



Two Histories of England

Charles Dickens, Jane Austen

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In these two forgotten gems of English literature, Jane Austen and Charles Dickens offer delightful, irreverent histories of their native land.

When she was only sixteen years old, Jane Austen composed her bitingly satirical *History of England* for performance in her family's drawingroom. A startling and precocious example of her celebrated wit—not to mention a brilliant social commentary—this lively piece sweeps rapidly across almost four centuries of British monarchy. In rambunctious and wickedly funny prose, Austen's critique spans from Henry IV to Charles I, from Richard III to Mary Queen of Scots, offering a fierce parody of the kind of biased history that young ladies of Austen's time were being forced to study. Reproduced here in its entirety, this is a rare, tantalizing look at the great novelist's budding talent, and an extraordinary bit of literary history that lay unpublished for more than 130 years.

Charles Dickens's *A Child's History of England*, by contrast, was written and published at the height of its author's considerable fame. A gory and dramatic account, full of villains and heroes, the essay was originally intended as a study-piece for his children, but in fact represented a sly, unconventional countertext to the more straitlaced historical canon. Dickens's exciting, flamboyant narrative is hugely evocative, both of the history he describes and of the time in which he himself was writing.

With an insightful introduction by bestselling historian David Starkey, *Two Histories of England* brings together, in a single, irresistible volume, these remarkable—and remarkably overlooked—literary treasures by two of the world's most beloved writers.

Two Histories of England Details

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From Reader Review Two Histories of England for online ebook

Cynthia Egbert says

Please understand that you should not read this book to get a history lesson but rather to get a sense of the personalities of these two authors. Those personalities and their strong opinions really come through in such a way that made me laugh out loud a number of times. This was so entertaining and there is the bonus of getting somewhat a picture of history along the way.

Here is a taste of what Jane has to offer: "Edward the 4th. This Monarch was famous only for his Beauty & his Courage, of which the Picture we have here given of him, & his undaunted Behavior in marrying one Woman while he was engaged to another, are sufficient proofs. His Wife was Elizabeth Woodville, a Widow who, poor woman! was afterwards confined to a Convent by that Monster of Iniquity & Avarice Henry the 7th. One of Edward's Mistresses was Jane Shore, who has had a play written about her, but it is a tragedy & therefore not worth reading. Having performed all these noble actions, his Majesty died, & was succeeded by his son."

Mr. Dickens really made me laugh. He was especially disgusted by the manners, or lack thereof, of Queen Elizabeth. In fact, she was so crude that "a coach was rarely seen and even the Queen herself, on many high occasions, rode on horseback on a pillion". Oh, the disgrace!

A few more tidbits from Mr. Dickens, who really has such a way with words.

"The coronation was a great success; and, on the next day, one of the courtiers presented a petition to the new Queen, praying that as it was the custom to release some prisoners on such occasions, she would have the goodness to release the four Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and also the Apostle Saint Paul, who had been for some time shut up in a strange language so that the people could not get at them."

"The Scotch have always been rather a sullen and frowning people in religious matters."

"And those who were called the Puritans, because they said that they wanted to have everything very pure and plain in all the Church service. These people were for the most part an uncomfortable people, who thought it highly meritorious to dress in a hideous manner, talk through their noses, and oppose all harmless enjoyments."

"The Earl of Leicester was not much of a general. He did so little in Holland, that his campaign there would probably have been forgotten, but for its occasioning the death of one of the best writers, the best knights, and the best gentlemen, of that or any age. This was SIR PHILIP SYDNEY, who was wounded by a musket ball in the thigh as he mounted a fresh horse, after having had his own killed under him. He had to ride back wounded, a long distance, and was very faint with fatigue and loss of blood, when some water, for which he had eagerly asked, was handed to him. But he was so good and gentle even then, that seeing a poor badly wounded common soldier lying on the ground, looking at the water with longing eyes, he said, 'Thy necessity is great than mine,' and gave it up to him. This touching action of a noble heart is perhaps as well known as any incident in history - it is as famous far and wide as the blood-stained Tower of London, with its axe, and block, and murders out of number: So delightful is an act of true humanity, and so glad are mankind to remember it."

"Put not your trust in Princes!"

Elise Goubet says

Loved these two! No, not the most accurate pieces of historical writing if you judge that based on how they portrayed the actual events ... however, if you think about it as more of an informative view into the time in which the authors were writing these two pieces, THEN you can appreciate these two pieces for what they are!

Kay Iscah says

This is a combination of two books with an extremely long introduction that I didn't bother reading.

"The History of England" by Jane Austen is a silly retelling of English History with an odd love for Mary Queen of Scots... Apparently at 16 Jane was quite fond of her. It's very short.

And then there's an Excerpt from "A Child's History of England" by Charles Dickens. Which I probably would have found funnier if I had a better memory/knowledge of English History. But basically it's a narrative retelling of the reign of several kings and queens, and it's clear that Dickens had a remarkably low opinion of the Monarchy (and only slightly higher opinion of everyone else). It annoys me to no end that it doesn't contain the full book. If you were trying to promote a lost "gem of literature" why on earth would chop off its head and tail to do so.

So I was torn, I figure the likelihood of finding Austen's essay in anything else is extremely remote. On the other hand I don't want to devote valuable shelf-space to an excerpt from a book, rather than the book proper. In the end, I'm inclined to put it in the out box.

Cathy says

Funny but didn't finish while in England

Laura Gurrin says

Austen's mock history is a fun piece of juvenilia from one of England's best authors. Dickens' portion of the work (more substantial) was actually used as a history text for many years. A comparison between this bloody, commentary-filled work and modern history books for kids shows some of the good and bad in their development over time. Dickens focuses almost entirely on history as the product of certain powerful individuals - typical for the time - which leaves out entirely large swathes of society (other than as people who suffer at the hands of these giants). On the other hand, this is a dramatic world where historical figures spring to life. Far from being remote actors, kings and queens are shown as much like ordinary people - only ones whose personal peccadilloes can impact the course of nations. I think if there were more beheadings in modern history books, kids might pay more attention.

Luciana Darce says

Eu já estava com a resenha desse mês pronta quando Two Histories of England chegou pelo correio e me toquei que era melhor passá-lo à frente para fevereiro a fim de lembrar o bicentenário de nascimento do Charles Dickens.

Sorte minha que o livro é curto e consegui terminá-lo de uma única sentada. Ainda assim, quase que essa resenha não sai, uma vez que tive de viajar, tive que enrolada com mais um milhão de projetos e toda vez que sentava no computador eu arranjava alguma outra coisa para fazer...

Mas, enfim, estamos aqui. Então, vamos ao que interessa...

Para começar de conversa, não se deixem enganar pela capa. Postei uma foto da capa e contracapa do livro no grupo da JASBRA no Facebook e todo mundo acha lindo e muito fofo – rosa e azul bebê, com as silhuetas dos dois autores, parece um livrinho para crianças.

E, a bem da verdade, a parte que o Dickens escreveu é, realmente, para crianças – não à toa o título é *A Child's History of England*. Mas isso não significa que seja um livro ingênuo, fofo ou meigo. A capa é pura propaganda enganosa.

A primeira parte do livro cuida de uma das peças da Juvenilia de Jane Austen. *The History of England from the reign of Henry the 4th to the death of Charles the 1st* by a partial, prejudiced & ignorant Historian já revela do título os verdadeiros propósitos de Austen. Ela começa pegando um dos períodos históricos mais conturbados da história inglesa e revirando tudo de pernas para o ar, numa paródia que critica a ingenuidade de certos argumentos históricos. É uma peça curta – no original, de 1791, são 34 páginas manuscritas – mas deliciosa.

Bem valeria à pena alguma editora trazer para o Brasil um volume com a Juvenilia, não? Esses trabalhos da Austen mais nova servem como um verdadeiro estudo do desenvolvimento dela como autora – a ironia e a inteligência que são suas características já estão ali, apenas um pouco menos sutis que em seus romances maduros.

A segunda parte do livro traz apenas alguns capítulos do *A Child's History of England*, de Dickens – indo do governo de Elizabeth até a morte de Charles I quando da Guerra Civil. É mais ou menos o mesmo período histórico que Austen retratou em sua própria História.

Dickens não deixa de julgar os atos de todos os reis, rainhas e políticos que perpassam por suas páginas, sem levar em consideração atenuantes de contexto histórico – motivo pelo qual historiadores não gostam muito de seu livro. Ele os pesa dentro de seus próprios princípios e sensibilidades morais e não hesita em chamar a atenção para aquilo que ele acha errado.

O que mais achei curioso enquanto lia *Two Histories of England* é que os dois autores não iam muito com a cara da Rainha Elizabeth – Austen chega ao ponto de chamá-la de ‘peste’. Sempre tive a impressão de que Elizabeth era uma unanimidade, mas acho que me enganei...

Amanda says

If I were completely honest I would mark this as a did-not-finish, but I read all 20 pages of Jane Austen's portion, and nearly 20 pages of Charles Dickens' 130 page portion, which is pretty much all I need from this book. I'm not a huge history buff unless it's art history, but this may be more enjoyable for those who are history buffs, or more familiar with Dickens than I am (I tried A Tale of Two Cities and gave up.)

Julie says

This was a lot of fun to read. Austen's history, intended mostly for humor purposes, was very short and extremely silly and of course, extremely biased. It was fun reading it, imagining her reading it out to her family.

Dickens' history was really interesting. He was still rather biased but did seem to cover a lot of ground on all sides. It's fascinating to me (having been a history major) to see how the subject of history has evolved, as this used to be considered a teaching tool for schoolchildren. Today it wouldn't fly because history textbooks are supposed to be unbiased (whether they achieve that is another story).

I definitely feel like I have a better grasp on the chronology of things thanks to Dickens' clear writing.

Joanna Mounce says

Charles Dickens's section of this book was about 80% of the book, with the remainder split between Austen's part and a very long introduction that I just skimmed. The Dickens part was just a long excerpt from "A Child's History of England", which was apparently used to teach history in British schools for about 100 years. I envy those British kids, because it was a lot more clever than the videos of an old man talking I got in place of a World History class. Is it just me, or is reformation English history a lot like reading an account of a prolonged high school drama? What did Elizabeth say to Robert again? She's mad he's with Amy? Which was kind of the point of Austen's short satire on English history, written when she was 16, and mostly interesting because it is fun to see Jane Austen's voice so young.

I definitely would not recommend buying this book as both of the histories are in the public domain. I got it from the library, and I do plan to listen to the whole Child's History on Librivox.

Roberta says

This is an abbreviated version of two separate books by two famous and beloved authors combined into one. Both parts are fun, and while I love both authors, I greatly preferred Austen's barbed wit while describing some of England's former monarchs...

It is telling that she (a Catholic) and he (a Protestant) liked the monarchs who most closely followed their own religious beliefs, and stated so openly in this writing.

I purchased this at a Jane Austen museum in Bath, England, and have since ordered the complete version of her History of England in order to more fully enjoy her humor!

Carol Mann Agency says

From Publishers Weekly

Unbeknownst to most readers today, Austen and Dickens each wrote a satiric history of England. Austen's *The History of England from the Reign of Henry the 4th to the Death of Charles the 1st*—written in 1791 when she was 16—is a deliberate parody of the intellectually vapid histories to which girls of her class were routinely subjected. Reprinted in its entirety, Austen's juvenilia is witty, cold-blooded and contrarian: during Henry V's reign, she writes, Lord Cobham was burnt alive, but I forget what for, and the history's purpose is supposedly to vindicate Mary Queen of Scots and abuse Elizabeth. Dickens was already a bestselling novelist when he published *A Child's History of England* in the early 1850s, which was part of the British school curriculum for decades; an excerpt appears here. Using plain language, sharp if heavy irony and evocative detail, Dickens is radical and opinionated: Elizabeth is coarse, capricious, and treacherous and James I is a greedy, dirty drunk. Although a knowledgeable introduction by historian and TV presenter Starkey (Elizabeth) offers interesting biographical tidbits and puts each book in its proper context, American readers will find these to be amusing minor works by a pair of English national treasures. (Oct. 2)

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Cynda says

Austen makes light fun of the education/lack of education of women of her era. Accomplishments, such as memorizing order of the monarchs with a very few facts allowed for no intelligent conversation, only allowed the women to follow some of what the men talked about. The women's history education ranked as another accomplishment. Yuck. Austen takes that yuckiness and turns it into light humor. Pleasant reading.

That Dicken's history of England could be used as textbook for children amazes me. Not history. Not literature. Not sure what this is Dickens was writing.

Sarah says

I feel a little silly for getting sucked into buying this book, especially since I can't really imagine anyone picking up the pitch someone must have made for publishing it: "What if we take some Jane Austen juvenilia and put it together with a small fraction of a children's textbook by Dickens? PEOPLE WILL LOVE IT!" It was, obviously, designed for people who would be bound to think "I like Austen! I like Dickens! I like England! I like history!" and yet who would NOT care about having the complete or scholarly version of either book. Are there a lot of people like that other than me out there? And I actually already HAVE the scholarly version of the Austen part. I could have just looked up the Dickens book -- the whole thing -- instead of buying an ugly remainder where Jane is pink and Charles is blue for gosh'sake.

ALL THAT SAID, Austen's juvenilia is not that impressive (whose is, really) and Dickens' history is, while

probably more interesting than other Victorian educational material for kids, not that mind-blowing. There's a Dickensism here or there but if you don't need them wall-to-wall, I think the average British writer can do that sort of thing.

Mary Bronson says

I thought this was a fun book to read. It was interesting to read about Jane Austen's prospective on the History of England on how she sees it. I was surprised that she wrote one and how this manuscript did not get published until the 1960s. It was short and sweet and gave a small biography on the different rulers during her time and a little before. Then the second half of the book was Charles Dickson's History of England that he wrote about the different rulers shortly before his time and during.

Jen says

Very cute and fun. Austen's account is filled with the snarky observations of a 16-year-old in possession of a rather biting wit. She probably wouldn't be as funny if you didn't actually know English history, however, so I'd suggest boning up a bit first. You may or may not want to start with Dickens's history (an excerpt in the edition I read). Students of the modern historical idea of context will be appalled at his rampant judgments and editorial comments, even if this was originally meant to teach children. Once you get over that, however, it's easy to appreciate the dry sarcasm and honest dismay he felt towards some of the rulers (especially James I!). Not least, it's very interesting to see an Englishman's opinion of the English.

My edition was introduced by David Starkey, of whom I don't remember hearing of before but whose enthusiasm fairly bleeds off the page. I almost expected him to end the note with a squee or something. His excitement for the project is a lovely set-up, though. Recommended for casual historians, serious historians, and fans of Austen and Dickens. Also, people who like to view the world through a slightly different set of eyes.
