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WHAT DOES JANE AUSTEN'S WRITING MEAN TO ME? – BRENNA O'NEILL

Several years ago, my sister handed me *Pride and Prejudice* and told me to read it. By the next day, I had not only finished the book, but had fallen head over heels in love with Mr. Darcy. Over the following years, I read and re-read *Pride and Prejudice*, watched every different version of the movie, and started discovering Jane Austen's other books. As I fell in love with the characters of the books, I began also to love the author who had created them.

Despite the many differences between our time period and that of Jane Austen's novels, her stories contain timeless themes. Although society has changed and we do not today live in a culture that requires us to follow the etiquette her characters obey, we nonetheless have different prescribed roles. We continue to hold expectations for men and women of varying social classes, and some people continue to break the boundaries our society creates. Though time may pass and society may change, people will always stay fundamentally the same.

Jane Austen describes the setting of her stories so vividly that the reader becomes a part of that era and location. She allows the reader to forget the present world and enter a past one filled with people we know. Everyone has met a silly Mrs. Bennet, an irritating Lydia, and a spirited Elizabeth, individuals who demonstrate the height of Jane Austen's ability. She recreates characters in

a convincing and realistic way, showing to us not only a society, place, and time but also a cast of people, all based on her own sharp observations of the world around her. In her novels, I identify with the heroines, fall in love with the heroes, and believe that these characters can be strong despite rigid roles; they can be independent and exert power over their destinies.

For me, though, the most appealing part of Jane Austen's books will always be the romance. As a hopeless romantic, I enjoy reading beautiful, intelligent stories that describe how it is possible to find true love. I love the way in which, despite keen observations of the weakness in people and sadness in the world, Jane Austen shows complete faith in friendship, in families, and in love.

Through her stories, I regain my thorough belief in the strength of love, the ability to do right, and the power I myself can exert over my life. Jane Austen empowers me and allows me to believe that someday I will meet my own Mr. Darcy.