



Revised Edition

A Preface to Jane Austen

Christopher Gillie

ROUTLEDGE


Preface Books

A series of scholarly and critical studies of major writers intended for those needing modern and authoritative guidance through the characteristic difficulties of their work to reach an intelligent understanding and enjoyment of it.

General Editor: JOHN PURKIS

A Preface to Wordsworth (<i>Revised edn</i>)	JOHN PURKIS
A Preface to Donne (<i>Revised edn</i>)	JAMES WINNY
A Preface to Jane Austen (<i>Revised edn</i>)	CHRISTOPHER GILLIE
A Preface to Lawrence	GAMINI SALGADO
A Preface to Forster	CHRISTOPHER GILLIE
A Preface to Dickens	ALLAN GRANT
A Preface to Shelley	PATRICIA HODGART
A Preface to Keats	CEDRIC WATTS
A Preface to Orwell	DAVID WYKES
A Preface to Milton (<i>Revised edn</i>)	LOIS POTTER
A Preface to the Brontës	FELICIA GORDON
A Preface to T S Eliot	RON TAMPLIN
A Preface to Shakespeare's Tragedies	MICHAEL MANGAN
A Preface to Hopkins (<i>Second edn</i>)	GRAHAM STOREY
A Preface to James Joyce (<i>Second edn</i>)	SYDNEY BOLT
A Preface to Hardy (<i>Second edn</i>)	MERRYN WILLIAMS
A Preface to Conrad (<i>Second edn</i>)	CEDRIC WATTS
A Preface to Samuel Johnson	THOMAS WOODMAN
A Preface to Pope (<i>Second edn</i>)	I.R.F. GORDON
A Preface to Yeats (<i>Second edn</i>)	EDWARD MALINS with JOHN PURKIS

Maurice Hussey died suddenly in June 1991. The publishers and author would like to pay tribute to his wisdom, inspiration and friendship as Editor of Preface Books. He will be sadly missed.

The new General Editor of Preface Books is JOHN PURKIS.



Chawton. The cottage belonged to Jane Austen's brother Edward. He gave it to the widowed Mrs Austen in 1809. The first four of Jane Austen's novels were published while she lived here, and she only left it in 1817 when she moved to Winchester where in a few months she died.

A Preface to Jane Austen

Christopher Gillie

REVISED EDITION

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 1974 Addison Wesley Longman Limited
This edition 1985
Seventh impression 1996

Published 2013 by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

Copyright © 1974, 1985, Taylor & Francis.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Notices

Knowledge and best practice in this field are constantly changing. As new research and experience broaden our understanding, changes in research methods, professional practices, or medical treatment may become necessary.

Practitioners and researchers must always rely on their own experience and knowledge in evaluating and using any information, methods, compounds, or experiments described herein. In using such information or methods they should be mindful of their own safety and the safety of others, including parties for whom they have a professional responsibility.

To the fullest extent of the law, neither the Publisher nor the authors, contributors, or editors, assume any liability for any injury and/or damage to persons or property as a matter of products liability, negligence or otherwise, or from any use or operation of any methods, products, instructions, or ideas contained in the material herein.

ISBN 13: 978-0-582-35481-4 (pbk)

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Gillie, Christopher.

A Preface to Jane Austen. Revised edition.

(Preface books)

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

I. Austen, Jane, 1775–1817. 2. Novelists, English –
19th century – Biography. I. Title.

PR4036.G5 1985 823'.7 84-26160

To my daughter, Jane

CHRISTOPHER GILLIE is an Arts Tutor for the Open University having for a long period served Trinity Hall, Cambridge as a lecturer in English. Among other books he has compiled the *Longman Companion to English Literature* and in 1983 published the volume on E M Forster for the present series.

Contents

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	vii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	viii
FOREWORD	ix
INTRODUCTION	xi

PART ONE: BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

Chronological Table	2
1 <i>Character and Family Background</i>	7
2 <i>Religion</i>	16
Jane Austen and the Clergy	17
Candour	21
3 <i>Mysteries and Uncertainties</i>	23
4 <i>Juvenilia</i>	28
<i>Love and Freindship</i>	30
<i>Evelyn</i>	34
<i>Catharine</i>	36
Intervening Work	37

PART TWO: LITERARY BACKGROUND

5 <i>Augustan Sense and Sensibility</i>	41
Johnson and Conservative Reason: 'Rasselas'	45
Johnson and the Art of the Novel	47
Cowper and Sensibility	51
6 <i>Literary Contemporaries: Isolation and Involvement</i>	58
7 <i>The Eighteenth-century Novel</i>	65
Daniel Defoe, 1660–1731	66
Samuel Richardson, 1689–1761	68
Jonathan Swift, 1667–1745	73
Henry Fielding, 1707–54	76
Fanny Burney, 1752–1840	80
8 <i>The Arts and the Social Order</i>	87
Gilpin and the Picturesque	91
9 <i>Women in Life and Literature</i>	98
The Predicament of the Jane Austen Heroine	103

PART THREE: THE ART OF JANE AUSTEN

<i>10 Characterization: Heroines and Heroes</i>	109
The Caricatures	112
Minor Characters	115
The Heroines	115
The Heroes	119
Heroes and Heroines: Marriage and Money	121
<i>11 The Construction of the Novels</i>	123
The Fable of the Starling	123
Narrative Construction	126
Settings: the Ritual Entertainments	129
The Meaning of the Fable	131
<i>12 Emma</i>	133
Frank Churchill	142
Mr Knightley	144
<i>13 Jane Austen's Place in English Fiction</i>	149

PART FOUR: REFERENCE SECTION

Bibliography	165
Short Biographies	169
Jane Austen's Vocabulary	173
Places	176
Notes to Maps of Places in Jane Austen's Novels	180
Notes to Maps of London and Bath	183
INDEX	187

List of Illustrations

	page
'Bath' by John Claude Nattes	cover
Chawton: the cottage where Jane Austen wrote all her novels	frontispiece
Silhouettes of Jane Austen's parents	6
Godmersham Park, Kent, home of Thomas Knight	8
Steventon Parsonage	11
Walcot Church, Bath	19
Sidney Gardens, Bath	25
Jane Austen, by her sister Cassandra	29
Fanny Knight, Jane's favourite niece, daughter of her brother Edward	33
Samuel Johnson; two portraits by Sir Joshua Reynolds	44
William Cowper by L. F. Abbott	52
William Cowper by G. Romney	52
Samuel Richardson by J. Highmore	69
Henry Fielding, from an original by William Hogarth	78
Fanny Burney, by her cousin E. F. Burney	81
'The Cloakroom, Clifton Assembly Rooms, Bristol' by R. Sharples	84
Sketches by Humphrey Repton: improving the prospect from a small house	92
Pump Room, Bath	111
A barouche	114
A curricule	117
Specimen of Jane Austen's handwriting	127
'Lymc Regis' by J. M. W. Turner, with the Cobb in the distance	130
Polesden Lacey, Surrey	134
Steventon Parsonage	148
The house in College Street, Winchester, in which Jane Austen died	160
Harlestone Park, Northants	179
The geographical locations of Jane Austen's novels	181
The London of Jane Austen's novels	183
The Bath of Jane Austen's novels	185

Acknowledgements

I would like to record my gratitude to the General Editor, Maurice Hussey, for much useful advice, and particularly for drawing my attention to material for illustrations, to Professor Nikolaus Pevsner's essay, 'The Architectural Setting of Jane Austen's Novels' (*Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute*, Vol. 31, 1968) which is the source of our maps of Bath and London and to D. J. Greene's essay, 'Jane Austen and the Peerage' (*Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, Vol. 68, 1953).

The author and publisher are grateful to the following for permission to reproduce photographs:

Jane Austen Society and J. Butler Kearney, pages 33 and 148; Bath Municipal Libraries and Victoria Art Gallery, pages 25 and 111; Bristol City Art Gallery, page 84; British Museum, pages 19 and 127; British Tourist Authority, *frontispiece*; J. Butler Kearney, page 160; Courtauld Institute, page 117; Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum, page 130; A.F. Kersting, page 134; Major E. Knight and J. Butler Kearney, page 6 *below*; Mansell Collection, page 11; National Portrait Gallery, pages 29, 44 *both*, 52 *both*, 69 and 81; BBC Hulton Picture Library, pages 78 and 114; University Library Cambridge, pages 92 *both* and 179.

The painting of Bath by J. C. Nattes is reproduced on the cover by permission of the British Library.

Foreword

The centre of the world of Jane Austen lay in and near the county of Hampshire and had its outposts, usually for comparative purposes, in London, Lyme Regis, Bath and one or two areas not exactly on the map. All these locations are dominated by families, often obsessed with finance and the prospects of matrimonial alliances and occasionally alarmed by the unsatisfactory status of newcomers to the district. To accompany these observations she undoubtedly had notions of the appropriate architectural contexts though, as Sir Nikolaus Pevsner pointed out, she spent rather too little time in visualizing and verbalizing them. In this book we have provided one or two of such settings, but Christopher Gillie's main purpose has been to explore the social and moral themes that emerge from the conversations that provide the matrix of the novels. If they are social comedies they are shown to be also dramas of the conscience, the mind and the imagination that derive from the eighteenth-century situations and idioms which she recreated.

For the Revised Edition of this most successful study Mr Gillie has turned to several new and revealing topics and reviewed some of the most distinguished criticism and scholarship of the last decade. Social and political attitudes associated with the opening of the nineteenth century are prominently discussed on pages 59–61 and 99–101. A chronological table has been provided to help the reader define for himself the context of the popular and seminal novels associated always with her name. How we should read them today in order to understand the universal truths that nourish them is the preoccupation of the modern commentator, and to set these out in the most cogent manner has been Christopher Gillie's special concern in these pages.

MAURICE HUSSEY
General Editor

Maurice Hussey died suddenly in June 1991. The Publishers and author would like to pay tribute to his wisdom, inspiration and friendship as Editor of Preface Books. He will be sadly missed.

This page intentionally left blank

Introduction

'What do you read, Mr Masson?' said Mrs Merry.

'Very little off my own line, Mrs Merry. Miss Austen is the novelist I read the most.'

'What do you think of her books, Mr Fletcher?' said Delia to Francis.

'I am afraid, Miss Bentley, that I have very little use for books written by ladies for ladies, if I may so express myself; though I dare say I should be the better for them.'

'Oh, no, you would not. You could not be,' said Bumpus.

'It is the other way round,' said Masson.

IVY COMPTON-BURNETT: *Pastors and Masters* (1925)

Ivy Compton-Burnett, from whose second novel this extract is taken, invariably set her stories at the end of the nineteenth century or the beginning of this one. The conversation suggests fairly enough Jane Austen's reputation at the time: she was admired by a literary elite, including Tennyson, Macaulay, George Lewes and George Eliot; she was despised by the solemn, the pompous, the obtuse and the humourless. But she was also enjoyed by very many who found in her an assured and reassuring world for escape from the restless questionings of their own.

In the twentieth century a change has come about; the novelist Ivy Compton-Burnett to some extent illustrates it. No other novelist of distinction carried the mark of Jane Austen's influence so clearly, and yet her novels are sharp, pitiless, pessimistic analyses of human relations. The change is further indicated by this sentence from an essay entitled 'Regulated hatred: an aspect of the work of Jane Austen,' by D. W. Harding, first published in 1940 in *Scrutiny*: 'Her books are, as she meant them to be, read and enjoyed by precisely the sort of people whom she disliked: she is a literary classic of the society which attitudes like hers, held widely enough, would undermine.' How has this change come about—the change which has replaced Jane Austen the tranquillizer for the overstressed by Jane Austen the 'truth-teller' as Laurence Lerner has designated her?

Although she had discriminating admirers in the nineteenth century, none of them seems fully to have realized the subtlety and depth of her art, nor the perfection she brought to the novel form, which was to prove the chief vehicle of imaginative expression of the Victorian age. This is partly intelligible if we remember that she also culminated the eighteenth century art of fiction, and her six novels show some typically eighteenth-century assumptions about

society and about attitudes to human nature. The Victorians abandoned and often despised many of these assumptions, which involved a static view of the social order while they were deeply preoccupied by change, and an ironic, illusionless conception of human nature which they were apt to interpret as moral shallowness or cynicism. Cynicism is indeed the charge which many Victorians would have made about many of our own attitudes, and in this respect our temper of mind is closer to Jane Austen's than it is to theirs; this is perhaps the principal reason why most of the valuable Jane Austen criticism has been produced in the last half century. But in regard to her static view of society, it is by no means the case that she was incapable of any other: I end this book by suggesting that had she lived the normal term, she might have become the first of the great Victorian novelists.

Yet this would not necessarily have meant that we should now admire her later work even more than her earlier. What has caused critics of the twentieth century to recognize the true greatness of the work which she accomplished is a sense of its unusual modernity. This is an effect of the alertness of her consciousness. Whatever our terrible shortcomings, we have learned from our characteristic thinkers—our psychologists, anthropologists, and sociologists—that survival depends on how well we can understand ourselves, and that our understanding depends on what we can observe, on how well we can interpret the evidence, and on how far we can relate the different categories of evidence to one another. The novelists have had an important part in forming this modern consciousness because they give us an image of social man in which we can imaginatively participate, not merely facts available only to our analysis. Jane Austen was the first in our language to understand this novelistic function with full clarity, and few have understood it better since.

Part One

Biographical Background

Chronological Table

	LIFE AND WORKS	RELEVANT BACKGROUND
1764	George Austen (1731–1805) marries Cassandra Leigh (1739–1827). He is the rector of Steventon, Hampshire, in the gift of his relative Thomas Knight with estates in Hampshire and Kent.	
1775	16 December: Jane Austen born. Seventh of eight children: James (1765–1819); George (1766–1838); Edward (1768–1852); Henry (1771–1850); Cassandra (1773–1845); Francis (1774–1865); Charles (1779–1852).	Sheridan: <i>The Rivals</i>
1776		Adam Smith: <i>The Wealth of Nations</i>
1777		Henry Mackenzie: <i>Julia de Roubigné</i> Hannah More: <i>Percy</i> (a tragedy)
1778		Fanny Burney: <i>Evelina</i> Sheridan: <i>The School for Scandal</i>
1779		William Cowper: <i>The Olney Hymns</i>
1780		Samuel Johnson: <i>Lives of the Poets</i>
1781	An Austen cousin, Elizabeth Hancock, marries the Comte de Feuillide.	Rousseau: <i>Confessions</i>
1782		Burney: <i>Cecilia</i>
1783	Jane and Cassandra sent to school with Mrs Cawley, widow of the Principal of Brasenose, Oxford. School transferred to Southampton. Jane nearly dies of putrid fever.	End of American War of Independence George Crabbe: <i>The Village</i>

- 1784 Jane and Cassandra sent to Abbey School, Reading, under Mrs Latournelle. Cowper: *The Task*
Death of Samuel Johnson
- 1785 Education continued informally at home. Learns French, some Italian, the piano, and reads English literature extensively.
- 1787 Family theatricals (including *The Rivals*) in the Steventon barn. Jane begins to write sketches.
- 1789 Beginning of French Revolution
- 1790 *Love and Freindship*. Edmund Burke: *Reflections on the French Revolution*
- 1791 Edward marries Elizabeth Bridges. The *History of England*. Thomas Paine: *Rights of Man I*
- 1792 James marries Anne Mathew. *Evelyn, Catharine*, etc. Paine: *Rights of Man II*
Mary Wollstonecraft: *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*
- 1793 William Godwin: *Political Justice*
War with France; French Reign of Terror under the Jacobins
- 1794 Elizabeth de Feuillide's husband guillotined in France. Jane working at *Lady Susan*. Mrs Radcliffe: *The Mysteries of Udolpho*
Godwin: *Caleb Williams*
- 1795 Death of James's first wife. Cassandra engaged to Thomas Fowle. The Directory takes over the government of France
- 1796 Jane working at *Elinor and Marianne* (later *Sense and Sensibility*); *Susan* (later *Northanger Abbey*); *First Impressions* (later *Pride and Prejudice*). Burney: *Camilla*
Robert Bage: *Hermesprong*
William Wordsworth and Samuel Coleridge: *Lyrical Ballads*

- 1797 Death of Cassandra's fiancé, Thomas Fowle. James marries Mary Lloyd. Edward inherits Kent and Hampshire estates from Thomas Knight. Henry m. Elizabeth de F.
- 1799 Mrs Austen's sister-in-law, Mrs Leigh Perrot, arrested for shoplifting in Bath. Acquitted.
- 1800 Jane seems to have had a brief romance with a gentleman met at Sidmouth; he dies soon after. Death of Cowper
Maria Edgeworth: *Castle Rackrent*
- 1801 Edgeworth: *Belinda*
- 1802 Jane receives a proposal of marriage from Harris Bigg Wither; she accepts him but withdraws the next morning. Peace of Amiens
Walter Scott: *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*
- 1803 Sells the ms of *Northanger Abbey* for £10 to Crosby in expectation of publication. War with France renewed
- 1804 Visits Lyme Regis. Begins *The Watsons* (perhaps an early draft of *Emma*). The death of Mrs Lefroy, Jane's best friend. Napoleon declared Emperor of France
- 1805 Death of Jane's father. Mrs Austen and her daughters move to Southampton. Battle of Trafalgar
Scott: *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*
- 1807 Charles marries Fanny Palmer. Madame de Staël: *Corinne*
Crabbe: *The Parish Register*
Abolition of slave trade
- 1808 Scott: *Marmion*
Beginning of Peninsular War
- 1809 Mrs Austen and her daughters move to Chawton in Hampshire, on Edward's estate. Crosby returns the unpublished ms of *Northanger Abbey*. Hannah More: *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*
Death of Sir John Moore in Spain
- 1810 Scott: *The Lady of the Lake*
Crabbe: *The Borough*

- 1811 *Sense and Sensibility* published: 'a novel by a Lady'.
- 1812 *Pride and Prejudice* sent to publishers; *Mansfield Park* begun. Byron: *Childe Harold*
Crabbe: *Tales*; Napoleon invades Russia
- 1813 *Pride and Prejudice* published; well received. Jane's last visit to Edward at Godmersham. Southey: *Life of Nelson*
- 1814 *Mansfield Park* published; *Emma* begun. Restoration of the Bourbons in France
Scott: *Waverley*
- 1815 Jane Austen in London with Henry; the Prince Regent orders his librarian, James Clarke, to give her every attention. *Emma* consequently dedicated to the Prince Regent. Battle of Waterloo
Scott: *Guy Mannering*
- 1816 *Emma* published. Walter Scott's essay on Jane Austen in the *Quarterly Review*. Byron: *The Prisoner of Chillon*
Scott: *The Antiquary*; *Old Mortality*
- 1817 *Persuasion* completed and 'put upon the shelf for the present'. Jane Austen, having contracted Addison's disease, moves to Winchester for better medical attention. Dies on 18 July. John Keats: *Poems*
- 1818 Publication posthumously of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*. Mary Shelley: *Frankenstein*

Silhouettes of Jane Austen's parents, the Reverend George Austen and his wife, formerly Cassandra Leigh. Profiles in silhouette were in Jane Austen's day the equivalent of the modern photographic portrait.



I Character and Family Background

One of the most misleading facts that are widely known about Jane Austen is that her life was what is called 'uneventful'. Her biography can indeed be quickly summarized.

She was born on 16 December 1775, at her father's rectory at Steventon in Hampshire, the seventh in a family of eight children. She lived with her parents until the death of her father in 1805, and then with her mother until the year of her own death. The household moved from Steventon to Bath in 1801, from Bath to Southampton in 1806, from Southampton to the Hampshire village of Chawton in 1809. Every change of address represents, on the whole, a downward social direction. She died on 18 July 1817, in Winchester, where she and her sister Cassandra had taken lodgings so as to be near her doctor. Her death seems to have been due to a then obscure illness called Addison's Disease. She visited other places, including London and a number of country houses, but she scarcely left the south of England. She and her sister attended boarding-schools at Oxford, Southampton and Reading when she was between the ages of seven and nine, but she received most of her education at home. She never married, though she received at least one proposal; she may have had at least one love affair, but little is known about it except that it was not connected with the proposal. She seems to have had no direct relationships with any of the famous men and women of her time, unless we call the royal invitation to dedicate one of her novels to the Prince Regent a direct relationship. The memorable events seem to have been the publication of the novels: *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1815); after her death, *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, in December 1817.

What, apart from the novels, could appear more commonplace? And for that matter what could be more commonplace than the events in those novels? And yet, as novels, they are so far from being ordinary or commonplace that few by other writers contain so much quickness of life so well sustained. We do not judge them, of course, by the amount of shock they produce in the nervous system, but by their luminousness. Correspondingly, the facts about Jane Austen's life illuminate her art only in so far as we seek in them what is illuminating, not what is glamorous or startling.

To begin with the large family of which she was a member. The father, George Austen, came from stock which dated itself back to the class of medieval clothiers which were known as 'the Grey Coats of Kent'—'a body so numerous and united that at county elections whoever had their vote and interest was almost certain of being

