
Charles Dickens And Jane Austen As Novelists Of The Romantic To Victorian Period

The Victorian period was the golden age of the English novel. The novel during the age filled a place which the drama held in the Elizabethan period. With the ever increasing general reading public, it came to be recognized as incomparably the most popular form of literature. In its variety of subject matter, and treatment, the Victorian novel was the index of the many sided interests and conflicting elements of the Victorian period. "The spread of science made it realistic and analytical; the spread of democracy made it social and humanitarian; the spirit of religious and moral unrest, of inquiry and criticism, was often uppermost in it; often, too, it revealed the powerful influences of the romantic revival." (Hudson). The Victorian novelists mainly aimed to give a fairly comprehensive picture of contemporary society; we can clearly see the well marked tendency towards specialization in the Victorian novel. The different aspects of life were taken up for separate treatment. Thus, it has novels of high life, middle-class life, low life, criminal life, clerical life, political life, industrial life, and so on. Of the many novelists to emerge during the 18th and 19th centuries, Charles Dickens and Jane Austen are among the few who presented realistic accounts of middle-class life. They rendered their subjects with careful attention to life-like detail through features and themes.

The novel is the dominant form of literature during the Victorian Age. A fairly constant accompaniment of this development was the yielding of romanticism to literary realism, the accurate observation of individual problems and social relationships. The close observation of a restricted social background in the novels of Jane Austen early in the century (*Pride and Prejudice*, 1813; *Emma*, 1816) had been a harbinger of what was to come in the later years. However, the spirit against which the realists later were to react was only in the Victorian novelists Charles Dickens that the new spirit of realism came to the fore. Dickens's novels of contemporary life (*Oliver Twist*, 1838; *David Copperfield*, 1849-1850; *Great Expectations*, 1861; *Our Mutual Friend*, 1865) exhibit an astonishing ability to create living characters; his graphic exposures of social evils and his powers of caricature and humor have won him a vast readership. The writing styles of Charles Dickens and Jane Austen used many of the same elements. These elements include a focus on individualism and the use of dialect. Realism is also a technique used by both Dickens and Austen. Both the novelists lived during the Victorian period but at different times. Jane Austen lived and wrote during late 18th and early 19th centuries while Charles Dickens lived and wrote during 19th century. Both wrote about everyday life, with many unpleasant plots. Charles Dickens is not only the most famous of the Victorian novelists, but also the most typical. Like most Victorian novelists he is not successful with his plot-building. His novels have no organic unity. They are full of detachable episodes and characters who serve no purpose in furthering the plot. Dickens' most brilliant characters- Mr Micawber, Mrs Gamp, Flora Finching, Mr Crummles are given hardly anything to do. They are almost irrelevant to the action of the novels in which they appeared. I remember the story for them, but the story can perfectly go on without them. The novels of Dickens are like shapeless bags into which diverse objects of different sizes and shapes have been ruthlessly crammed. They contain something for everybody, and one can easily ignore the parts which one does not like. But, his novels tell the story admirably, with his first sentence he engages out attention and holds it to the end. In retrospect, plot-construction was Jane Austen's forte. Her novels have an exactness of structure and symmetry of form. There are no loose ends in her novels, no

padding, and no characterization for its own sake. Nothing was allowed in her novel that is not there for a clearly defined reason, to contribute to the plot or character development. *Pride and Prejudice* has an architectonic plot-structure. The marriage between Darcy and Elizabeth is not only a possible solution of the plot, but is inevitable. In short, Jane Austen was a pure novelist.

Realism is the hallmark of both Dickens' and Austen's novel. Their novels did not seek inspiration in the middle Ages or the world of romance. They drew the matter of their novels from the social, political and economic life of the time. Their novels were pictures, not photographs. Dickens is essentially the novelist of London life while Austen gives a vivid pen-picture of the provincial gentry of her time. Dickens portrays the streets of London, its gas lights, its fog, its watersides, and its middle class life. He sees reality through the colored glasses of his creative imagination and transforms it into an idealistic picture. Austen sheds light on the gentry's manners, customs, interests and occupation of South England. Thus, the match-making, picnics, dinners, dances, walks in the countryside, the occasional visits to relatives' houses, which were the chief interests and occupation of the gentry form the warp and woof of her novels.

Dickens' novels belonged to the humanitarian movement of the Victorian age. He always wrote with a purpose. In almost all his novels he sets out to attack the abuses in the existing system of things and champions of the weak, the oppressed and the outcast. He may just be considered one of the greatest social reformers of his age as his picturesque of the weak and vicious elements of society are accurate and true to life. Similarly, in her novels, Austen writes about as seen from woman's point of view and wryly focused on practical social issues, especially marriage and choosing the right partner in life, with love being above all else. She brings to light not only the difficulties women faced in her day, but also what was expected of men and of the careers they had to follow.

The characters of both the novelists are remarkable for their lively characterization. They linger in our memory, not as stories but as crowds of every crying, laughing and living people.

Jane Austen excels in the art of characterization. Her characters are described as 'three dimensional' or 'round' characters as contrasted with 'two dimensional' or 'flat' characters, in which a single quality is portrayed. She sees her men and women from thousands facets. But Dickens' characters are all character-parts. Dickens does not look at them from intellectual point of view. He shows man as an individual and was incapable of seeing into the qualities which are characteristic of man as man. Jane Austen also has an unerring eye for the surface personality. She records accurately the manners, charms, and tricks of their speech of her characters. In this respect she resembles Charles Dickens. But unlike Dickens she penetrates to the mind of her characters and discerns the motives and causes of their behavior.

Finally Charles Dickens and Jane Austen are diverse in many ways. They use characters differently. Their moods are also dissimilar. Austen wrote about her world and the things that she knew best. Her intricate detail outlines human behavior precisely and accurately. She portrays life as it truly is and that is even accurate in modern ways. Her writing style was elegant and satirical.

And Dickens uses an appearance description to insinuate what the characters personality. He also describes people by the house they live in. He is poetic and has a way with words. He wrote a blend of realism and fantasy, based on social commentary. Despite these differences,

they have the similarity of their creative use of humor and satire that sets them apart from so many other novelists of the Victorian period. Therefore, the two authors and their work show the transition happen in writing ranges from romantic to Victorian periods when we go through their work.

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