## INTRODUCTION

### Names of authors

Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë are two of the most famous women writers ever born. Their two masterpieces, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Jane Eyre*, are equally famous.

### Names of titles

Both these authors and their works have been the subjects of much praise, but criticism has also arisen. This criticism commonly focuses on the society that is portrayed in these novels; many modern readers take umbrage with this society. It is full of unfamiliar rules, customs, and prejudices that, thankfully, no longer exist in our current world. While both these novels do indeed deal with this society, there are some differences between the two. *Pride and Prejudice* is more of a social commentary than *Jane Eyre*, while the latter has more religious tones than the former. However, both authors seem to view this society in a negative light and, therefore, create strong, memorable characters that serve as inspiration for women of all generations and societies.

### Background information

The Caste System of Victorian England

### Thesis statement
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<td>Key point</td>
<td>One of the provocative elements of Jane Austen’s society in <em>Pride and Prejudice</em> is the mind-set that most women have; they think their primary concern should be marriage. Most of the girls in the novel can think of nothing besides flirting and finding someone to marry. Whenever there is a ball in the neighborhood, the women and girls talk only about who danced with whom and speculate if the pairings could lead to marriage. The worst of these girls is Lydia, the youngest Bennet daughter. She has very little decorum when it comes to talking to the officers quartered near her family’s home and can think of nothing else when they are out of sight. She very much embarrasses her older sisters, Elizabeth and Jane, and her wild behavior even contributes to months of anguish on Jane’s part.</td>
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<td>Elaboration</td>
<td>Also, as the girls continue to act silly, they only serve to propagate their own stereotype, which the men come to depend and expect. Elizabeth Bennet receives two marriage proposals during the course of the novel, and both men who propose treat her like she is very silly and desires nothing more than to be</td>
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Evidence

married. The first of these men, Mr. Collins, asks Elizabeth to marry him and then, upon her firm refusal, insists that she only refuses in order to be more enticing. He cannot believe that she is being honest because he thinks all girls act silly like her sisters do. The second proposal is from Mr. Darcy, who is a much better prospect for marriage, yet extremely proud. He assumes that, because he is incredibly rich, any girl would jump at the chance to marry him. He, like Mr. Collins, thinks he knows more about women than they do themselves and, aided by the very silly and annoying behavior of Lydia Bennet, contributes to the offensive society in the novel.

Elaboration

Another appalling element of the novel’s society is the caste system, which was all-encompassing in the nineteenth century. Throughout the entire novel, the reader never forgets the financial status of any of the characters. Although the Bennets are not poor (we know they have several servants), they are still seen as poor by many in the novel and therefore have lower social status. The rich people in the novel treat the Bennets very badly. Mr. Darcy discourages his best friend, Mr.
Elaboration

Mr. Bingley’s sisters are also very rude to Jane. They are friends with her for a time but, when they think their brother loves her, do not speak to her and barely deign to visit her for five minutes. One of the most memorable characters in all of literature is Lady Catherine de Bourgh, an extremely wealthy and influential old woman, who epitomizes the caste system. She feels that she can tell everyone what to do, and that they will listen, just because she is rich. She sees the Bennets as extremely low on the food chain and hardly worth her time.

Evidence

This blatant disregard for people who should be equal helps create the distasteful society to which readers react; for in a society of equals, as we have today, it is very upsetting to see one that is so discriminatory.

Key point

Although modern audiences react in this way to Austen’s society, the time frame in which the novel was written must be kept in mind. We, as readers, cannot impose modern morals and sensibilities on historical works. Everything was different when Jane Austen wrote *Pride and Prejudice*. This
Elaboration

kind of society actually existed; she did not just make it up in order to shock audiences. She reported the truth. However, there is no evidence to suggest that Jane Austen enjoyed this society; in fact, there is evidence to the contrary. Her heroine, Elizabeth Bennet, seems to feel the same way many modern women do. She wants to be independent, she has her own ideas about the relationships between men and women, and she does not seem to fall prey to the same weaknesses that many of her contemporaries in the novel do. Elizabeth seems to be in many ways a woman of the future. Granted, she does have some flaws, but overall she acts just like a woman of our time would in her situation.

Although it’s a novel of the same time period and influence, *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë deals with the society of the time in a slightly different way than Austen’s novel. The protagonist of this novel, Jane Eyre, is not nearly as well-off as the Bennet sisters in *Pride and Prejudice*, so we see society from a different point of view. Additionally, Brontë uses society only as a background for her story, not a prominent
### Key point

However, there are some similarities between the two novels. In *Jane Eyre*, as in *Pride and Prejudice*, the social caste system is a factor. As a child, Jane is painfully aware of the difference between her poor heritage and her cousins’ rich one.

She grows up living with her Aunt Reed, a very rich woman who doesn’t want anything to do with her late husband’s poor niece. Although she feeds and clothes Jane, Mrs. Reed hates her passionately and sends her to boarding school to get rid of her. Here, Jane again makes note of the social classes. This time, she is an equal to the other girls, who are training to be governesses and to have other lower-class jobs. The girls are taught to be humble and obedient and to learn their place in society and in the religious hierarchy that pervades the novel.

After she leaves the school, Jane has the opportunity to observe all types of social classes. She becomes a governess to the ward of a very wealthy man, examines the behavior of her employer’s rich friends, and visits with her cousins again. But she also wanders through a small, poor town, stays with a fairly wealthy, though very nice, family, and ends up teaching a
group of poor village girls at the behest of her newly found cousin, a missionary. Throughout most of the novel, this societal caste system is in the background, a subtle description that permeates, but does not color, the events of the novel. However, Jane herself does go through some societal changes. After leaving her employment as governess, Jane establishes a school for the village girls. While she knows this is a good thing to do, she feels a little degraded. She feels that she is too refined to teach country girls, but she knows that this feeling is wrong. She does her job well and comes to enjoy it.

Even with all this societal conflict, the novel is still not as much of a social commentary as *Pride and Prejudice* is. Instead, *Jane Eyre* is a commentary on individualism. Like Elizabeth Bennet, Jane is very much her own, modern woman. As a child, she shows much spirit and spunk when she finally rebels against her mean aunt and tells her exactly what she thinks of her. This spirit continues to grow at school and shows itself again when Jane takes it upon herself to seek other employment when she can’t stand being cooped up at the
school any longer. Her spirit serves her well at Mr. Rochester’s house when she helps him on the road and endures many strange and terrifying incidences without complaint or fear. Her resolve is most tested when Mr. Rochester reveals he is in love with her and wants to shower her with expensive gifts and live with her even though he is married to another woman. Jane, however, shows perseverance and stands fast to her moral code. She does not approve of what Mr. Rochester is doing and, even though she is desperately in love with him, she will not sacrifice her own principles. She then shows great courage by leaving his house with very little money, camping out by herself in the woods, and looking for work in a small town. This is quite remarkable for a woman used to living in a fine house. She proceeds to make her own way in the world once again and, when she inherits a great fortune, divides it equally with her cousins, who she felt were slighted in the deal. She again maintains her principles by refusing a marriage proposal that she feels is wrong. As the story ends, Jane defying convention and the caste system by marrying her former
Both of these great novels have stood the tests of time, criticism, and bookworms, and have prevailed through all their tribulations. Although some criticize them for their depiction of society, both authors seem to disapprove of this fundamental element of their respective stories. Jane Austen uses *Pride and Prejudice* as a social commentary against the caste system of her society. Charlotte Brontë, on the other hand, uses this castelike society to spread her message of individualism and perseverance in *Jane Eyre*. Despite these differences, there is an essential similarity. Both of them feature women who are different than the others they know. These women know what is right and wrong, and go after what they want, but always stick to their principles. They are strong, independent, and, best of all, available for many future generations to learn from, listen to, and read.