

# Analysis of Jane Austen's Love and Friendship

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## **Abstract:**

Jane Austen's early works are contained in three notebooks, all of which still exist today in various museums and libraries. "Love and Friendship" and "The History of England" are the two most notable works from her early writings." Love and Friendship" is an epistolary novella written when Austen was a teenager. It consists of letters from the heroine, Laura, to Marianne, the daughter of her friend Isabel. The story is a parody of romantic novels of the time. In it, Laura falls instantly in love with a mysterious stranger, Edward, who she almost immediately marries. Laura also meets a friend, Sophia, with whom she instantly connects in a way that is so ridiculous that it is clear that Austen was making fun of conventional stories of the day. The complex story has them undertaking perilous journeys, solving mysteries, and having adventures, all while fainting near-constantly in a clear parody of what women in romance novels would do. Ultimately, Edward and Sophia both die and Laura retires to the countryside to mourn. The story is complete with many of the cliches of Romantic era novels, including falling in love and friendship at first meeting, unexpected inheritances, and others.

**Keyword:** Love and Friendship

## **Full paper:**

This parody of sentimental fiction is Jane Austen's best-known juvenile work. It was written in 1790, when she was only 14, but did not appear in print until 1922.

Austen's novella is a mock epistolary romance consisting of 15 letters written by a woman named Laura to the daughter of her friend. In her first letter, Laura uses rhetoric typical of novels of sensibility when she offers to give an account of "the fortitude with which I have suffered the many Afflictions of my past Life" in the hopes that it will provide the girl with "a useful Lesson". Through Laura's narration of her own early adventures, Austen sends up the emotive heroines, stilted diction, and pseudo didacticism of sentimental novels. Austen's witty story can be read as a moral satire to the extent that it exposes the spuriousness of Laura's claims to virtue and, by extension, the dubious morality of much sentimental fiction.

Austen, making fun of the idealized heroines of romance, has Laura begin her narrative by describing how beautiful, accomplished, and virtuous she was at 18. By her own account, her only flaw was a "sensibility too tremblingly alive". The first incident in her story is the arrival of a mysterious young man at her parents' cottage. The noble youth, named Edward, has run away from home because he scorns to marry the woman his father has chosen for him: "Never shall it be said that I obliged my Father". Edward declares his passion for Laura, and they are married at once. This episode ridicules two conventions of sentimental fiction: the portrayal of tyrannical parental authority and the formation of sympathetic bonds between

characters. The second of these sentimental tropes is parodied again when Edward and Laura move in with Edward's friend Augustus and his wife Sophia. Laura describes her first meeting with Sophia as follows: "We flew into each others arms and after having exchanged vows of mutual Friendship for the rest of our Lives, instantly unfolded to each other the most inward Secrets of our Hearts.

The household is broken up when Augustus is sent to debtor's prison and Edward disappears. Laura and Sophia travel to Scotland to seek assistance from Sophia's relations. Laura explains in passing that they could not take refuge with her parents, as they had died some time earlier. With this fleeting remark, Austen exposes the hypocrisy of Laura, who, for all her tender sensibility, has little real compassion. The death of Laura's parents also affords Austen the opportunity of mocking the well-worn literary cliché whereby an orphaned heroine is discovered to be of high birth. At an inn, Laura and Sophia meet an elderly gentleman who readily acknowledges both as his long-lost granddaughters. After this providential reunion, the heroines proceed to the home of Sophia's cousin, Macdonald, where they convince his daughter to break her engagement with a suitable young man, because "he had no soul" and his hair was not auburn. After they help her elope with a fortune hunter and are caught stealing banknotes, Macdonald sends them away.

As the heroines sit by a stream, they witness a carriage overturning. The passengers, who lie "weltering in their blood," are none other than Edward and Augustus. Laura explains that upon making this discovery, she and Sophia lose their senses: "Sophia fainting every moment and I running Mad as often" . The coup de grâce of Austen's parody of the sentimental heroine occurs when Sophia's acute sensitivity proves fatal. As a consequence of having fainted repeatedly "in the open Air as the Dew was falling" ,Sophia catches a cold, never to recover. On her deathbed, she gives her friend the following advice: "Run mad as often as you chuse; but do not faint," a lesson that serves as the ironic moral of Laura's tale .

"Love and Friendship" introduces themes that Austen developed more fully in novels such as *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) and *Northanger Abbey* (1798, 1818). Stylistically, it offers an excellent early example of Austen's deft use of irony. It is also important for its critique of romance, which set precedents for the realism that came to characterize her approach as a writer.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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