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WHAT DOES JANE AUSTEN'S WRITING MEAN TO ME? – K. OLIVIA HARRINGTON

Recently, upon coming home from school, I have gotten in the habit of putting the tea kettle on the stove, getting out my favorite teapot and cup, and preparing for a few minutes of unhurried bliss in which I relax and read one of my favorite books by my favorite author. Clearly, sitting around the house daintily drinking tea and reading fine literature is quite a strange daily routine for the average teenager. When teatime became the day's peak I realized there was either something strange about me or something extraordinary about the writing of this author. The author was of course Jane Austen, and I have come to believe that both circumstances are probably true... but hopefully mostly the latter.

Reading Jane Austen's work is like making a sincere lifelong friend. I first became acquainted with her around age fourteen as I drudgingly attempted to decipher the flouncy language of *Pride and Prejudice*. I now believe that this was the perfect time for me to be introduced to her works because at age fourteen all girls have love whizzing through their minds, yet there are dismal few boys that age deserving of such attention. In effect, the story of Elizabeth and Darcy lured me to keep reading, lest my appetite for love go unfed. By the time I finished it, I found myself in love with the characters, plot, language, and the astute witty woman who created this masterpiece. After reading *Pride and Prejudice* about four times I figured I should venture out and explore all of Miss Austen's other major works, and so my friendship grew with the authoress.

After reading Austen's work, I not only feel a bond with the writer, but I feel like her writing was able to breach space and time to influence me in many personal ways. The characters of her books always serve a purpose in educating. I remember the first time I read *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park* I was thoroughly in love with both Mr. Wickham and Mr. Crawford, but I inevitably learned, along with the heroines of the stories, the true character of these men. At my impressionable age the thought that not all handsome and charming men

were good had never crossed my naive mind; I now, however, believe with all my heart that a humble Mr. Edmond Bertram or Mr. Henry Tilney is worth more than any ostentatious man. I also like to think myself somewhat influenced by the estimable heroines of these novels. Austen is able to preserve the reality of these imperfect women while proving them models of sensibility, love, and bravery.

My first impression of Jane Austen was not favorable, but like Darcy to Elizabeth, I found something intriguing about the story and I now know that that “something” was: the authoress herself speaking to me through a haze of centuries of pop culture and generations of changes in order to befriend and influence a young woman in vitally important ways.

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