

LETTER--To Jane Austen

In a letter to Jane Austen, the author expresses admiration and critiques on behalf of the contemporary audience. He acknowledges Austen's high artistry in literature but notes her diminishing popularity among modern readers who find her style outdated and her characters too restrained. The author suggests Austen's works lack the sensationalism and dramatic passion that current tastes favor, evident in characters from other popular novels of the time. Despite the critique, he intimately discusses the subtleties in Austen's characterization, lauding her portrayal of genteel, moral heroines like Emma, Elizabeth, and Catherine, who, though not dazzling in birth or fortune, capture the essence of real, virtuous English women.

Austen's choice to focus on everyday, moral, and societal concerns rather than grand passions or social reforms—a common theme in more modern literature—is highlighted as both a strength and a limitation. The critique extends to the mundane social circles Austen portrays, lacking the allure of nobility and grandiose settings preferred in the literary market of the day.

The author speculates on potentially controversial topics Austen could have explored, such as the fates of Lydia and Kitty or the elopement of Mrs. Rushworth, which might have captivated readers with a taste for sensationalism. However, he ultimately admires Austen for her faithful adherence to realism and moral integrity over sensationalism.

The letter also touches on Austen's deliberate avoidance of the then-emerging debates on evolution, social reforms, and the more profound psychological or spiritual experiences of her characters, aligning her work more with traditional values and narratives rather than the pressing social and scientific inquiries of the time.

Austen's understated approach to fiction, focusing on the nuanced, moral domestic life rather than overt passion or societal critique, is posited as a reason for her declining popularity in an age seeking more explicit and sensational literature. Yet, the author's reverence for Austen's "gentle self-respect" and humor in her characters denotes a lasting appreciation for the depth and humanity in her work, suggesting a timeless quality to her insights into human nature and relationships.

