

Critical Insights: Jane Austen

“Teachers and librarians pressed into covering both literary research and citation in a short time frame support a ripe market for collecting, distilling, and packaging literary criticism related to an author or work in a single volume. Salem Press’s Critical Insights series meets this need with two new collections featuring both titles which address an author’s entire output and those which discuss a single work.

In a somewhat typical volume, Jane Austen is introduced with an 1849 critical acknowledgement that, despite her death more than thirty years before, her "novels may be considered as models of perfection in a new and very difficult species of writing" (vii). The critical analysis is presented within the context of Austen’s persistent commercial success and her matrimonial novels’ status as forerunner of mass market paperback romance formula.

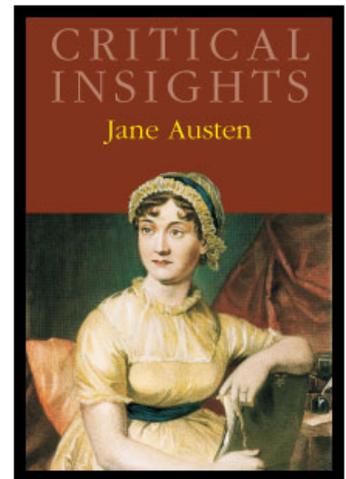
Much of the tension in the analysis contrasts Austen’s own diminution of her work with its professed scale of "two inches of ivory" versus contemporary readings concerned with ferreting-out implicit connections to the larger world issues of Austen’s day, such as the slave economy underpinning some of her character’s fortunes and the dashing soldiers who people *Pride and Prejudice* yet only exist because of the European wars across the channel. Despite Austen’s perfection of a deeply ironical narrative voice, persisting across eras and standing up to multiple readings, her focus on the domestic sphere still ghettoizes her work. Salman Rushdie, for instance, said Austen "can fully and profoundly explain the lives of her characters without reference to the public sphere" (p. 17).

In this treatment of Jane Austen, there is a telegraphic version of her life, career, and influence, much pulled from Salem’s *Dictionary of World Biography: The 19th Century*. As is explained, the paucity of information about Austen’s life has much to do with the role of women in England during the Regency time period. There is also contextualization of the novel as a genre, with Fielding and Richardson’s work as direct forerunners of Austen’s.

Many of the critical chapters on Austen were published in the past decade, and these include up-to-date analysis on queer theory and intertextuality...**Recommended for school and public libraries.**”

-GALE

Text Reviews



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