



# JANE AUSTEN: LIFE AND BACKGROUND

NOTES FROM: Crash Course Literature, Macmillan Study Guides etc

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## HOW TO STRUCTURE YOUR PARAGRAPHS

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Your marks are simply dependent on how well you address the mark scheme.

- Very often, the structure of your paragraphs will limit how well you address the mark scheme.
  - Use our mnemonic to help you structure grade 9 paragraphs: TTECEA
    - Topic sentence
    - Technical terminology
    - Evidence (quote)
    - Close analysis
    - Effects of author's methods on the reader
    - Author's purpose + Context (where applicable)
      - Your points don't have to be in that exact order
      - You also don't have to include all of these details in every paragraph
        - Ensure you follow our 100% essay structure template and that you include all of these details in the entirety of your essay

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## OVERARCHING TOPICS OF 'PRIDE AND PREJUDICE'

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Austen's novel is a Regency-era novel of

- life
- and liberty
  - a social satire about
    - a family with five daughters
    - and economic anxiety
      - the novel's characters and themes have remained relevant for centuries now
        - and has spawned numerous adaptations

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## WHAT WAS THE 'REGENCY' ERA?

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The Regency era (1811-1820) refers to the period when King George III of England was declared unfit to rule and his son, the Prince of Wales, served as Prince Regent.

- This period is also known as the Georgian era, as it follows the reign of George III.
  - The Regency era is characterised by
    - elegance,
    - luxury,
    - and excess,
      - with a focus on
        - art,





- fashion,
- and entertainment.
  - It is often associated with the romanticism movement and is known for its architectural styles, such as the Regency style and the Greek Revival.

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## SATIRE AS STYLE

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Satire can be described as both a style and a genre of literary writing.

- As a style, satire is characterised by the use of
  - irony,
  - sarcasm,
  - and humor
    - to ridicule or criticise
      - people,
      - organisations,
      - or society as a whole.
        - It is often used to expose and challenge
          - social,
          - political,
          - or cultural issues and to provoke thought or change.
            - Satirical writing can take on many different forms, including
              - essays,
              - articles,
              - novels,
              - plays,
              - and poetry.

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## SATIRE AS GENRE

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As a genre, satire typically involves works of fiction or non-fiction that use satirical techniques to critique and mock human behavior and society.

- Examples of satirical genres include
  - satire news,
  - political satire,
  - social satire,
  - and dark satire.
    - Satirical works are often intended to be humorous, but they can also be
      - critical
      - and confrontational,
        - highlighting the problems and flaws of society in an effort to spur change.





- Overall, whether it is considered a style or genre, satire is a powerful tool for writers to use to challenge and engage readers on a wide range of issues.

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## HOW AUSTEN USES SATIRE & COMEDY IN *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*: OVERVIEW

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Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is widely considered a masterpiece of social satire, in which she uses wit, irony, and humor to criticise the social conventions and gender roles of her time. Through her use of satire, Austen is able to convey her message about the importance of overcoming personal prejudices and biases in order to see and appreciate the true character of others. She uses satire and comedy in a way that is both entertaining and thought-provoking, while also using these techniques to highlight the absurdity and limitations of the society she lived in.

One of the key ways in which Austen uses satire in *Pride and Prejudice* is through her portrayal of the characters. By giving them exaggerated personalities and behaviors, she is able to create a sense of humor and irony, while also drawing attention to the flaws and prejudices of her society. For example, Mr. Collins is portrayed as a pompous and self-important clergyman, while Lady Catherine de Bourgh is shown as arrogant and overbearing. Through their actions and words, Austen is able to critique the social hierarchies and class divisions of her time.

Another way in which Austen uses satire in *Pride and Prejudice* is through her critique of the gender roles and expectations of her society. Through her depiction of the female characters, particularly Elisabeth Bennet, Austen is able to challenge the traditional notions of femininity and domesticity that were prevalent in her time. Elizabeth is shown as intelligent, independent, and outspoken, challenging the norms of her society. Through her depiction of Elisabeth and other female characters, Austen is able to critique the limitations and stereotypes of gender roles in her society.

The effects of Austen's use of satire in *Pride and Prejudice* are profound and enduring. By using humor and irony to critique social conventions and gender roles, Austen is able to engage readers in a way that is both entertaining and thought-provoking by, on the one hand, helping to lighten the mood of the novel and provide moments of levity in what is otherwise a fairly serious and dramatic story. Comedy can also make the characters more relatable and likable to the reader, as it allows for the depiction of their flaws and quirks in a way that is amusing rather than off-putting.

Through her portrayal of the characters and their actions, she is able to challenge the prejudices and stereotypes of her society, while also highlighting the absurdity and limitations of the social norms of her time.

Moreover, Austen's use of satire in *Pride and Prejudice* has inspired countless other works of social satire, from novels like Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* to television shows like *The Office* and *Parks and Recreation*. The enduring popularity of *Pride and Prejudice* is a testament to the power of satire to challenge and engage readers on a wide range of social and cultural issues.

In conclusion, Jane Austen's use of satire in *Pride and Prejudice* is a powerful tool for critiquing the social conventions and gender roles of her time. Through her portrayal of the characters and her critique of social norms, she is able to engage readers in a way that is both entertaining and thought-provoking, while also highlighting the absurdity and limitations of her society. The enduring legacy of *Pride and Prejudice* is a testament to the power of satire to challenge and engage readers on a wide range of social and cultural issues.





## GENERAL OVERVIEW OF JANE AUSTIN'S LIFE

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We don't know that much about Jane Austen's life because after her death her sister burned most of her letters.

- However, here's what we do know:
  - Jane Austen was born in 1775 to an Anglican clergyman and his wife;
    - Austin's father supplemented his income as rector of Steventon by taking pupils, alongside whom he would teach his own children .
  - As the seventh child in the family, Jane was mostly taught at home
    - and sometimes she wasn't taught at all, although she
      - and her sister did go to a year or two of boarding school.
  - She was educated in part by her older brothers,
    - two of whom were to become clergymen,
    - while two others rose to the rank of admiral in the Navy,
    - and yet another, Edward, was through adoption made a member of the landed gentry.
  - The wide range of activities within the Austen family –
    - country walks,
    - charades,
    - reading,
    - writing stories
    - and family plays –
      - constituted a rich informal education for the children,
        - and stimulated Jane Austen's ambition to become a novelist.
          - Her formal education at boarding schools in Oxford, Southampton and Reading was certainly brief and relatively unimportant.
  - When she was eleven, Jane started writing
    - plays
    - and novels
      - mostly social satires and parodies of “novels of sensibility,”
        - a literary genre in which women cry, sigh and faint a lot.
      - Many of these early works were in the style of the epistolary novel,
        - which is a story composed of letters
          - we see echoes of that form in *Pride and Prejudice*.
            - We also see some echoes of *Pride and Prejudice* in Austen's life.

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## JANE AUSTIN'S EXPERIENCES WITH MARRIAGE

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While in her teens, and learning her craft as a novelist, Jane Austen shrewdly observed the rural community among whom she lived,

- and attended such social activities as the fashionable balls held in nearby towns.
  - Neither she nor her devoted sister, Cassandra, married.
    - Cassandra was engaged, but her fiance was tragically drowned;





- Jane herself became engaged to a friend of her brother's, only to break off the engagement next day.
  - Unlike Charlotte-Lucas in *Pride and Prejudice*, she was unwilling to marry someone she did not love for the sake of
    - status,
    - security
    - and a home of her own.

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## AUSTIN'S LIFE REFLECTED IN THE NOVEL

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She never married, but she did receive at least one proposal that she accepted for a few hours.

- And after her father's death in 1805, her financial position and the positions of her mother and her sister became increasingly insecure.
  - By 1816, four of her books had been published.
    - And she was working on a new novel, called *Sanditon*, when she died in 1817, at the age of just 41
      - Two more of her works, *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey*, were published after her death.
        - However, *Pride and Prejudice* is generally considered the most precise and perfect of them

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## WHAT HAPPENS IN PRIDE AND PREJUDICE?

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Her father retired in 1801 and the family moved to Bath,

- a city less fashionable than it had been half a century before.
  - Jane Austen was never happy there, nor in Southampton,
    - where they moved in 1805, after her father's death;
      - but in 1809 her brother Edward offered his mother and sisters a small country house at Chawton, on his Hampshire estate .
        - It was here that Jane Austen, now a favourite maiden aunt with her brother's children, wrote and revised earlier work,
          - achieving sufficient literary success to attract the attention of the Prince Regent,
            - to whom *Emma* was dedicated when it was published in 1815.
              - During 1816 Jane Austen became an invalid and in May 1817 she took lodgings in Winchester, to be near a good doctor;
                - but at that time little could be done for Addison's disease, from which she died on 18th July 1817. A devout Christian, she was buried in Winchester Cathedral





## GENERAL BACKGROUND: PART 1

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Jane Austen lived through a turbulent period of our history.

- During most of her adult life, Britain was at war with revolutionary France (1793-1815), while at home a traditional agricultural economy and culture was being gradually transformed by a rapidly developing industrial revolution.
  - The aristocratic eighteenth century was challenged by radical political thinkers,
    - who argued for greater democracy,
    - and a new evangelism,
      - far removed from formal religion, spread a living faith among all sections of society ,
        - including the new industrial working class.

## GENERAL BACKGROUND: PART 2

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The fact is, however, that none of the political turbulence is portrayed in the novels.

- What Jane Austen needed, as a novelist , was not the broad canvas of Europe torn apart by the Napoleonic wars,
  - but, as she herself wrote, '[3 or 4 Families in a Country Village](#)'.
    - If she makes a vague mention of peace in the last chapter of *Pride and Prejudice*, she does so, not because of any importance in the event itself,
      - but because it gives Lydia and Wickham an opportunity to set up a home of their own.
        - It may well be that Jane Austen was brought into contact with broader, more public issues than her novels deal with,
          - but as a writer she deliberately restricts herself to portraying the commonplace events of people 'of her own class, living quiet, rural lives that are barely touched by the momentous happenings of history.'
            - Even the Industrial Revolution is ignored ,
              - except in so far as it is implied in the portrayal of such a character as Bingley, who has no settled family estate and wishes to emulate well-established gentry like Darcy by buying one out of the fortune made by his father in the North –
                - that is, in such cities as Manchester and Liverpool , where there was a rapid expansion of grim, industrial slums.

## CULTURAL BACKGROUND: THE AGE OF REASON AND ENLIGHTENMENT

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The cultural background to the novels is also of importance.





- Jane Austen's life coincides approximately with the first phase of the great shift in culture we call Romanticism
  - The eighteenth century boasted it was the Age of Reason and Enlightenment.
    - Men believed that they lived in 'the best of possible worlds' and that science both explained the design of the universe and held out the hope of indefinite progress for the future.
      - According to this tidy view of life,
        - art,
        - nature
        - and human nature
          - could all be explained by rational principles, and the head was held to prevail over the heart .

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## CULTURAL BACKGROUND: ROMANTICISM

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The Romantic Movement attempted to reverse principles of the Age of Reason and Enlightenment by championing

- intuition,
- the emotions
- and the imagination,
  - in opposition to the tyranny of the intellect.
    - The strength of the Age of Reason lay in
      - its balanced judgement,
      - restraint,
      - good sense
      - and good taste,
    - all of which matter enormously in the work of Jane Austen,
      - who is rather backwards-looking in the values she affirms.
        - But, as she well knew, these values could be perverted into deadening and inflexible conformity.
          - The strength of Romanticism lay in
            - its reverence for the emotions
            - and personal intuition,
              - and Jane Austen respects and realises this.
          - But Romanticism also tends to
            - sensationalism,
            - egotism
            - and eccentricity,
            - and she brings her eighteenth-century good sense and satire to bear on all such excesses







## HOW AUSTEN DELIBERATELY SUBVERTS NOVELS OF EXCESS

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In literature, these excesses were conspicuously found in the so-called Gothic novels,

- the most popular fiction of the period.
  - They were potboilers of
    - extreme violence
    - and sadism,
  - designed to make flesh creep with their improbable heroines undergoing nightmarish adventures in ivied ruins in desolate wastes haunted by the ghosts of long-dead nuns and monks.
    - In another early novel, *Northanger Abbey*, Jane Austen splendidly burlesques and ridicules these romances,
      - but in *Pride and Prejudice* she deliberately gives us a novel at the opposite extreme from such fiction.
        - It is domestic,
        - confined,
        - unadventurous
        - and restrained.
      - The values it affirms are basically those of the eighteenth century at its best –
        - practical good sense,
        - good taste,
        - civilised respect for other people –
        - but there is also a recognition that the individual matters as an individual and that sincere and genuine feelings are of paramount importance, and this recognition draws on what is best in the Romantic tradition.

