

A true story of the brutal murder of a Kansas farm family, the book was based on six years of exacting research and interviews with neighbours and friends of the victims and the two captured murderers. The story is told from the points of view of different “characters,” and the author attempts not to intrude his own comments or distort fact. Critics pointed out earlier precedents for this type of journalistic novel, such as John Hersey’s *Hiroshima* (1946), an account of the World War II atomic bombing of the Japanese city told through the histories of six survivors. Norman Mailer’s *The Executioner’s Song* (1979) is another notable example of the genre.

NOVEL OF MANNERS

A work of fiction that re-creates a social world, conveying with finely detailed observation the customs, values, and mores of a highly developed and complex society is called a novel of manners. The conventions of the society dominate the story, and characters are differentiated by the degree to which they measure up to the uniform standard, or ideal, of behaviour or fall below it. The range of a novel of manners may be limited, as in the works of Jane Austen, which deal with the domestic affairs of English country gentry families of the 19th century and ignore elemental human passions and larger social and political determinations. It may also be sweeping, as in the novels of Balzac, which mirror

the 19th century in all its complexity in stories dealing with Parisian life, provincial life, private life, public life, and military life. Notable writers of the novel of manners from the end of the 19th century into the 20th include Henry James, Evelyn Waugh, Edith Wharton, and John Marquand.

JANE AUSTEN

(b. Dec. 16, 1775, Steventon, Hampshire, Eng.—d. July 18, 1817, Winchester, Hampshire)

The English novelist Jane Austen gave the novel its distinctly modern character through her treatment of ordinary people in everyday life. The daughter of a rector, she lived in the circumscribed world of minor landed gentry and country clergy that she was to use in her writing; her closest companion was her sister, Cassandra. Her earliest known writings are mainly parodies, notably of sentimental fiction. In her six full-length novels—Sense and Sensibility (1811), Pride and Prejudice (1813), Mansfield Park (1814), Emma (1815), Persuasion (1817), and Northanger Abbey (published 1817 but written before the others)—she created the comedy of manners of middle-class English life in her time. Her writing is noted for its wit, realism, shrewd sympathy, and brilliant prose style. She published her novels anonymously; two appeared only after her death, which probably resulted from Addison disease.