
UNIT 1 THE NOVEL IN ITS CONTEXT

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 The Eighteenth Century in Europe
 - 1.2.1 Conditions in England
 - 1.2.2 The Enlightenment
 - 1.2.3 The Beginnings of Romanticism
 - 1.2.4 Jane Austen's Work in the Context of the Romantic Movement
 - 1.2.5 The Rise of the Novel
 - 1.2.6 Jane Austen and the Development of the Realist Novel
- 1.3 Jane Austen's Life and Works
- 1.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.5 Glossary
- 1.6 Questions
- 1.7 Suggested Reading

1.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit is meant to provide a general introduction to *Pride and Prejudice* by looking at the immediate social and cultural environment in which it is written and situated, and by relating the text to the eighteenth century tradition of realistic fiction.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

A study of the intellectual and historical context as part of the study of a literary work might be undertaken with two main aims. The first of these is to try and recover some of the thought-patterns and influences that the author comes in contact with, whether or not consciously. These need not necessarily be seen only as forming a 'background' against which the text is written, but as playing into the text and constituting it along with other texts, not all of them fictional ones. Intertextuality is thus one of the areas such a study is interested in. The second is a consequence of the first, and involves looking at the implications of authorial choices of form, genre and language in relation to the influences mentioned above.

1.2 THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY IN EUROPE

The eighteenth century is usually spoken of as a period of supposed stability in Europe, but can in fact be seen as one of the most turbulent periods in European history, with considerable social unrest as one of its features. There were important and widespread changes in the social and political consciousness of Europe at this time, with peasants beginning to move from rural estates to the towns, increased trade, communication and travel as well as the economic gains and contact with other cultures brought about by imperialism.

This is also a period associated with revolution. The fast-growing middle classes resented having to pay taxes to support an expensive aristocracy which contributed little economically to society (except in the form of patronage of the arts) but retained social privilege and political power. The most extreme form taken by this

dissatisfaction was of course the Revolution in France, but its impact was much wider, and was felt all over Europe.

The French Revolution began in 1789, on July 14 of which year the Bastille was stormed, and the king (Louis XVI) was removed from the court at Versailles. The Revolution then moved through several, increasingly radical phases, beginning with the establishment of a constitutional monarchy, going on to the eventual abolition of the monarchy and the execution of the king, followed by the Reign of Terror (1793-1793), the establishment of a new government called the Directory and the eventual rise of Napoleon Bonaparte who became Emperor in 1804. The French Revolution greatly influenced British politics and philosophy at the time, but there was a gradual shift away from the early enthusiasm with which English radicals like Paine and Godwin had greeted it — Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) is proof of this. Paine replied to this work with *The Rights of Man* (1791) thus setting off a long-lasting debate between conservative and radical thinkers. Wordsworth and Coleridge, interestingly were both to eventually change their minds about the French Revolution, as they were forced to acknowledge that, far from its professed aims of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, it had come to mean anarchy and cruelty.

1.2.1 Conditions in England

Class divisions continued to be fairly rigid in England at least, though Jane Austen does in her novels explore the beginnings of class mobility. This period has been considered the most violent in English history since the Civil War, and it also witnessed a repression of the citizen's rights in the form of restrictions on the freedom of speech and assembly, and a suspension of *habeas corpus*. In addition, survival was difficult for the vast majority of the population, and the extremes of wealth and poverty coexisted in close proximity, a situation more or less guaranteed to give rise to dissatisfactions. A fast-growing population which began to be concentrated in the new industrial areas whose development went along with the gradual enclosing of land to provide larger arable holdings, something Jane Austen must have seen at close quarters, since she lived in Hampshire and Kent, both areas of agricultural poverty. These enclosures, in turn, gave rise to a greater accumulation of the poor in urban areas. Mortality rates were high in the congested cities. Dr. Johnson once estimated that at least a thousand persons died each year in London from hunger and related diseases, and was told that this was a considerable underestimation. Though social reform was beginning to be an issue among many, it was not yet strong enough to overcome the more common attitude of a strong fear of popular unrest. This was also a period that saw the emergence of modern capitalism in the shift from a mainly agrarian economy to an increasingly industrialized one centered upon the market. The result of England's having gone through — and survived—a political revolution in the seventeenth century, made it possible, paradoxically, for democracy to develop despite the restoration of the monarchy. James II (a Catholic) who came to the English throne in 1685, was overthrown by Protestant Slateman under William of Orange, who invaded England in 1688, forcing James to flee to France. The English Parliament then crowned William and his wife Mary, but also passed legislations severely restricting the powers of the sovereign.

Along with these economic and political developments came deeper social changes, and a questioning of the very idea of society, its supposed nature as a civilising force, and its values. This scepticism about society —clearly present in Jane Austen's work—does seem restricted to writers and thinkers, and though it spread gradually, a far-reaching change in the middle-class values of the time cannot be supposed to have been an immediate result. The prevalent intellectual mood of the time is an interesting one in that it combines a belief in the progress of human capacities and in the universals of 'Nature' and 'Reason' with a questioning and even a subversion of the optimism that saw 'man' as a fulfilled and enlightened being. This optimism can

be most clearly seen in a phrase often repeated at the time, 'the Age of Improvement'. Such 'improvement' carries connotations of a self-satisfied pride in the progress of human knowledge (significantly, this was also the time when encyclopedias first appeared), a pride not particularly tempered by the acknowledgement of the divine that had remained present even in the humanism of the Renaissance. One area where such 'improvement' manifested itself, and which is early satirized by Jane Austen, is that of 'landscape improvement' and the improvement of old country houses like Southerton Court in *Mansfield Park*. In *Pride and Prejudice*, one of the things Elizabeth most admires about the grounds at Pemberley (and this is intended to be commendatory of its owner, Darcy) is the fact that they have not been subjected to such improvement, and retain a natural appearance.

1.2.2 The Enlightenment

The "enlightenment" is the name commonly given to an intellectual movement usually associated with the eighteenth century, though its origins can be traced back to a period earlier than that. Its most important feature is a belief in reason as a defining characteristic of human beings. Along with this goes the idea that reason, if correctly used, is the right weapon against superstition and tyranny. Reason is thus considered perfectly consistent with revolution. The roots of the Enlightenment have been traced by some scholars to a period as far back as the 13th century, which saw a renewed interest in, and appropriation of, Aristotelian logic by the medieval scholastic theologian Thomas Aquinas who used the logical procedures elaborated by Aristotle, to defend the dogmas of Christianity, thus bringing together two concepts (those of 'faith' and 'logic') which had been largely polarized before this period. This method of using logic could not, however, remain confined to the church's purpose of upholding its teachings, and as had happened in the pagan culture of its origin; it eventually began to be used to question traditional ideas and beliefs. The Renaissance Humanists, a group of thinkers in Italy and France in the 14th century, argued that the proper worship of God requires an admiration of his creation, and especially of humanity, as the 'crown' of that creation. Of all creation, humanity alone has the power of creation, and since this power is seen as a divine one, humans are therefore not only created in the image of God but also share his creative power. 'Reason' in the Enlightenment usually refers to common sense, powers of observation and deduction, and scepticism in thought and the exercise of this faculty becomes a moral duty for human beings. This was however only one strand of thought in the seventeenth century, and one by no means strong enough to overcome the dogma and fanaticism which manifested itself in witch-hunts and wars of religion and of imperial conquest. The idea of 'Nature', inherited along with other Renaissance absolutes of 'goodness', 'truth' and 'reason', is not during this period a fixed or uniform one, and continues to change and evolve with time. To begin with, it means whatever is 'original' and precedes 'culture' or human civilization, but this notion gives way to a different conception that sees the fullest development of nature in art and civilization. A third view is that of nature as an inner moral law that is imprinted in the minds of human beings. 'Nature' is thus appropriated by very different – and often mutually opposed – streams of thought, and variously made to fit the purposes of ethics, satire, science, religion and politics. Neoclassicism, a literary movement that advocated the close study of, and imitation of, classical writers (especially the Romans) extended the pursuit of 'balance' and 'proportion' to literature. Writers like Dryden, Pope and Johnson emphasized the need for order and harmony as a safeguard against the folly and excess to which human society is prone.

One of the concerns most closely identified with Enlightenment thought is the epistemological strain that studies the concept, the nature and the possible extent of human knowledge. The main questions posed by this kind of philosophic thought are what it means to know something, whether we can know anything at all, and if so how much and in what ways. 'Knowledge' is now conceived as a conceptual category rather than a quantifiable entity. 'Truth' cannot be demonstrably proven or asserted, but could be recognized instead as a relative and culturally contingent idea. It follows that if 'truth' (or 'virtue') is not an eternally relevant absolute, that morality

also becomes relative and cannot be imposed on anyone. Descartes sees the knowledge of one's own existence as the minimum of human knowledge, and allies it with the human power of thought.

Good sense is of all things in the world the most equally distributed, for everybody thinks himself so abundantly provided with it that even those most difficult to please in all other matters do not commonly desire more of it than they already possess. It is unlikely that this is an error on their part; it seems rather to be evidence in support of the view that the power of forming a good judgement and of distinguishing the true from the false, which is properly speaking what is called good sense or reason, is by nature equal in all men. (James Fieser (ed.) (1996) Descartes. *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting the Reason and seeking for Truth in the Sciences* 1637, Internet Release)

This passage provides an example of the Enlightenment 'absolutes' of 'reason' and 'good sense', locating them in 'nature' and in doing so, offering a definition of the latter term. The human (more specifically the social) behaviour that resulted from ideas such as these are certainly satirized by more than one writer in the eighteenth century, Jane Austen among them.

The Enlightenment has been criticized by current literary and cultural theorists, as much for its ideals as for its failure to live up to them, but its confidence in human 'nature' and human capacity has certainly decisively shaped the subsequent intellectual history of Europe and the Enlightenment notions of human rights and religious tolerance, even if they have been often deviated from in practice, remain among the most powerful principles in the public life of the twentieth century, and can be seen to be behind the various liberationist movements that have emerged during this period. The following quote from the theorist Michel Foucault, provides yet another idea of why the Enlightenment is essential to subsequent Western thought's understanding of itself. For Foucault, the enlightenment does not predate the 'modern' but is its starting point:

... we find ourselves asking whether modernity constitutes the sequel to the Enlightenment and its development, or whether we are to see it as a rupture or a deviation with respect to the basic principles of the 18th century. I wonder whether we may not envisage modernity rather as an attitude than as a period of history. I do not pretend to be summarizing in these few lines either the complex historical event that was the Enlightenment, at the end of the eighteenth century, or the attitude of modernity in the various guises it may have taken on during the last two centuries. I have been seeking, on the one hand, to emphasize the extent to which a type of philosophical interrogation, one that simultaneously problematizes man's relation to the present, man's historical mode of being, and the constitution of the self as an autonomous subject is rooted in the Enlightenment ... We must never forget that the Enlightenment is an event, or a set of events and complex historical processes, that is located at a certain point in the development of European societies. As such, it includes elements of social transformation, types of political institution, forms of knowledge, projects of rationalization of knowledge and practices, technological mutations that are very difficult to sum up in a word, even if many of these phenomena remain important today. (Foucault, 1984)

I quote the passage at length because it seems to me to convey very clearly a feature of the Enlightenment that we tend to ignore, namely its plurality. This is also evident from the fact that much of the Augustan attempt to protect inherited absolutes by looking to the past came from the awareness of imminent change. Once we get away from a picture of the Enlightenment as a unified and monolithic event or moment in history, we are better placed to look at Jane Austen's novels as drawing on many

quite different contemporary strands of thought, and also to see them as attempting to deal with a fast-changing reality instead of a supposedly 'stable' one.

1.2.3 The Beginning of Romanticism

The Romantic movement in Europe roughly covers the period from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century. Though it involves a move away from the scientific and critical rationalism of the empirical thinkers (Locke and Hume in particular) its stress on 'Nature' as an ideal places it very much within the Enlightenment, of which it could be seen as one of the main developments. Romanticism dissociated 'nature' from civilization, in favour of primitivism, and began to replace the linking of nature with 'reason' by allying it instead with the imagination or 'fancy'. The stress came to be on human subjectivity as well as on the subjectivity of the external world, since the imagination was seen as creating and projecting its own world.

M.H Abrams in *The Mirror and the Lamp* identifies one of the constitutive elements of the very gradual rise of the Romantic world-view in the shift from the eighteenth-century view of nature to the idea that "the mind is creative in perception, and an integral part of an organically inter-related universe." Though Abrams is speaking specifically with regard to Wordsworth, the statement is also more broadly applicable and is useful for an understanding of Romanticism in general. Wordsworth, according to this reading, remains within the eighteenth century tradition of thought in many crucial ways despite some radical departures from it, the most important of these being the belief in a universal human nature (chiefly characterized by reason and feeling) and the idea that the shared opinions and feelings of mankind are the best basis for the aesthetic. This does go to show that the development of Romanticism need not be seen only in opposition to Enlightenment thought (or, to put it simply, the nineteenth century did not necessarily shape itself as against the preceding period) but that one is the eventual – one might even say the necessary—development of the other. Wordsworth ought not to be ignored in this context, because though he is commonly thought of as belonging to a period later than Jane Austen by virtue of their being respectively, a 'Romantic' poet and an 'Augustan' novelist, they were in fact contemporaries. Though he does not figure among Jane Austen's mentioned favourite poets (Cowper and Crabbe are the best known of them) Wordsworth was already a major poet by 1811 when her first novel was published.

One of the defining traits of Romanticism is the tendency to privilege individual experience and expression over the collective or the social. Personal 'sensibility' might thus override the categories of race, sex and class. In literature this means a strong emphasis on subjectivity, on spontaneous expression and on the internalising of all experience. These features of Romanticism clearly emerge (not necessarily without criticism) in Jane Austen's work. Look for instance at the way in which Elizabeth's personal 'prejudice' causes her to think in a certain way about both Wickham and Darcy, and to act according to a completely subjective reality – insofar as it is real to her—which has very little to do with things as they actually are, or turn out to be. All the same, the fact that there is finally one unequivocal truth which emerges at the end of the novel, and not simply everyone's own version of the truth, prevents this 'subjectivity' from being carried to the extremes that are explored by later Romantic and modernist literature. I think that the *nature* of this truth itself, is less crucial in the text than the *process* by which it is reached by the main characters, and would cite as evidence of this the fact that there is no moment of revelation independent of Elizabeth's consciousness, and that the reader has been led astray along with her. What do you think?

1.2.4 Jane Austen's work in the context of the Romantic movement.

Jane Austen's work does take into account the two opposing sets of impulses that emerge in the two decades (1798-1818) when she wrote most of her novels. This is a transitional period in English literature, since it combined the eighteenth century

concern with the social context of human beings with the romantic emphasis on the individual self in isolation. Meenakshi Mukherjee sees Jane Austen's major contribution as the extension of the 'self' (which had so far been all-male) to include woman. Jane Austen wrote and published her novels when the Romantic movement in literature had begun to emerge, though her novels are usually read as part of the eighteenth century tradition of reason and good sense which this movement reacted against. She ridicules the lack of realism, falsities of sentiment and lack of psychological veracity in the treatment of character in the novels of sensibility and the gothic novels which enjoyed great popularity in her time. Her first novel, *Northanger Abbey* (published in 1817 after her death) exposes through parody the sentiments and perceptions associated with gothic romances and *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) similarly points out the danger of an uncritical acceptance of the cult of sensibility.

Jane Austen's refusal to include magical, miraculous or fantastic elements in her writing, her distrust of emotional effusiveness, and her choice of ordinary human beings instead of grand or heroic figures as characters for her novels, must be seen in the context of the rise of the novel earlier in the eighteenth century, when 'realism' intended to affirm a 'scientific' outlook and democratic values — the newly ascendant middle classes defined these against the fatalism and mysticism of the romances. But Romanticism is more than a re-assertion of outmoded and earlier discarded irrationalities — it also voices dissatisfaction with the inherited ideals of rationality and good sense. The instinctive and passionate self of Romantic literature also repudiates what it saw as the repressive and qualified uniformity of these ideals. Jane Austen has been, on the one hand, accused of ignoring this aspect of Romanticism, and on the other, identified as one of its initiators in the genre of fiction. Ruth Vanita, for instance, sees Jane Austen as a Romantic novelist because of her interest in the juxtaposition of inner and outer worlds, the movement of the individual consciousness between these worlds, and the insistence in the novels on love and friendship as the best basis for human community.

Do pause for a moment here and consider the nature of 'Romanticism' as a literary category. I think it is important to remember that while we need to posit this and other such categories, to place each individual author firmly in one category or the other is a more suspect enterprise. Suppose that we were to look at 'Romantic' texts in terms of certain shared features that they might possess in very varying degrees, instead of necessary conditions that they must conform to in order to be accepted within this category. There do remain authors and texts that can inhabit two categories simultaneously, and Jane Austen seems to me to be one of them, being both Romantic and Augustan. The question as to whether the presence of such authors or even genres (the domestic novel for instance has usually been considered less of a 'Romantic' genre than the lyric poem) can bring about a redefinition of the categories themselves, is a rather more complex one which I shan't go into here.

1.2.5 The Rise of the Novel

The emergence of the novel as a form of realistic narrative in the eighteenth century came about with an acceleration in the changes that had been taking place in the social structures of Europe since the Renaissance. The narrative form of the romance represented the values and attitudes of a feudal society, both hierarchical and relatively static, which was challenged by the expansion of market forces. Classes and groups associated with trade and manufacture now gained ascendancy in society, a development that brought along a confidence in human power to change one's own existence or destiny. Religion was correspondingly redefined with a stress on the individual's spiritual experience and the emergence of a secular morality based on the idea of personal responsibility. This new set of values is embodied in the novel during its development in the earlier half of the eighteenth century with the writings of Defoe, Fielding and Richardson. In the process, the novel took the form of realism and adopted the necessary technical devices to embody in a narrative form the

thought and values which (for purposes of convenience) we call enlightenment humanism. The new genre was challenging enough in its emergence to call for comparisons with the 'heroic' genre of the epic.

1.2.6 Jane Austen's Work and the Development of the Realist Novel

By the time we come to Jane Austen, a decline in the significance of the novel had taken place, in order to consider which we have to look at the concrete form taken by enlightenment humanism in the eighteenth century. Towards the end of the seventeenth century, as a consequence of the compromise effected through the Glorious Revolution of 1688, the same classes which had earlier been engaged in a bitter conflict over state power, came together in a relatively unified social formation, consisting of large sections of landed aristocracy, the rural gentry and the middle classes associated with the professions and with trade and industry. A workable consensus evolved from different interpretations of the values of enlightenment humanism, to create the ideals of reason and good sense. The 'consensus' mentioned above did not however have a fixed meaning despite its apparent structural unity, since different sections of society viewed it differently according to their comparative strength and the scope of their perspective for accommodating a variety of opinion. All the major novelists of the eighteenth century show an awareness of these inner contradictions and tensions, and as attempts to project them in their works. One of their concerns was to develop effective technical devices to embody all the aspects of Augustan culture, including its contradictions. One of these contradictions relates to the space to be provided to the individual in the community. While the landed aristocracy was not sufficiently responsive to the individual need for an assertion of personal identity, large sections of the rural gentry and the middle classes associated with the professions, trade and industry were prepared to concede a much wider area of freedom to the individual. However, even here, the individual freedom of women was severely restricted. Both Fielding and Richardson deal with the problematic nature of the relation between the individual and society, and try to resolve the problem through a plot where the rights of the individual are somehow balanced by his or her obligations to society. The treatment of the theme of love and marriage in the works of both these writers reflects their position on these important issues, though Richardson might be said to give greater importance to the subjectivity of the characters than Fielding does.

Another source of tension was the split between the idealistic aspirations of the individual and the materialism of society. These conflicts both found expression in, and influenced the development of the realist novel—particularly the novel of social and domestic comedy—in England. The literary device of the judicious observer and commentator became a method used by novelists, not only to highlight the existence of these tensions, but also to stress the need for finding a resolution. A third contradiction is present in the conflict of class interests. Within the apparently unified social formation consisting of different classes and groups, there existed incessant competition, and as the century advanced, the terms were increasingly weighted in favour of the industrial and commercial classes. Richardson's *Pamela* offers an example of a comic resolution of this conflict of class interests, effected through the incorporation of the deserving lower-class individual into the higher class. One of the strengths of Fielding and Richardson is that they evolved a narrative form which was flexible enough to register these contradictory aspirations as well as to suggest a suitable method for their resolution.

By the time of Fanny Burney and Maria Edgeworth, who were Jane Austen's immediate predecessors, the differences in the perspectives and attitudes of the different classes and factions of society seems to have become almost intractable. Since these writers place women characters at the centre of their work, they are even better able to portray the problematic relationship between the individual and society. In doing so their novels become sentimental and unrealistic, because of the exaggeration and hyperbole as well as the inability either to repudiate the consensus

which appears unsatisfactory to them, or the confidence to find a viable solution to the problem.

As noted earlier in this unit, Jane Austen consciously and deliberately identified herself with the eighteenth century tradition of realism in the novel though she doesn't imitate the methods and techniques developed by her predecessors, or adopt their values and attitudes. Instead she makes creative use of an inherited tradition to deal with the issues and problems of contemporary social developments, to try and find a proper comic resolution to conflicts, while continuing to show an awareness of their acuteness. She came from a section of the gentry which had strong links with the middle classes belonging to the professions, trade and industry, and which played an important role in working towards a resolution of these conflicts because it had a real interest in preserving stability. The "universal truths" of the Augustan ideal – reason and good sense—are stated in her texts but are then subjected to an ironical subversion.

1.3 JANE AUSTEN'S LIFE AND WORKS

I shall here offer only a brief outline of Jane Austen's life, and suggest that you read at least one of the many available biographies which offer more detailed analyses of her personal experience in relation to her work.

Jane Austen was born on the 16th of December, 1775 at Steventon in Hampshire. She was the seventh of the eight children, (and the second daughter) of the Rev. George Austen who was the local rector, and his wife Cassandra, (*née* Leigh). Jane Austen's father had a fairly respectable income of about £600 a year, and belonged to the landed gentry, but was certainly not a rich man. His wife, however, belonged to a family (the Leighs) which was proud of its aristocratic links. Since the couple ran a boy's school at the parsonage where they lived, Jane and her brothers and sisters grew up alongside the students, and as a child, Jane was (like Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey*) both fond of and well-acquainted with boy's games:

In 1783, when Jane was eight years old, she was sent, along with her sister Cassandra, to a school run by a Mrs. Cowley (who was the sister of one of their uncles), first in Southampton and later in Oxford, but they returned home after an infectious disease broke out at the school. Two years later, in 1785, they were sent to the Abbey Boarding school in Reading, on which Mrs. Goddard's school in *Emma* is supposedly based. In her parents' opinion, Jane was actually too young to go to school, but reportedly insisted on accompanying Cassandra, from whom she was inseparable – her mother said of the situation that "if Cassandra's head had been going to be cut off, Jane would have hers cut off too". Except for the short periods of time she spent at these schools, Jane Austen received no other formal education outside her family. She did learn, along with her sister, the accomplishments – chief among them how to draw and play the piano – considered necessary for girls. She also read quite widely and was acquainted with both the serious and the popular literature of the day, including the novels of Fielding, Richardson and Fanny Burney (the title for *Pride and Prejudice* is taken from a phrase in Burney's *Cecilia*.) The three novels that she praised in her famous "Defense of the Novel" in *Northanger Abbey* were Burney's *Cecilia* and *Camilla*, and Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* and she once wrote that she and her family "were great novel readers, and not ashamed of being so." One of the favourite pastimes at the rectory was the staging of amateur theatricals, which throws an interesting light on the apparent disapproval of play-acting in *Mansfield Park*, causing some critics to see it as influenced by the changed moral climate of a period closer to the Victorian age, than that of Jane Austen's childhood. Jane Austen wrote her *Juvenilia* between 1787 and 1793. This early work consists mainly of parodies of prevailing literary trends (such as in *Love and Friendship*) which were later collected in three manuscript volumes. Usually dedicated to one or the other of

her relatives or family friends, and circulated among the same circle, these pieces are clearly written above all for the amusement of her family.

Jane Austen had begun work on earlier versions of *Sense and Sensibility*, *Mansfield Park*, and *Northanger Abbey* between 1795 and 1799. Their working titles were *Elinor and Marianne*, *First Impressions* and *Susan* respectively. But *First Impressions* was refused by the publisher to whom Jane Austen's father showed the manuscript in 1797.

Jane Austen apparently enjoyed social events like balls and parties, and was particularly fond of dancing – a famous (though clearly malicious) description of her by one Mrs. Mitford calls her “The prettiest, silliest, most affected, husband-hunting butterfly” that she could remember. An early romance (in 1795-6) that ended because of a lack of money on both sides, may have been an unhappy experience that surfaces in the analysis of money and marriage in the novels. Jane Austen eventually never married. After her father's death in 1805, Jane, along with her mother and sister, moved to Bath, staying there only a few months before going on to Southampton, and from there to Hampshire in 1809.

In 1803, *Northanger Abbey* was sold to a publisher, but it did not appear in print until fourteen years later, while *Sense and Sensibility* appeared anonymously (“By a Lady”) in 1811. *Pride and Prejudice*, as *First Impressions* had now been renamed, was sold in November 1812, and published in January 1813, to a favourable reception and the first edition was followed by another later in the same year. A second edition of *Sense and Sensibility* was published in October 1813, followed by *Mansfield Park* in 1814, while she had already started work on *Emma*, which appeared in December 1815. *Persuasion* was begun in August 1815 and completed exactly a year later. She started work on another novel, *Sandition* in 1817, but had to give it up because of her increasing ill-health. She died at Winchester on July 18, 1817, (of a disease undiagnosed at the time, but later conjectured to have been either Addison's disease or ‘trigeminal neuralgia’) and was buried in Winchester Cathedral. *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey* were published posthumously toward the end of 1817 in a combined edition of four volumes, with a “Biographical Notice of the Author” by her brother Henry.

1.4 LET US SUM UP

The Enlightenment is looked at as the manifestation of the intellectual and political conditions prevalent in Europe during the course of the eighteenth century. Jane Austen's work is then considered in the context of the Romantic movement which begins to emerge at this moment in history. Secondly, the rise of the novel and of the genre of realist fiction to which Jane Austen's work belongs, are traced with a view to placing her work within a certain literary tradition, and also looking at the ways in which it is constitutive of that tradition.

1.5 GLOSSARY

Habeas Corpus

Latin term used in a writ requiring a person to be brought before a judge or into court for the purpose specified in the writ.

Subjectivity

Consciousness of one's perceived states; the quality or condition of viewing things exclusively through the medium of one's own mind or individuality.

Universals

What is applicable to, or involves, all the individuals or species of a class or genus; an abstract or general concept regarded as having an absolute, mental, or nominal existence.

1.6 QUESTIONS

1. What are the main aspects of Enlightenment humanism which gave rise to the need for a new type of narrative in the eighteenth century?
2. Mention some of the technical devices used by novelists in the eighteenth century, which Jane Austen uses in a modified form.

1.7 SUGGESTED READING

- Willey, Basil *The Eighteenth Century Background*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1953.
- Foucault, Michel *What is Enlightenment: Was ist Aufklärung?* Unpublished ms.transl. Catherine Porter in Paul Rabinow ed. *The Foucault Reader*. New York: Pantheon, 1984.
- Watt, Ian *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1957.
- Uphaus, Robert Ed *The Idea of the Novel in the Eighteenth Century*. U.S.A: Colleagues Press, 1988.
- Tomalin, Clare *Jane Austen: A Life*. London: Viking, 1997, Penguin, 1988.