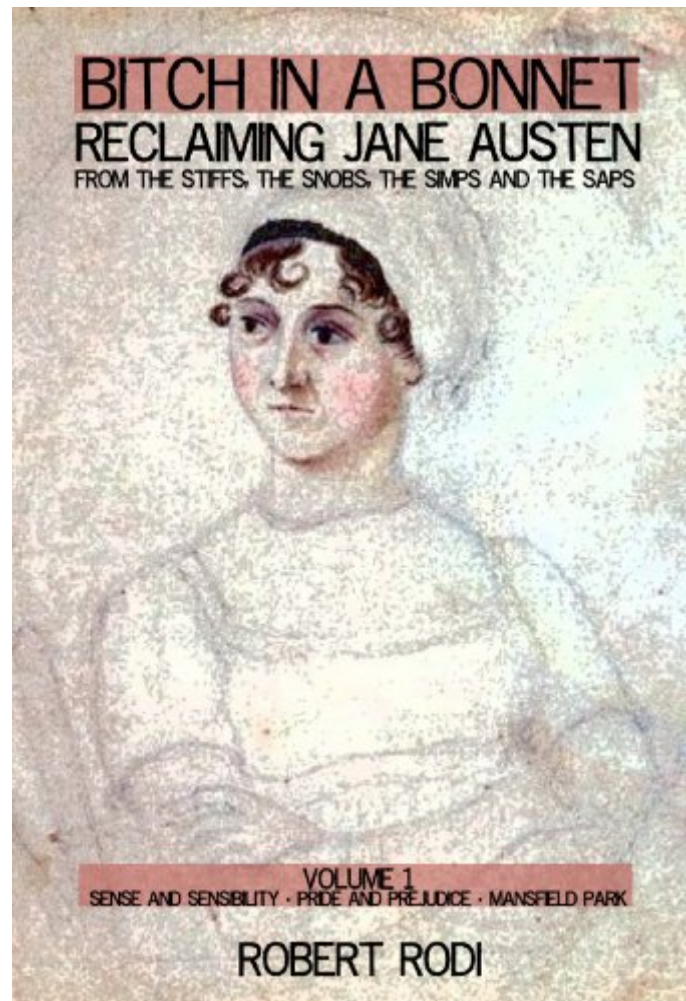


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Bitch In A Bonnet: Reclaiming Jane Austen From The Stiffs, The Snobs, The Simps And The Saps (Volume 1)



Synopsis

Novelist Rodi (Fag Hag, The Sugarman Bootlegs) launches a broadside against the depiction of Jane Austen as a “œa woman”™s writerâ |quaint and darling, doe-eyed and demure, parochial if not pastoral, and dizzily, swooningly romantic â ” the inventor and mother goddess of â ^chick lit.â™â • Instead he sees her as â œa sly subversive, a clear-eyed social Darwinist, and the most unsparing satirist of her centuryâ | She takes sharp, swift swipes at the social structure and leaves it, not lethally wounded, but shorn of its prettifying garb, its flabby flesh exposed in all its naked grossness. And then she laughs.â • In this volume, which collects and amplifies two-and-a-half yearsâ™ worth of blog entries, he combs through the first three novels in Austenâ™s canon â ” Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice, and Mansfield Park â ” with the aim of charting her growth as both a novelist and a humorist, and of shattering the notion that sheâ™s a romantic of any kind (â œWeddings bore her, and the unrelenting vulgarity of our modern wedding industry â ” which strives to turn each marriage ceremony into the kind of blockbuster apotheosis that makes grand opera look like a campfire sing along â ” would appall her into derisive laughterâ •).â œHilariousâ |Rodiâ™s title is a tribute. Heâ™s angry that the Austen craze has defanged a novelist whoâ™s â ^wicked, arch, and utterly merciless. She skewers the pompous, the pious, and the libidinous with the animal glee of a natural-born sadistâ™â |Like Rodi, I believe Austen deserves to join the grand pantheon of gadflies: Voltaire and Swift, Twain and Mencken.â • Lev Raphael, The Huffington Post

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Customer Reviews

This litcrit is well-written and funny, but here's the trouble: I spy a wee thread of sexism. Rodi is right - there is a "Jane Austen" that is not the same as Jane Austen, a tamed version that lives in people's minds and is associated primarily with romance, and the impulse to push the real Austen forward at the people who can only gush over her ~*~heroes~*~ and their associated most dramatic moments (or wet shirt scenes. To go off on a tangent, it seems immeasurably hypocritical that nobody these days says anything against Colin Firth in a wet shirt, but all hints of eroticism in newer adaptations get pooh-poohed as pandering). However, he presents himself as the sole voice of reason when there are many people in Jane Austen's fandom, mostly women, who are well aware that she was primarily writing comedies of manners, satires on human behavior. And at the same time, when he rails against romance novels and films ("... and Austen, the supposed progenitor of "Regency romance", the patron saint of "chick lit", the inspiration for who even knows how many craptacular costume dramas with dewy close-ups of heaving bazooms and quivering lips ...") I detect even more revulsion for the people (again, primarily women) who enjoy them. What is it that makes these costume dramas craptacular? Apparently, nothing except their focus on a dramatic romantic storyline. I cannot speak for everyone who discusses Austen's place in the ancestry of the romance novel, but it seems to me that there *is* a general understanding out there that she did not single-handedly give birth to the genre.

Robert Rodi's "Bitch in a Bonnet" is an amusing commentary on three of Jane Austen's novels. He presents an interesting discussion of the novels as Comedies of Manners influenced by the Enlightenment. I especially enjoyed his analysis of Austen's masterful choice of words and use of phrases that make her stories sparkle with wit and astute insight. Rodi's essays on "Sense and Sensibility" and "Pride and Prejudice" achieve these goals very well, but I was disappointed with his comments about "Mansfield Park." Rodi remarks that Jane Austen barely mentions servants in her novels; yet, when she wrote an entire story about a poor relation/servant, he doesn't notice. Fannie Price is an unwanted child. She is not physically strong or particularly bright; she has minimal education and social experience. Clearly the Bertrams, who have taken her in, do not

consider her one of the family. Of course she is passive; she must remain under the radar to survive in the Bertram house. And of course she is terrified when someone notices her, as she does not know how to interact socially. To label her as passive-aggressive makes no sense. Her indication that she would like to visit Sotherton shows only a flicker of curiosity and courage. The better developed and more interesting Crawford characters serve as a contrast to Fannie. Although they are entertaining and exciting and have many advantages, they are basically self-centered troublemakers. Although she is dull, in many ways Fannie has better sense than they do. She certainly does less harm. Austen probably had good reason to cast Fannie as the heroine.

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