Jane Austen depicts a society which, for all its seeming privileges (pleasant houses, endless hours of leisure), closely monitors behaviour. Her heroines in particular discover in the course of the novel that individual happiness cannot exist separately from our responsibilities to others. Emma Woodhouse’s cruel taunting of Miss Bates during the picnic at Box Hill and Mr Knightley’s swift reproof are a case in point: “How could you be so insolent in your wit to a woman of her character, age, and situation?” Jane Austen - Articles from The School of Life, formerly The Book of Life, a gathering of the best ideas around wisdom and emotional intelligence. Jane Austen is loved mainly as a charming guide to fashionable life in the Regency period. She is admired for portraying a world of elegant houses, dances, servants and fashionable young men driving barouches. But her own vision of her task was radically different. She was an ambitious and stern moralist. She was acutely conscious of human failings and she had a deep desire to make people nicer; less selfish, more reasonable, more dignified and more sensitive to the needs of others. Born in 1775, Jane Austen grew up in a small village in Hampshire where her father was the Anglican rector. Here, firmly rooted in her own social setting for the first time, is the real Jane Austen—the shy woman willing to challenge convention, the woman of no pretensions who nevertheless called herself “formidable,” a woman who could be frivolous and yet suffer from black depressions, who showed unfailing loyalty and, in the conduct of her own life, unfailing bravery. In an act of understanding and brilliant synthesis, Claire Tomalin reveals Jane Austen with a clarity never before achieved, one which makes us look upon her novels with fresh and even greater admiration. She paints a vivid portrait of life in the Austen household, and throughout the book her strength lies in taking the reader into Austen’s quotidian experience. Like Jane Austen's Love and Freindship, this book makes fun of the conventions of many late 18th century literary works, with their highly wrought and unnatural emotions; some of this humor derives from the contrast between Catherine Morland and the conventional heroines of novels of the day (for an idea of the latter, see the Plan of a Novel). It was the first of Jane Austen's novels to be published, and appeared without her name on the title page (only “By a Lady”). It was advertised as an ‘Interesting Novel’, which meant (in the jargon of the day) that it was a love story. The book describes a year in the life of the village of Highbury and its vicinity, portraying many of the various inhabitants.