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JANE AUSTEN AS A MORAL WRITER



**Editura UNIVERSITARIA
Craiova, 2019**

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Descrierea CIP a Bibliotecii Naționale a României

AL-KUBAISI, MAY HASSAN SRAYISAH

Jane Austen as a moral writer / May Hassan Srayisah Al-Kubaisi. -

Craiova : Universitaria, 2019

Conține bibliografie

ISBN 978-606-14-1496-3

82.09

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Mrs. May Hassan Srayisah proves she can flexibly approach female psychology in order to highlight the way in which Jane Austen presents the high-intensity epistemological crises experienced by her heroines, identifying correctly and from a theoretical point of view the way the female and male, urban and rural, young and old voices intermingle. The basis is a serious documentation, the critical exegesis readings being varied and solid. The ideas of the specialists are taken over skillfully and nuanced to capture the way Jane Austen refused to dramatize, but also to romanticize the social pressure exerted by the family and men on female victims who have no other choice but to resist, by their voices – opposing and militant, but always morally correct.

Pia Brînzeu
Universitatea de Vest, Timișoara

The entire scientific construction of this study is well built and organized, with a consistent and logical pursuit of the assumed objectives, a careful selection of the support elements, a special importance for the documentation, a constant concern for the form of the work, an elegance of expression, and as a whole, an obvious and extremely convincing seriousness of the scientific approach. We note and warmly appreciate the rigorous scientific substantiation to which the author constantly appeals to her ideas, which brings to the attention renowned theoreticians of feminism, to set out just a few of the immediately visible strengths of this text.

Valentina Stîngă
Universitatea din Pitești

Mrs. May Hassan Srayisah relates significant details of the writer's life with the transition period in which she wrote her novels, presenting the historical context, the literary context, the cult of sensibility, the influence of the epistolary genre and the success of the Gothic novel, the existence of the realistic novel, and the emergence of romanticism as a reaction against rationalism, enlightenment and classicism. The author demonstrates that Jane Austen's prose portrays the moral behavior of the characters in the preparation of ethical actions, making the literary creation the best manifestation of reality, focusing on important aspects of ethics and interdependence and adaptability in social issues and human relations, social issues imposed by the traditional, patriarchal society and the moral and ethical principles governing English society during Regency.

Emil Sîrbulescu
Universitatea din Craiova

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The present study was triggered by the growing interest in Jane Austen, and the increasing number of Iraqi researches who have written on her work during the last decade. This study is significant for all those interested in the study of fiction, because of its concern with the moral values, respect, change, judgment and prejudices to be found in Jane Austen's major novels. The study sheds light on Jane Austen's ability to show the effect of social variables, especially social power on human character, imperfect in the best sense: first impressions, social character, happiness, pain, suffering, or the importance of staying true to oneself, are only a few examples that constitute an important part of the literary legacy of this English writer, who transforms them with great skill narrative in her work. Our target readership includes college students of English literature from Iraq and the other Arab countries, as well as a larger audience of those interested in literature in general.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As the largest academic procedure I have undertaken, the thesis project naturally involved a great deal of assistance, support, and encouragement from a good number of individuals. First, I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Emil Sîrbulescu, for his precious feedback and guidance throughout the writing process. My sincere thanks and gratitude go to the members of the “Alexandru Piru” Doctoral School University of Craiova, and especially my mentors – Dr. Florentina Anghel, Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Letters, Dr. Sorin Cazacu, Head of Department of Anglo-American and German Studies, and Dr. Mihai Coșoveanu, Director of the University Library.

My most affectionate gratitude goes to my mother and my brothers and sisters: I want to thank you all for supporting me emotionally and financially throughout my studies and especially during the process of writing this thesis. Thank you for always being there for me and believing in me.

I want to express my deepest gratitude to all the people who have supported me throughout the completion of this thesis, especially my friends and colleagues, both past and present, whose helped me in my questionnaire, and participation in my work and to whom has been a source of encouragement and stimulation.

I would also like to express my thanks to the staff of the following libraries: the University of Craiova Library, Biblioteca Județeană “Alexandru și Aristia Aman” (the “Alexandru and Aristia Aman” County Library) in Craiova, Biblioteca Națională a României (the National Library of Romania) in Bucharest, as well as the Central Library of Baghdad and the Iraqi University Library for their help in obtaining the texts that I needed for my research.

I don't want to forget to thank my family, especially my husband Prof. Abdul Razaq, my sons Abdul Rahman, and Bisher, and my dear daughter Sama who have supported me along this educational path, had faith in my abilities, always supported my decisions, and always acknowledged my accomplishments. Thank you for all your love.

FOREWORD

Jane Austen is the type of writer capable of capturing the reality that surrounds her, of observing, evaluating, criticizing, reflecting, expressing opinions and stressing human behaviour in everyday situations, emphasizing the failures and successes of society with regard to social issues, political, economic, family, traditions, customs, mechanisms of expression and thought, or knowledge and behaviour. Her writings are transcendent even today for several reasons. Her work is one of them, but Austen's ability to present human characters, imperfect in the best sense, and stories that speak of values, language, respect, change, judgment and prejudices, first impressions, social character, happiness, pain, suffering, or the importance of staying true to oneself, are examples that constitute an important part of the literary legacy of the English writer, who transforms them with great skill narrative in her works.

Born on December 16, 1775, in Steventon, England, (d. 18 July 1817) as part of a wealthy family in rural areas, the plots of her novels invariably deal with the subject of falling in love, the couple and / or marriage, taking a look at the cultural issues of the subject, from their importance or need in some social circles, to the deep reflection of what union ideally means, seen not as the loss of freedom, or the gain of social status, but as a process of mutual coupling and exaltation between the people involved.

Austen talks with her female characters, her heroines, about the importance of being a woman, and in general, about the difficulties that the environment and society sometimes put on people to develop, professionally or personally, either through discrimination, freedom (or lack of freedom) of thought, social rules, or how global education sometimes fails to awaken people's interest in progress and growth. The author herself knew the social limitations imposed by society on women writers, which explains why her work was initially published under a pseudonym.

The protagonists in Jane Austen's novels usually undertake journeys that make them learn to be better people and more faithful to themselves, even if this involves overcoming obstacles that seem insurmountable, which vary according to the context, time, and the environment in which live: for example,

family pressure, social customs and barriers, the education of each person, the economic level or class implicit in the characters, or the idealization and acceptance of oneself and others, what is supposed to be desired and actually desired by the protagonists, all representative examples of the socioeconomic situation in the age in which the author wrote.

Analyzing the works of the writer involves analyzing the motivations, customs, thoughts and feelings of her characters and how they motivate them in their decisions, noticing the change in them and the underlying reason why they decide this change, or the lack of it, and also observing how the social context – bourgeois or proletarian – influences their way of thinking and seeing life. The material conditions of existence determine the way of being and existence, and Austen ventures to expose that situation. To analyze Austen means to break down into its parts the layers that make up each of her characters, the echo and reflection of people in the real world. Her themes are universal, always applicable to everyday life, the common situations we encounter every day, the doubts, concerns and desires that humans reproduce repeatedly, hence the relevance of the works of Austen and her adaptation to films, sometimes set in more modern contexts.

Jane Austen is now considered a feminist writer in that she values women's place in domestic life. She also portrays women capable of acting independently against the patriarchal system. Thanks to the second feminist wave, Jane Austen and her books were studied from a feminist point of view, which led to varied results. In our introduction, we have already briefly mentioned these different interpretations. Thus, Marilyn Butler, the author of *Jane Austen And The War Of Ideas* (1988) and Susan Gilbert and Sandra Gubar, in *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (2000) consider the heroines of Austen as subject, but Lloyd Brown in "Jane Austen and the Feminist Tradition" (1973) and Margaret Kirkham in *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1983) are of opinion that her heroines are strong and intelligent women and they consider Austen as a feminist.

The heroines created by Jane Austen oppose the category of the young angelic woman, driven by the social and literary stereotypes, sought by

characters such as Mr. Collins and Mr. Woodhouse. They oppose this narrative which assigns them to a role, a posture, striving to develop a different narrative, as well as an authentic word. But such a word is rarely heard. As it was developed, Mr. Collins does not hear Elizabeth Bennet. In addition, female figures are of great diversity. Among the heroines, the unit is not appropriate. Each of them is a different incarnation of femininity. It's not the woman, but the women, a more realistic choice than feminist.

The interest of this criticism comes from the fact that Austen wrote for the very public to whom she ascribed these wrongs. The bourgeoisie, its men and women, read the novels of Austen: yet it is they who are represented in her work as people obsessed by the money and the social status that it confers. It was therefore very clever of her to magnify the romantic aspect of her stories, so that her criticism is, somehow, insidious. She also presents her female characters as well-educated readers, just like her. The majority of her main characters being women, they are diversified and complex, the fiction reflecting the reality. It seems that, for Austen, the best way to emphasize the importance of women is simply by telling their stories, even romanced. On the other hand, it is interesting to note that her male characters are explored, most of the time, on the surface only. As she develops the psyche of women in detail, what is known about men is, primarily, their financial state and some elements of the story of their lives. It seems that she reduces men in her novels to what they can bring to women.

The inversion of roles is part of the feminist criticism of Austen, denying men, in literature, the place that they demand in society. In addition, it must be remembered that her work, written between 1793 and 1811, follows almost immediately the French Revolution. Being born in 1775, she has somehow grown up in its wake and can only be influenced by it. Even though Austen was not explicit in her defence of women as Wollstonecraft was, her approach, through literature, made it possible to touch a social class, the bourgeoisie, which was perhaps afraid of revolutionary ideas.

Considering the difficulty of discussing the work of a transition writer as Jane Austen, who simultaneously belonged to two periods of English literature and whose work continues to elicit a sustained support in the first decades of the

21st century, and whose writing conveys a message of honesty, self-knowledge, and inter-dependence, we have followed a number of directions in our research. Starting from the assertion that Jane Austen is a moral writer, we proposed to identify those elements that show the narrator irony, the social judgement and the moral education of Austen's heroine. Also, if we consider Jane Austen as a romantic writer, it would be interesting to demonstrate the writer's crafting of the heroine's inner life in a novel like *Emma*, Austen's most romantic novel, and the importance of reading as a marker of character. On the other hand, if Jane Austen is a Victorian, and professional writer, we propose to determine the extent to which Jane Austen's novels support the prevailing attitudes of the old social order versus the upward mobility of the professional classes. Another direction would be the alleged feminist orientation of the writer, her preoccupation with the condition of the woman in the Regency period, and her views on the man-woman and woman-woman relationships. Finally, considering the references to Britain's colonial possessions in a novel like *Mansfield Park*, seen as a "metaphor of plantation slavery in eighteenth-century England" (Said 1993:84), we have been considering the possibility of extending the postcolonial approach to the whole of Austen's work (or not).

On the other hand, we are aware that such an approach cannot exhaust the multiple possibilities offered by such a complex writer as Jane Austen. We have not devoted a special chapter to Jane Austen's realism, nor did we go deeper into the economical aspects that motivate the characters' actions.

As a method for our critical discourse we have resorted to hermeneutics, the key concepts of which are "interpretation" and "understanding." We are interpreting not only for the sake of interpreting, but interpreting to understand. Understanding or comprehension is the endpoint of any hermeneutical approach. Hermeneutics is a vast discipline, the largest of all, because it includes everything else and because there is no discipline, no matter how precise, that does not use, to a certain extent, interpretation. Hermeneutics is a synchronous and diachronic discipline at the same time, trying to capture the essences of the phenomena, but also their evolution.

First and foremost, in our discussion of Jane Austen as a moral writer we have made use of the working instruments provided by comparative

literature, a methodical approach that goes beyond the limits imposed by an isolated literary work, bringing literature closer to other areas of expression or knowledge, or literary facts and texts, in order to better describe, understand and taste them. Regarding the other approaches, we should mention the contextual approach, which allowed for a reading of some of Austen's novels in the context of the literature of the Regency period and the Victorian age; the postcolonial approach, which let us connect Jane Austen and her country gentry to the larger picture of colonial Britain; or the feminist approach, which allowed us to better understand the writer's female characters and their continuous appeal over the centuries.

The present volume is the result of our doctoral research: our thesis, titled *Jane Austen as a Moral Writer*, was successfully defended at the University of Craiova, Romania. We have decided to preserve the same structure: Introduction: *Caring for the Angel in the House*, Part One: *The Moral Jane Austen*, Part Two: *The Multiple Images of the Moral Writer*, Conclusions: *The Moral Writer Reconsidered*, and Works Cited. All the illustrations belong to the public domain.

The Introduction: *Caring for the Angel in the House*, directs the analysis towards a gendered reading of Victorian women's fiction with the purpose of establishing an intertextual dimension of our critical discourse, starting from Roland Barthes's assertion that narrative is present in all epochs of history in one form or another, in all places and societies, so that we can conclude that it begins with the history of humanity and remains since then. We demonstrate that the nineteenth-century British novel is a form of narrative that has as two of its essential ingredients the fictionality and the construction of a narrator that tells the story. The novels are sources of knowledge of the reality of nineteenth-century England with their portraits of the situation of women, the family, the British Empire, the middle class or education throughout the century.

The legal status of women in nineteenth-century England separates single from married women, to the clear detriment of the latter. Despite the fact that a single woman of legal age has no right to vote, and she cannot exercise any official functions or practice a liberal profession, she enjoys the same rights as men with regard to personal property or real estate being able