1731–1805), and his wife Cassandra (1739–1827), were members of substantial gentry families. George was descended from a family of woollen manufacturers, which had risen through the professions to the lower ranks of the landed gentry. Cassandra was a member of the prominent Leigh family; they married on 26 April 1764 at Walcot Church in Bath. From 1765 until 1801, that is, for much of Jane's life, George Austen served as the rector of the Anglican parishes at Steventon, Hampshire, and a nearby village. From 1773 until 1796, he supplemented this income by farming and by teaching three or four boys at a time who boarded at his home.

Austen's immediate family was large: six brothers—James (1765–1819), George (1766–1838), Edward (1767–1852), Henry Thomas (1771–1850), Francis William (Frank) (1774–1865), Charles John (1779–1852)—and one sister, Cassandra Elizabeth (Steventon, Hampshire, 9 January 1773–1845), who, like Jane, died unmarried. Cassandra was Austen's closest friend and confidante throughout her life. Of her brothers, Austen felt closest to Henry, who became a banker and, after his bank failed, an Anglican clergyman. Henry was also his sister's literary agent. His large circle of friends and acquaintances in London included bankers, merchants, publishers, painters, and actors: he provided Austen with a view of social worlds not normally visible from a small parish in rural Hampshire. George was sent to live with a local family at a young age because, as Austen biographer Le Faye describes it, he was "mentally abnormal and subject to fits." He may also have been deaf and mute. Charles and Frank served in the navy, both rising to the rank of admiral. Edward was adopted by his fourth cousin, Thomas Knight, inheriting Knight's estate and taking his name in 1812.

Early life and education

Austen was born on 16 December 1775 at Steventon rectory and publicly christened on 5 April 1776. After a few months at home, her mother placed Austen with Elizabeth Littlewood, a woman living nearby, who nursed and raised Austen for a year or eighteen months. In 1783, according to family tradition, Jane and Cassandra were sent to Oxford to be educated by Mrs. Ann Cawley and they moved with her to Southampton later in the year. Both girls caught typhus and Jane nearly died. Austen was subsequently educated at home, until leaving for boarding school with her sister Cassandra early in 1785. The school curriculum probably included some French, spelling, needlework, dancing and music and, perhaps, drama. By December 1786, Jane and Cassandra had returned home because the Austens could not afford to send both of their

daughters to school.

Austen acquired the remainder of her education by reading books, guided by her father and her brothers James and Henry. George Austen apparently gave his daughters unfettered access to his large and varied library, was tolerant of Austen's sometimes risqué experiments in writing, and provided both sisters with expensive paper and other materials for their writing and drawing. According to Park Honan, a biographer of Austen, life in the Austen home was lived in "an open, amused, easy intellectual atmosphere" where the ideas of those with whom the Austens might disagree politically or socially were considered and discussed. After returning from school in 1786, Austen "never again lived anywhere beyond the bounds of her immediate family environment".

Private theatricals were also a part of Austen's education. From when she was seven until she was thirteen, the family and close friends staged a series of plays, including Richard Sheridan's *The Rivals* (1775) and David Garrick's *Bon Ton*. While the details are unknown, Austen would certainly have joined in these activities, as a spectator at first and as a participant when she was older. Most of the plays were comedies, which suggests one way in which Austen's comedic and satirical gifts were cultivated.

Juvenilia

Perhaps as early as 1787, Austen began to write poems, stories, and plays for her own and her family's amusement. Austen later compiled "fair copies" of 29 of these early works into three bound notebooks, now referred to as the *Juvenilia*, containing pieces originally written between 1787 and 1793. There is manuscript evidence that Austen continued to work on these pieces as late as the period 1809–11, and that her niece and nephew, Anna and James Edward Austen, made further additions as late as 1814. Among these works are a satirical novel in letters titled *Love and Freindship* [sic], in which she mocked popular novels of sensibility, and *The History of England*, a manuscript of 34 pages accompanied by 13 watercolour miniatures by her sister Cassandra.

Austen's *History* parodied popular historical writing, particularly Oliver Goldsmith's *History of England* (1764). Austen wrote, for example: "Henry the 4th ascended the throne of England much to his own satisfaction in the year 1399, after having prevailed on his cousin & predecessor Richard the 2nd, to resign it to him, & to retire for the rest of his Life to Pomfret Castle, where he happened to be murdered." Austen's *Juvenilia* are often, according to scholar Richard Jenkyns, "boisterous" and "anarchic"; he compares them to the work of 18th-century novelist Laurence Sterne and the 20th century comedy group

Monty Python.

Adulthood

As Austen grew into adulthood, she continued to live at her parents' home, carrying out those activities normal for women of her age and social standing: she practised the fortepiano, assisted her sister and mother with supervising servants, and attended female relatives during childbirth and older relatives on their deathbeds. She sent short pieces of writing to her newborn nieces Fanny Catherine and Jane Anna Elizabeth. Austen was particularly proud of her accomplishments as a seamstress. She also attended church regularly, socialized frequently with friends and neighbours, and read novels—often of her own composition—aloud with her family in the evenings. Socializing with the neighbours often meant dancing, either impromptu in someone's home after supper or at the balls held regularly at the assembly rooms in the town hall. Her brother Henry later said that "Jane was fond of dancing, and excelled in it"

In 1793, Austen began and then abandoned a short play, later entitled *Sir Charles Grandison or the happy Man*, a comedy in 6 acts, which she returned to and completed around 1800. This was a short parody of various school textbook abridgments of Austen's favourite contemporary novel, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* (1753), by Samuel Richardson. Honan speculates that at some point not long after writing *Love and Freindship* [sic] in 1789, Austen decided to "write for profit, to make stories her central effort", that is, to become a professional writer. Beginning in about 1793, she began to write longer, more sophisticated works.

Between 1793 and 1795, Austen wrote *Lady Susan*, a short epistolary novel, usually described as her most ambitious and sophisticated early work. It is unlike any of Austen's other works. Austen biographer Claire Tomalin describes the heroine of the novella as a sexual predator who uses her intelligence and charm to manipulate, betray, and abuse her victims, whether lovers, friends or family. Tomalin writes: "Told in letters, it is as neatly plotted as a play, and as cynical in tone as any of the most outrageous of the Restoration dramatists who may have provided some of her inspiration....It stands alone in Austen's work as a study of an adult woman whose intelligence and force of character are greater than those of anyone she encounters."

Early Novels

After finishing *Lady Susan*, Austen attempted her first full-length novel—*Elinor and Marianne*. Her sister Cassandra later remembered that it was read to the

family "before 1796" and was told through a series of letters. Without surviving original manuscripts, there is no way to know how much of the original draft survived in the novel published in 1811 as *Sense and Sensibility*.

When Austen was twenty, Tom Lefroy, a nephew of neighbours, visited Steventon from December 1795 to January 1796. He had just finished a university degree and was moving to London to train as a barrister. Lefroy and Austen would have been introduced at a ball or other neighbourhood social gathering, and it is clear from Austen's letters to Cassandra that they spent considerable time together: "I am almost afraid to tell you how my Irish friend and I behaved. Imagine to yourself everything most profligate and shocking in the way of dancing and sitting down together." The Lefroy family intervened and sent him away at the end of January. Marriage was impractical, as both Lefroy and Austen must have known. Neither had any money, and he was dependent on a great-uncle in Ireland to finance his education and establish his legal career. If Tom Lefroy later visited Hampshire, he was carefully kept away from the Austens, and Jane Austen never saw him again.

Austen began work on a second novel, *First Impressions*, in 1796. She completed the initial draft in August 1797 when she was only 21 (it later became *Pride and Prejudice*); as with all of her novels, Austen read the work aloud to her family as she was working on it and it became an "established favourite". At this time, her father made the first attempt to publish one of her novels. In November 1797, George Austen wrote to Thomas Cadell, an established publisher in London, to ask if he would consider publishing "a Manuscript Novel, comprised in three Vols. about the length of Miss Burney's *Evelina*" (*First Impressions*) at the author's financial risk. Cadell quickly returned Mr. Austen's letter, marked "Declined by Return of Post". Austen may not have known of her father's efforts. Following the completion of *First Impressions*, Austen returned to *Elinor and Marianne* and from November 1797 until mid-1798, revised it heavily; she eliminated the epistolary format in favour of third-person narration and produced something close to *Sense and Sensibility*.

During the middle of 1798, after finishing revisions of *Elinor and Marianne*, Austen began writing a third novel with the working title *Susan*—later *Northanger Abbey*—a satire on the popular Gothic novel. Austen completed her work about a year later. In early 1803, Henry Austen offered *Susan* to Benjamin Crosby, a London publisher, who paid £10 for the copyright. Crosby promised early publication and went so far as to advertise the book publicly as being "in the press", but did nothing more. The manuscript remained in Crosby's hands, unpublished, until Austen repurchased the copyright from him in 1816.

Bath and Southampton

In December 1800, Mr Austen unexpectedly announced his decision to retire from the ministry, leave Steventon, and move the family to Bath. While retirement and travel were good for the elder Austens, Jane Austen was shocked to be told she was moving from the only home she had ever known. An indication of Austen's state of mind is her lack of productivity as a writer during the time she lived at Bath. She was able to make some revisions to *Susan*, and she began and then abandoned a new novel, *The Watsons*, but there was nothing like the productivity of the years 1795–99. Tomalin suggests this reflects a deep depression disabling her as a writer, but Honan disagrees, arguing Austen wrote or revised her manuscripts throughout her creative life, except for a few months after her father died.

In December 1802, Austen received her only proposal of marriage. She and her sister visited Alethea and Catherine Bigg, old friends who lived near Basingstoke. Their younger brother, Harris Bigg-Wither, had recently finished his education at Oxford and was also at home. Bigg-Wither proposed and Austen accepted. As described by Caroline Austen, Jane's niece, and Reginald Bigg-Wither, a descendant, Harris was not attractive—he was a large, plain-looking man who spoke little, stuttered when he did speak, was aggressive in conversation, and almost completely tactless. However, Austen had known him since both were young and the marriage offered many practical advantages to Austen and her family. He was the heir to extensive family estates located in the area where the sisters had grown up. With these resources, Austen could provide her parents a comfortable old age, give Cassandra a permanent home and, perhaps, assist her brothers in their careers. By the next morning, Austen realised she had made a mistake and withdrew her acceptance. No contemporary letters or diaries describe how Austen felt about this proposal. In 1814, Austen wrote a letter to her niece, Fanny Knight, who had asked for advice about a serious relationship, telling her that "having written so much on one side of the question, I shall now turn around & entreat you not to commit yourself farther, & not to think of accepting him unless you really do like him. Anything is to be preferred or endured rather than marrying without Affection".

In 1804, while living in Bath, Austen started but did not complete a new novel, *The Watsons*. The story centres on an invalid clergyman with little money and his four unmarried daughters. Sutherland describes the novel as "a study in the harsh economic realities of dependent women's lives". Honan suggests, and Tomalin agrees, that Austen chose to stop work on the novel after her father died on 21 January 1805 and her personal circumstances resembled those of her characters too closely for her comfort.

Mr Austen's final illness had struck suddenly, leaving him, as Austen reported to her brother Francis, "quite insensible of his own state", and he died quickly. Jane, Cassandra, and their mother were left in a precarious financial situation. Edward, James, Henry, and Francis Austen pledged to make annual contributions to support their mother and sisters. For the next four years, the family's living arrangements reflected their financial insecurity. They lived part of the time in rented quarters in Bath and then, beginning in 1806, in Southampton, where they shared a house with Frank Austen and his new wife. A large part of this time they spent visiting various branches of the family.

On 5 April 1809, about three months before the family's move to Chawton, Austen wrote an angry letter to Richard Crosby, offering him a new manuscript of *Susan* if that was needed to secure immediate publication of the novel, and otherwise requesting the return of the original so she could find another publisher. Crosby replied he had not agreed to publish the book by any particular time, or at all, and that Austen could repurchase the manuscript for the £10 he had paid her and find another publisher. However, Austen did not have the resources to repurchase the book.

Chawton

Around early 1809, Austen's brother Edward offered his mother and sisters a more settled life—the use of a large cottage in Chawton village that was part of Edward's nearby estate, Chawton House. Jane, Cassandra, and their mother moved into Chawton cottage on 7 July 1809. In Chawton, life was quieter than it had been since the family's move to Bath in 1800. The Austens did not socialise with the neighbouring gentry and entertained only when family visited. Austen's niece Anna described the Austen family's life in Chawton: "It was a very quiet life, according to our ideas, but they were great readers, and besides the housekeeping our aunts occupied themselves in working with the poor and in teaching some girl or boy to read or write." Austen wrote almost daily, but privately, and seems to have been relieved of some household responsibilities to give her more opportunity to write. In this setting, she was able to be productive as a writer once more.

Published Author

During her time at Chawton, Jane Austen successfully published four novels, which were generally well-received. Through her brother Henry, the publisher Thomas Egerton agreed to publish *Sense and Sensibility*, which appeared in October 1811. Reviews were favourable and the novel became fashionable

among opinion-makers; the edition sold out by mid-1813. Austen's earnings from *Sense and Sensibility* provided her with some financial and psychological independence. Egerton then published *Pride and Prejudice*, a revision of *First Impressions*, in January 1813. He advertised the book widely and it was an immediate success, garnering three favourable reviews and selling well. By October 1813, Egerton was able to begin selling a second edition. *Mansfield Park* was published by Egerton in May 1814. While *Mansfield Park* was ignored by reviewers, it was a great success with the public. All copies were sold within six months, and Austen's earnings on this novel were larger than for any of her other novels.

Austen learned that the Prince Regent admired her novels and kept a set at each of his residences. In November 1815, the Prince Regent's librarian invited Austen to visit the Prince's London residence and hinted Austen should dedicate the forthcoming *Emma* to the Prince. Though Austen disliked the Prince, she could scarcely refuse the request. She later wrote *Plan of a Novel*, according to hints from various quarters, a satiric outline of the "perfect novel" based on the librarian's many suggestions for a future Austen novel.

In mid-1815, Austen moved her work from Egerton to John Murray, a better known London publisher who published *Emma* in December 1815 and a second edition of *Mansfield Park* in February 1816. *Emma* sold well but the new edition of *Mansfield Park* did not, and this failure offset most of the profits Austen earned on *Emma*. These were the last of Austen's novels to be published during her lifetime.

While Murray prepared *Emma* for publication, Austen began to write a new novel she titled *The Elliots*, later published as *Persuasion*. She completed her first draft in July 1816. In addition, shortly after the publication of *Emma*, Henry Austen repurchased the copyright for *Susan* from Crosby. Austen was forced to postpone publishing either of these completed novels by family financial troubles. Henry Austen's bank failed in March 1816, depriving him of all of his assets, leaving him deeply in debt and losing Edward, James, and Frank Austen large sums. Henry and Frank could no longer afford the contributions they had made to support their mother and sisters.

Illness and Death

Early in 1816, Jane Austen began to feel unwell. She ignored her illness at first and continued to work and to participate in the usual round of family activities. By the middle of that year, her decline was unmistakable to Austen and to her family, and Austen's physical condition began a long, slow, and irregular

deterioration culminating in her death the following year. The majority of Austen biographers rely on Dr. Vincent Cope's tentative 1964 retrospective diagnosis and list her cause of death as Addison's disease. However, her final illness has also been described as Hodgkin's lymphoma. Recent work by Katherine White of Britain's Addison's Disease Self Help Group suggests that Austen probably died of bovine tuberculosis, a disease (now) commonly associated with drinking unpasteurized milk. One contributing factor or cause of her death, discovered by Linda Robinson Walker and described in the Winter 2010 issue of *Persuasions* online, might be Brill–Zinsser disease, a recurrent form of typhus, which she had as a child. Brill–Zinsser disease is to typhus as shingles is to chicken pox; when a victim of typhus endures stress, malnutrition or another infection, typhus can recur as Brill–Zinsser disease.

Austen continued to work in spite of her illness. She became dissatisfied with the ending of *The Elliots* and rewrote the final two chapters, finishing them on 6 August 1816. In January 1817, Austen began work on a new novel she called *The Brothers*, later titled *Sanditon* upon its first publication in 1925, and completed twelve chapters before stopping work in mid-March 1817, probably because her illness prevented her from continuing. Austen made light of her condition to others, describing it as "Bile" and rheumatism, but as her disease progressed she experienced increasing difficulty walking or finding the energy for other activities. By mid-April, Austen was confined to her bed. In May, Jane and Cassandra's brother Henry escorted the two of them to Winchester for medical treatment. Austen died in Winchester on 18 July 1817, at the age of 41. Henry, through his clerical connections, arranged for his sister to be buried in the north aisle of the nave of Winchester Cathedral. The epitaph composed by her brother James praises Austen's personal qualities, expresses hope for her salvation, mentions the "extraordinary endowments of her mind", but does not explicitly mention her achievements as a writer.

Posthumous Publication

After Austen's death, Cassandra and Henry Austen arranged with Murray for the publication of *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey* as a set in December 1817. Henry Austen contributed a Biographical Note which for the first time identified his sister as the author of the novels. Tomalin describes it as "a loving and polished eulogy". Sales were good for a year—only 321 copies remained unsold at the end of 1818—and then declined. Murray disposed of the remaining copies in 1820, and Austen's novels remained out of print for twelve years. In 1832, publisher Richard Bentley purchased the remaining copyrights to all of Austen's novels and, beginning in either December 1832 or January 1833, published them in five illustrated volumes as part of his *Standard Novels* series. In October 1833,

Bentley published the first collected edition of Austen's works. Since then, Austen's novels have been continuously in print.

Reception

In 1816, the editors of *The New Monthly Magazine* noted Emma's publication but chose not to review it.

Austen's works brought her little personal renown because they were published anonymously. Although her novels quickly became fashionable among opinion-makers, such as Princess Charlotte Augusta, daughter of the Prince Regent, they received only a few published reviews. Most of the reviews were short and on balance favourable, although superficial and cautious. They most often focused on the moral lessons of the novels. Sir Walter Scott, a leading novelist of the day, contributed one of them, anonymously. Using the review as a platform from which to defend the then disreputable genre of the novel, he praised Austen's realism. The other important early review of Austen's works was published by Richard Whately in 1821. He drew favourable comparisons between Austen and such acknowledged greats as Homer and Shakespeare, praising the dramatic qualities of her narrative. Whately and Scott set the tone for almost all subsequent 19th-century Austen criticism.

19th Century

Because Austen's novels failed to conform to Romantic and Victorian expectations that "powerful emotion [be] authenticated by an egregious display of sound and colour in the writing", 19th-century critics and audiences generally preferred the works of Charles Dickens and George Eliot. Though Austen's novels were republished in Britain beginning in the 1830s and remained steady sellers, they were not bestsellers.

Austen had many admiring readers in the 19th century who considered themselves part of a literary elite: they viewed their appreciation of Austen's works as a mark of their cultural taste. Philosopher and literary critic George Henry Lewes expressed this viewpoint in a series of enthusiastic articles published in the 1840s and 1850s. This theme continued later in the century with novelist Henry James, who referred to Austen several times with approval and on one occasion ranked her with Shakespeare, Cervantes, and Henry Fielding as among "the fine painters of life".

The publication of James Edward Austen-Leigh's *A Memoir of Jane Austen* in 1869 introduced Austen to a wider public as "dear aunt Jane", the respectable maiden

aunt. Publication of the Memoir spurred the reissue of Austen's novels—the first popular editions were released in 1883 and fancy illustrated editions and collectors' sets quickly followed. Author and critic Leslie Stephen described the popular mania that started to develop for Austen in the 1880s as "Austenolatry". Around the turn of the century, members of the literary elite reacted against the popularization of Austen. They referred to themselves as Janeites in order to distinguish themselves from the masses who did not properly understand her works. For example, James responded negatively to what he described as "a beguiled infatuation" with Austen, a rising tide of public interest that exceeded Austen's "intrinsic merit and interest".

During the last quarter of the 19th century, the first books of criticism on Austen were published. In fact, after the publication of the Memoir, more criticism was published on Austen in two years than had appeared in the previous fifty.

20th Century and Beyond

Several important works paved the way for Austen's novels to become a focus of academic study. The first important milestone was a 1911 essay by Oxford Shakespearean scholar A. C. Bradley, which is "generally regarded as the starting-point for the serious academic approach to Jane Austen". In it, he established the groupings of Austen's "early" and "late" novels, which are still used by scholars today. The second was R. W. Chapman's 1923 edition of Austen's collected works. Not only was it the first scholarly edition of Austen's works, it was also the first scholarly edition of any English novelist. The Chapman text has remained the basis for all subsequent published editions of Austen's works. With the publication in 1939 of Mary Lascelles's *Jane Austen and Her Art*, the academic study of Austen took hold. Lascelles's innovative work included an analysis of the books Jane Austen read and the effect of her reading on her work, an extended analysis of Austen's style, and her "narrative art". At the time, concern arose over the fact that academics were taking over Austen criticism and it was becoming increasingly esoteric—a debate that has continued to the beginning of the 21st century.

In a spurt of revisionist views in the 1940s, scholars approached Austen more sceptically and argued that she was a subversive writer. These revisionist views, together with F. R. Leavis's and Ian Watt's pronouncement that Austen was one of the great writers of English fiction, did much to cement Austen's reputation amongst academics. They agreed that she "combined [Henry Fielding's and Samuel Richardson's] qualities of interiority and irony, realism and satire to form an author superior to both". The period since World War II has seen more scholarship on Austen using a diversity of critical approaches, including feminist

theory, and perhaps most controversially, postcolonial theory. However, the continuing disconnection between the popular appreciation of Austen, particularly by modern Janeites, and the academic appreciation of Austen has widened considerably. Jane Austen was the favourite novelist of political philosopher Leo Strauss.

Sequels, prequels, and adaptations of almost every sort have been based on the novels of Jane Austen, from soft-core pornography to fantasy. Beginning in the middle of the 19th century, Austen family members published conclusions to her incomplete novels, and by 2000 there were over 100 printed adaptations. The first film adaptation was the 1940 MGM production of *Pride and Prejudice* starring Laurence Olivier and Greer Garson. BBC television dramatisations, which were first produced in the 1970s, attempted to adhere meticulously to Austen's plots, characterisations, and settings. In 1995 a great wave of Austen adaptations began to appear, with Ang Lee's film of *Sense and Sensibility*, for which screenwriter and star Emma Thompson won an Academy Award, and the BBC's immensely popular TV mini-series *Pride and Prejudice*, starring Jennifer Ehle and Colin Firth.

Books and scripts that use the general storyline of Austen's novels but change or otherwise modernise the story also became popular at the end of the 20th century. For example, *Clueless* (1995), Amy Heckerling's updated version of *Emma*, which takes place in Beverly Hills, became a cultural phenomenon and spawned its own television series. In a 2002 vote to determine whom the UK public considers the greatest British people in history, Austen was ranked number 70 in the list of the "100 Greatest Britons". In 2003, Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* came second in the BBC's *The Big Read*, a national poll to find the "Nation's best-loved book."

In 2007, the article *Rejecting Jane* by British author David Lassman, which examined how Austen would fare in the modern day publishing industry, achieved worldwide attention when Austen's work -- submitted under a pseudonym -- was rejected by numerous publishers.

Happy The Lab'Rer

Happy the lab'rer in his Sunday clothes!
In light-drab coat, smart waistcoat, well-darn'd hose,
And hat upon his head, to church he goes;
As oft, with conscious pride, he downward throws
A glance upon the ample cabbage rose
That, stuck in button-hole, regales his nose,
He envies not the gayest London beaux.
In church he takes his seat among the rows,
Pays to the place the reverence he owes,
Likes best the prayers whose meaning least he knows,
Lists to the sermon in a softening doze,
And rouses joyous at the welcome close.

Jane Austen

I'Ve A Pain In My Head

'I've a pain in my head'
Said the suffering Beckford;
To her Doctor so dread.
'Oh! what shall I take for't?'

Said this Doctor so dread
Whose name it was Newnham.
'For this pain in your head
Ah! What can you do Ma'am?'

Said Miss Beckford, 'Suppose
If you think there's no risk,
I take a good Dose
Of calomel brisk.'--

'What a praise worthy Notion.'
Replied Mr. Newnham.
'You shall have such a potion
And so will I too Ma'am.'

Jane Austen

Miss Lloyd Has Now Went To Miss Green

Miss Lloyd has now sent to Miss Green,
As, on opening the box, may be seen,
Some years of a Black Ploughman's Gauze,
To be made up directly, because
Miss Lloyd must in mourning appear
For the death of a Relative dear--
Miss Lloyd must expect to receive
This license to mourn and to grieve,
Complete, ere the end of the week--
It is better to write than to speak

Jane Austen

Mock Panegyric On A Young Friend

In measured verse I'll now rehearse
The charms of lovely Anna:
And, first, her mind is unconfined
Like any vast savannah.

Ontario's lake may fitly speak
Her fancy's ample bound:
Its circuit may, on strict survey
Five hundred miles be found.

Her wit descends on foes and friends
Like famed Niagara's fall;
And travellers gaze in wild amaze,
And listen, one and all.

Her judgment sound, thick, black, profound,
Like transatlantic groves,
Dispenses aid, and friendly shade
To all that in it roves.

If thus her mind to be defined
America exhausts,
And all that's grand in that great land
In similes it costs --

Oh how can I her person try
To image and portray?
How paint the face, the form how trace,
In which those virtues lay?

Another world must be unfurled,
Another language known,
Ere tongue or sound can publish round
Her charms of flesh and bone.

Jane Austen

My Dearest Frank, I Wish You Joy

My dearest Frank, I wish you joy
Of Mary's safety with a Boy,
Whose birth has given little pain
Compared with that of Mary Jane.--
May he a growing Blessing prove,
And well deserve his Parents' Love!--
Endow'd with Art's and Nature's Good,
Thy Name possessing with thy Blood,
In him, in all his ways, may we
Another Francis William see!--
Thy infant days may he inherit,
They warmth, nay insolence of spirit;--
We would not with one fault dispense
To weaken the resemblance.
May he revive thy Nursery sin,
Peeping as daringly within,
His curley Locks but just descried,
With 'Bet, my be not come to bide.'--
Fearless of danger, braving pain,
And threaten'd very oft in vain,
Still may one Terror daunt his Soul,
One needful engine of Controul
Be found in this sublime array,
A neighbouring Donkey's awful Bray.
So may his equal faults as Child,
Produce Maturity as mild!
His saucy words and fiery ways
In early Childhood's pettish days,
In Manhood, shew his Father's mind
Like him, considerate and Kind;
All Gentleness to those around,
And anger only not to wound.
Then like his Father too, he must,
To his own former struggles just,
Feel his Deserts with honest Glow,
And all his self-improvement know.
A native fault may thus give birth
To the best blessing, conscious Worth.
As for ourselves we're very well;

As unaffected prose will tell.--
Cassandra's pen will paint our state,
The many comforts that await
Our Chawton home, how much we find
Already in it, to our mind;
And how convinced, that when complete
It will all other Houses beat
The ever have been made or mended,
With rooms concise, or rooms distended.
You'll find us very snug next year,
Perhaps with Charles and Fanny near,
For now it often does delight us
To fancy them just over-right us.--

Jane Austen

Ode To Pity

1

Ever musing I delight to tread
The Paths of honour and the Myrtle Grove
Whilst the pale Moon her beams doth shed
On disappointed Love.
While Philomel on airy hawthorn Bush
Sings sweet and Melancholy, And the thrush
Converses with the Dove.

2

Gently brawling down the turnpike road,
Sweetly noisy falls the Silent Stream--
The Moon emerges from behind a Cloud
And darts upon the Myrtle Grove her beam.
Ah! then what Lovely Scenes appear,
The hut, the Cot, the Grot, and Chapel queer,
And eke the Abbey too a mouldering heap,
Conceal'd by aged pines her head doth rear
And quite invisible doth take a peep.

Jane Austen

Of A Ministry Pitiful, Angry, Mean

Of a Ministry pitiful, angry, mean,
A gallant commander the victim is seen.
For promptitude, vigour, success, does he stand
Condemn'd to receive a severe reprimand!
To his foes I could wish a resemblance in fate:
That they, too, may suffer themselves, soon or late,
The injustice they warrent. But vain is my spite
They cannot so suffer who never do right.

Jane Austen

Oh! Mr Best You'Re Very Bad

Oh! Mr. Best, you're very bad
And all the world shall know it;
Your base behaviour shall be sung
By me, a tunefull Poet.--
You used to go to Harrowgate
Each summer as it came,
And why I pray should you refuse
To go this year the same?--

The way's as plain, the road's as smooth,
The Posting not increased;
You're scarcely stouter than you were,
Not younger Sir at least.--

If e'er the waters were of use
Why now their use forego?
You may not live another year,
All's mortal here below.--

It is your duty Mr Best
To give your health repair.
Vain else your Richard's pills will be,
And vain your Consort's care.

But yet a nobler Duty calls
You now towards the North.
Arise ennobled--as Escort
Of Martha Lloyd stand forth.

She wants your aid--she honours you
With a distinguished call.
Stand forth to be the friend of her
Who is the friend of all.--

Take her, and wonder at your luck,
In having such a Trust.
Her converse sensible and sweet
Will banish heat and dust.--

So short she'll make the journey seem
You'll bid the Chaise stand still.
T'will be like driving at full speed
From Newb'ry to Speen hill.--

Convey her safe to Morton's wife
And I'll forget the past,
And write some verses in your praise
As finely and as fast.

But if you still refuse to go
I'll never let your rest,
Buy haunt you with reproachful song
Oh! wicked Mr. Best!--

Jane Austen

See They Come, Post Haste From Thanet

See they come, post haste from Thanet,
Lovely couple, side by side;
They've left behind them Richard Kennet
With the Parents of the Bride!
Canterbury they have passed through;
Next succeeded Stamford-bridge;
Chilham village they came fast through;
Now they've mounted yonder ridge.

Down the hill they're swift proceeding,
Now they skirt the Park around;
Lo! The Cattle sweetly feeding
Scamper, startled at the sound!

Run, my Brothers, to the Pier gate!
Throw it open, very wide!
Let it not be said that we're late
In welcoming my Uncle's Bride!

To the house the chaise advances;
Now it stops--They're here, they're here!
How d'ye do, my Uncle Francis?
How does do your Lady dear?

Jane Austen

This Little Bag

This little bag I hope will prove
To be not vainly made--
For, if you should a needle want
It will afford you aid.
And as we are about to part
T'will serve another end,
For when you look upon the Bag
You'll recollect your friend

Jane Austen

To The Memory Of Mrs. Lefroy Who Died Dec:R 16 -- My Birthday.

The day returns again, my natal day;
What mix'd emotions with the Thought arise!
Beloved friend, four years have pass'd away
Since thou wert snatch'd forever from our eyes.--
The day, commemorative of my birth
Bestowing Life and Light and Hope on me,
Brings back the hour which was thy last on Earth.
Oh! bitter pang of torturing Memory!--

Angelic Woman! past my power to praise
In Language meet, thy Talents, Temper, mind.
Thy solid Worth, thy captivating Grace!--
Thou friend and ornament of Humankind!--

At Johnson's death by Hamilton t'was said,
'Seek we a substitute--Ah! vain the plan,
No second best remains to Johnson dead--
None can remind us even of the Man.'

So we of thee--unequall'd in thy race
Unequall'd thou, as he the first of Men.
Vainly we wearch around the vacant place,
We ne'er may look upon thy like again.

Come then fond Fancy, thou indulgant Power,--
--Hope is desponding, chill, severe to thee!--
Bless thou, this little portion of an hour,
Let me behold her as she used to be.

I see her here, with all her smiles benign,
Her looks of eager Love, her accents sweet.
That voice and Countenance almost divine!--
Expression, Harmony, alike complete.--

I listen--'tis not sound alone--'tis sense,
'Tis Genius, Taste and Tenderness of Soul.
'Tis genuine warmth of heart without pretence

And purity of Mind that crowns the whole.

She speaks; 'tis Eloquence--that grace of Tongue
So rare, so lovely!--Never misapplied
By her to palliate Vice, or deck a Wrong,
She speaks and reasons but on Virtue's side.

Her's is the Energy of Soul sincere.
Her Christian Spirit ignorant to feign,
Seeks but to comfort, heal, enlighten, cheer,
Confer a pleasure, or prevent a pain.--

Can ought enhance such Goodness?--Yes, to me,
Her partial favour from my earliest years
Consummates all.--Ah! Give me yet to see
Her smile of Love.--the Vision diappears.

'Tis past and gone--We meet no more below.
Short is the Cheat of Fancy o'er the Tomb.
Oh! might I hope to equal Bliss to go!
To meet thee Angel! in thy future home!--

Fain would I feel an union in thy fate,
Fain would I seek to draw an Omen fair
From this connection in our Earthly date.
Indulge the harmless weakness--Reason, spare.--

Jane Austen

When Stretch'D On One's Bed

When stretch'd on one's bed
With a fierce-throbbing head,
Which precludes alike thought or repose,
How little one cares
For the grandest affairs
That may busy the world as it goes!

How little one feels
For the waltzes and reels
Of our Dance-loving friends at a Ball!
How slight one's concern
To conjecture or learn
What their flounces or hearts may befall.

How little one minds
If a company dines
On the best that the Season affords!
How short is one's muse
O'er the Sauces and Stews,
Or the Guests, be they Beggars or Lords.

How little the Bells,
Ring they Peels, toll they Knells,
Can attract our attention or Ears!
The Bride may be married,
The Corse may be carried
And touch nor our hopes nor our fears.

Our own bodily pains
Ev'ry faculty chains;
We can feel on no subject besides.
Tis in health and in ease
We the power must seize
For our friends and our souls to provide.

Jane Austen

When Winchester Races

When Winchester races first took their beginning
It is said the good people forgot their old Saint
Not applying at all for the leave of Saint Swithin
And that William of Wykeham's approval was faint.

The races however were fixed and determined
The company came and the Weather was charming
The Lords and the Ladies were satine'd and ermined
And nobody saw any future alarming.--

But when the old Saint was informed of these doings
He made but one Spring from his Shrine to the Roof
Of the Palace which now lies so sadly in ruins
And then he addressed them all standing aloof.

'Oh! subjects rebellious! Oh Venta depraved
When once we are buried you think we are gone
But behold me immortal! By vice you're enslaved
You have sinned and must suffer, ten farther he said

These races and revels and dissolute measures
With which you're debasing a neighboring Plain
Let them stand--You shall meet with your curse in your pleasures
Set off for your course, I'll pursue with my rain.

Ye cannot but know my command o'er July
Henceforward I'll triumph in shewing my powers
Shift your race as you will it shall never be dry
The curse upon Venta is July in showers--'.

Jane Austen