

**A CONTRASTIVE STUDY OF JANE AUSTEN AND  
CHARLOTTE BRONTË WITH SPECIAL  
REFERENCE TO PRIDE AND PREJUDICE, EMMA,  
JANE EYRE AND VILLETTE**

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رسالة

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## II

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**Gamal Ali Higazi**

# **INTRODUCTION**

## INTRODUCTION

It is known that the second half of the 18th. C. and the first half of the 19th. Century is an eventful period in the history of England. The French Revolution, the Napoleonic Wars, the battle of Waterloo, the American War of Independence, and the Industrial Revolution are eminent in their influence on the intellectual milieu, social stability and class system.

Referring to that period G. M. Trevelyan wrote :  
"It was a hard world of sharply-divided interests, with a small sense of national brotherhood, save occasionally in the face of the foreign foe." (1)

In literature, that period took a great stride, not only in moral standards but sensitiveness and refinement.

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(1) G.M. Trevelyan. "Illustrated English Social History."  
London, 1952. Vol. IV. P. 6.

It teemed with great poets, dramatists, and novelists, including Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë .

Jane Austen was born on 16 December, 1775 at Steventon, Hampshire, the seventh child in a family of eight children: James Austen (1762-1819), George Austen (1766-1838), Edward (1768-1852), Henry Austen (1771-1850), Cassandra (1773-1845), Francis (1774-1865), Charles (1779-1852) .

Jane received most of her education at home from her father the Reverend George Austen the parish clergyman, and her brother Henry her closest adviser and helper in literary matters, after leaving the Boarding School.

Jane and her elder sister Cassandra were interested in reading and writing as well as dancing and making visits to the houses of their relatives and friends.

In her writings Jane Austen perceived three things: Firstly, she realised that the manners and the culture to which she had been accustomed in her father's house were by no means universal.

Secondly, that much lower standards might often be observed in large country houses, among powerful land-

owners: And thirdly, that these great folks did not seem to be aware of their shortcomings.

Jane Austen, in fact, hated the life of towns as she spent most of her life time in Hampshire, at Steventon, and Chawton. She had shown a great interest in village people. Her brother Henry stated "She was a warm and judicious admirer of landscape, both in nature and on canvass. At a very early age she was enamoured of Gilpin on the Picturesque".<sup>(1)</sup>

Jane wrote, accordingly to her own experience, of what she saw around her. She portrayed the world she knew the house, the village and the familiar people, that her novels had been described as "epics of common life". Her period of course was that of the first generation of Romantic poets of the French Revolution and the American War of Independence.

It may be argued that country life in her part of the world was relatively undisturbed. Physically it was true, her

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(1) Quoted by Douglas Bush's "Jane Austen," Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., New York, 1975, P. 34.

life was lived much as it might have been fifty years before but she could not be so anachronistic as to ignore the great events of her time. Jane Austen is primarily a moral writer as she owes too much to the Eighteenth Century beliefs. She believes in the significance of the individual in society, her main concern is human nature and the problems of women in her age. Jane focused her criticism on the upper middle-class to whom she belonged. Having shown her limits, she wrote: "3 or 4 families in a country village is the very thing to work on".

She knew her own boundaries and never stepped beyond them. Like Charlotte Bronte, Jane Austen was characterised by the narrow experience. Her vision was focused on a very small perspective.

Miss Austen chose the microscopic method to clear her opinions and views. It was remarkable that Jane Austen's vision was defective. She stepped her thinking to very narrow boundaries.

In Jane Austen's world, one notices the current attitudes towards marriage as the daughter is free to choose her own partner.

It is observed that Jane Austen's protagonists "marry for love and parents, with some exceptions, are acquiescent." (1)

Fortune has its significance. Both Bingley and Darcy prefer adaptable wives in fortune and rank.

Mr. Collins prefers Charlotte Lucas, after being rejected by Elizabeth, because she is the daughter of a knight.

David Daiches sees that "Jane Austen is the only English novelist in stature who was in a sense a Marxist before Marx" (2). She exposes the economic basis of social behaviour with an ironic smile.

Jane Austen had all the necessary gifts for a great success. She had a lively wit, a turn for satire, keen power of observation, a strong sense of the ridiculous, and a youthful

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(1) Douglas Bush, Op. Cit., p. 5.

(1) David Daiches, American Scholar, XVII,(1948), pp. 289 - 290.

hardness of heart. Marvin Mudrick thinks that " Her earliest and always her characteristic defense is irony."<sup>(1)</sup>

Jane Austen's favourite attitude, we may even say her instinctive attitude, is of that of a humourist.

The foibles, delusions and self contradictions, of human nature are sources of delight to Miss Austen, not only for their own sakes, but because through actions they lead to results which may be serious but may also be comic. They introduce a kind of comedy a play where people's lives fall into a confused state of faults and mistaken views from which they free themselves from evils by a sort of luck and not by wisdom or skill.

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(1) Marvin Mudrick, "Jane Austen: " Irony as Defense and Discovery".  
Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1952, p. 1.

Of her novels perhaps Pride and Prejudice makes us laugh most. The reader finds irony in every twist of the story, and particularly in the speeches of her protagonists.

It is noticed Mr. Collins's stupidity and foolishness in his proposal to Elizabeth.

Jane Austen concentrates on Miss Bingley's treatments when she irritates Elizabeth, in Darcy's presence about the departure of the officers, including Mr. Wickham. Miss Bingley, in fact, is little aware of the suffering she causes to Darcy by reminding him of Wickham's wicked intention in his attempt to elope with his sister Georgiana. It is Darcy who becomes the acceptable lover, refers to the irony of Lady Catherine's intervention. Lady Catherine de Bourgh can also be humorous about herself as when she replies Jane's investigation when she did first detect her lover Mr. Darcy.

Jane Austen, like all great comedians, her humour is related to a universal standard of values, she believes that man lives only to be good, and it is the first duty of every one to be sincere, selfless and disinterested. She hates all ideals that were not practical; she did not esteem emotions unguided by principles.

Jane Austen seeks to reconcile the individual to society rather than advise him to flee from it. She looks at men in the world and is deeply disturbed by what she sees around her, but she can neither leave the world nor wholly refuse its values. She sees men and women as feeble but kind, alluring yet wicked, vain and teasing; ludicrous, over-assuming, deceived, foolish; but deeply human, often cognisant, and above all, capable of love. It is observed the ironical situation in Jane Austen's dialogue, in which the characters would have guided themselves wisely as they become aware of what is obvious to the reader.

Charlotte Brontë praises Jane Austen for her accuracy. She feels in her a want of imagination, though the language is different. She writes to W.S. Williams in much the same vein: "Anything like warmth or enthusiasm-anything energetic, poignant, heartfelt is utterly out of place in commending these works: all such demonstration the authoress would have met with a well-bred sneer would have calmly scorned as outre and extravagant. She does her business of delineating the surface of the lives of genteel English people curiously well; there is a Chinese fidelity, a miniature delicacy in the

painting. She ruffles her reader by nothing vehement, disturbs him by nothing profound. The Passions are perfectly unknown to her; she rejects even a speaking acquaintance with that stormy Sisterhood; even to the Feelings she vouchsafes no more than an occasional graceful but distant recognition; too frequent converse with them would ruffle the smooth elegance of her progress. Her business is not half so much with the human heart as with the human eyes, mouth, hands and feet; what sees keenly speaks aptly, moves flexibly suits her to study but what throbs fast and full, though hidden, what the blood rushes through, what is the unseen seat of Life and the sentient target of death- this Miss Austen ignores; she no more, with her mind's eye, beholds the heart of her race than each man, with bodily vision, sees the heart in his heaving breast.<sup>(1)</sup>

The critics who admire the novelist have, of course, an answer to this strongest attack ever made upon Jane Austen. In Miss Brontë's view Jane Austen's materials are 'the surface of the lives of genteel people'.

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(1) Quoted by B.C. Southam's "Jane Austen: S. & S., P. & P., and MP." A selection of critical essays, Macmillan Publishers LTD London, 1976, P. 57.

In fact, gentry is the matter in Jane Austen's works. She evades the 'outré extravagant' in a way that Charlotte Brontë does not.

What Charlotte Brontë perplexes is the distinction between dispassion and superficiality: the very stillness with which Jane Austen writes-the "Chinese fidelity", the "miniature delicacy" - leads Charlotte Brontë to believe that Jane Austen is a writer of the surface only.

What Charlotte Brontë does not apprehend is Jane Austen's management of her matters, here is, by implication, that 'stormy sisterhood', the Passions, and good deal more than 'occasional graceful but distant recognition' of the feelings what Charlotte Brontë slights is Jane Austen's moral concern, her prejudice with the way people behave.

In Jane Austen's books, it takes searching to find long words, long sentences, or even long paragraphs. Her books are dramatic in form and include a good deal of mastery dialogues which are very characteristic especially in character.