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## A Note on Jane Austen and the Importance of Freedom

We are in the midst of a Jane Austen revival. Several recent films based on her novels have been hits with both critics and the movie-going public. Many readers are discovering—or rediscovering—the wit and quiet charm of her prose.

Jane Austen appeals to us because her novels so realistically depict the life of the upper middle classes in early nineteenth-century England. An Austen novel may be compared to a Vermeer painting—rendered scrupulously from real life, with great attention to even the most minute detail. For example, Miss Austen never records a conversation between men alone without at least one woman present in the room. She apparently felt that women had no idea what men talked about when they were alone and hence was careful not to relate such exchanges.

Miss Austen's works can also be exasperating. One wonders how such delightful, wise, and witty heroines can be the offspring of such vain, silly, and inept parents. In her last completed novel, *Persuasion*, we find Anne Elliot, one of the most perceptive and resolute of Miss Austen's heroines. Anne's father, Sir Walter Elliot, on the other hand, is vanity personified. The only reading he has done in years is the entry about himself in the baronetage—an entry that is there, not for anything he himself has accomplished, but due to his inheritance. His greatest concern is facial wrinkles—how to eradicate his own and how to tolerate their appearance in others.

Emma Woodhouse, the heroine of *Emma*, is one of Austen's less prepossessing heroines. But compared with her father she is a model of intellectual brilliance and conversational eloquence. Mr. Woodhouse is capable of little else than moaning about his susceptibility to disease.

Elizabeth Bennett, in *Pride and Prejudice*, is Miss Austen's most popular heroine—and deservedly so. Her lively perspicacity and moral fortitude are the envy of almost every reader who has enjoyed her story. And her parents? Her father, Mr. Bennett, is depicted

as a near-recluse, driven to the shelter of his library because of his embarrassing wife. While Elizabeth Bennett is the model of intelligence and virtue, her mother is the epitome of shallowness and empty-headed vanity.

Jane Austen herself was aware of the irony presented by the differences between parent and child and tried in several of her books to explain it. Hence, Anne Elliot rises above her father in character partially due to the solicitous care and concern of her patroness, Lady Russell. Emma is described as having had a wonderful governess. Elizabeth Bennett spent much time in the library with her father, apparently learning much from both books and Mr. Bennett. But having a fine mentor or a remarkable teacher is probably not the whole answer.

The real explanation lies in the fact that these young heroines are, in their own way, as resourceful and as disciplined as any entrepreneur. Indeed, one distasteful aspect of Jane Austen's art for many readers is the almost businesslike way in which her characters approach the prospects of marriage. But the best of her heroines have prepared themselves with as much care and forethought as anyone ever starting a great enterprise.

Her heroines have, for the most part, mastered literature and languages; they are wonderful in conversation and in writing; they can play musical instruments; they are at least competent in a variety of sports and horseback riding; they are accomplished needlewomen; and they have thoroughly mastered the rather difficult social dances of their day. These young women are in the real world, the world of competition, of hopes, of chances.

But the framework of this mannerly world is artificial. Even though there are dashing soldiers aplenty, we seldom see even a hint of violence in Jane Austen. For a more complete picture we must go to the Scottish novels of Jane Austen's contemporary, Sir Walter Scott. Therein we witness the violence that maintains the artificial world so charmingly depicted by Jane Austen. But the result of that artificiality, so carefully removed from the violence and threat of violence that maintains

it, is decay. And that is faithfully recorded by the ever-observant Miss Austen.

After our heroes and heroines have married, they have little in their artificial worlds to challenge them. They sit and they talk; they play whist; they call on neighbors; they discuss politics, the weather, and, mostly, the neighbors. Above all, they remember and reminisce about what they once could do.

In a word, they cease to be Anne Elliot, Emma Woodhouse, and Elizabeth Bennett and degenerate into Mr. Elliot, Mr. Woodhouse, and Mrs. Bennett. How discouraging to think that the miraculous Miss Elizabeth Bennett might sink into the emptyheadedness of Mrs. Bennett once she marries and becomes Mrs. Darcy, mistress of the great estate of Pemberley.

In Jane Austen's world, the only real way to obtain a good livelihood was through inheritance, marriage, or to wrest it from someone else through military triumph. Nowhere do we find people advancing in society by entrepreneurial activity by meeting the real needs of people.

English society was to change greatly during the first half of the nineteenth century. With greater personal freedom came an increase in opportunity. The advancing Industrial Revolution created wealth and the prospect of trade. The subsequent repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 made farming more competitive and ended the sheltered and protected existence for many large landowners.

In fiction we tend to view the ending that somehow ensures security for our hero and heroine to the end of their days as the "happy ending." Jane Austen's unforgettable portraits of Mr. Elliot, Mr. Woodhouse, and Mrs. Bennett remind us that a secure life in a stagnant society is not a happy existence. It can bring loss of capacity and character. It can engender hollowness, emptiness, vanity. It may mean living luxuriously, but being barely alive. It vividly reminds us how important it is to be free to fail until the day we die.

—MERRILL GEE

(Mr. Gee is an engineer in Salt Lake City.)

# Free Trade to Benefit the Many—Not Fair Trade to Benefit the Few

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By Dwight R. Lee

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When asked, most politicians claim that they favor free trade. But they quickly add the qualification that it must also be fair trade, which generally means that we should open our markets to another country's products only if their markets are equally open to our products. This qualification makes sense politically because people are easily convinced that it makes sense economically. Why should we give other countries the opportunity to increase their employment at our expense unless they reciprocate? Unfortunately, this view misses entirely the real advantages of international trade. Furthermore, it reflects a serious political bias that distorts government decisions over a wide range of issues.

The advantage from trade with other countries does not come from selling more to them than they sell to us so we can create more jobs. The key to a successful economy has never been simply the creation of jobs. The ability to consume always exceeds the ability to produce, so there is never a lack of work to do. The key to a successful economy is directing people into the most productive jobs, those that create the most value for consumers. This is the real advantage of international trade.

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*Dr. Lee teaches economics at the University of Georgia, and is this month's guest editor.*

We create more productive domestic jobs both when we sell *and when we buy* from other countries, and the more open the international trade arrangements the better for all countries. When country B restricts the import of American products it reduces its productivity as well as ours. But we only add to our productivity loss if we respond by restricting the ability of our citizens to buy products from country B.

Consider the fact that, despite political rhetoric, when we buy foreign products we create American jobs. It would actually be better for Americans if this weren't true. When Americans buy products from, say, Japan, we end up with products we value more than the dollars spent could have bought elsewhere, and the Japanese end up with more dollars (actually the one who sells yen to American importers to pay for the Japanese products ends up with more dollars, but this doesn't meaningfully alter the story). What do the Japanese do with these dollars? It would be nice if they treated them as collector's items, to be kept and admired. Then Americans could obtain valuable products by doing nothing more costly than printing up dollars, something so easy that even the federal government does it well. But the Japanese produce goods for Americans not because they want dollars, but because of what dollars can