

A Study of Individuality and Social Evolution in Literature

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Science unravels the universe and empowers man. Technology has made life easier and is continuing to make the inconceivable possible. Social studies chart the evolution of society along various lines, and steer it towards greater progress. Apart from development and enjoyment of the aesthetic sensibilities, can the arts directly contribute to our understanding of life and our capacity to promote the progress of society?

Literature is a creative art, but it doesn't merely entertain. It reflects life. It portrays the values and aspirations of people and society, even the political atmosphere, economic situation, and social attitudes of the times. One good idea from a book can inspire individuals to acts of greatness. Powerful words can and do spark off revolutions. Inspiring stories can initiate progressive social movements or spur worldwide debate and reform. Fiction is often the forerunner of technological innovation, challenging man to actualize what he dreams of. Literature reflects history, elevates the present, and creates the future. Great literature is true to life. Great writers are seers of life who reveal through words subtle truths regarding human character and the character of life.

Literature provides unique insight into the process of evolution that governs the advance of society, civilization and culture. It offers greater depth of penetration than either historical narrative or biography because it can portray the subjective psychological and social consciousness of the characters and the times with far greater depth and realism. Therefore it can be a powerful complement to objective analysis of external institutions and events.

This paper analyzes Jane Austen's famous novel *Pride & Prejudice* to derive insights into the relationship between the development of society, the development of human personality, and the role of the evolved individual in process of social advancement. Although often regarded as a comic romance, on examination we discover that it offers profound insights into the process of social development at the time of the French Revolution when dramatic changes in social values, attitudes and behaviors in England made possible peaceful evolutionary change through intermarriage between the classes in place of the violent revolution by mass exterminations that took place on the other side of the English Channel.