

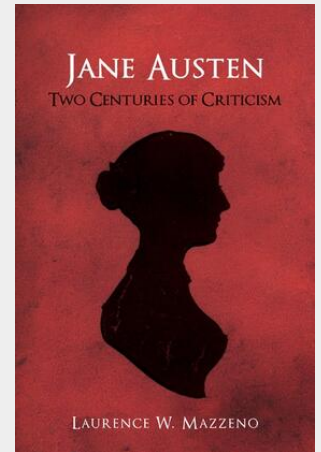
Mazzeno

## Jane Austen

Two Centuries of Criticism

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A comprehensive look at the academic criticism of Jane Austen from her time down to the present. Among the most important English novelists, Jane Austen is unusual because she is esteemed not only by academics but by the reading public. Her novels continue to sell well, and films adapted from her works enjoy strong box-office success. The trajectory of Austen criticism is intriguing, especially when one compares it to that of other nineteenth-century English writers. At least partly because she was a woman in the early nineteenth century, she was long neglected by critics, hardly considered a major figure in English literature until well into the twentieth century, a hundred years after her death. Yet consequently she did not suffer from the reaction against Victorianism that did so much to hurt the reputation of Dickens, Tennyson, Arnold, and others. How she rose to prominence among academic critics - and has retained her position through the constant shifting of academic and critical trends - is a story worth telling, as it suggests not only something about Austen's artistry but also about how changes in critical perspective can radically alter a writer's reputation. Laurence W. Mazzeno is President Emeritus of Alvernia University, Reading, Pennsylvania.



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