



Those Elegant Decorums: The Concept of Propriety in Jane Austen's Novels

Jane Nardin

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Analyzes the way in which Austen blends ironic criticism with moral affirmation through her complex and little-understood management of the narrative point of view. In Those Elegant Decorums Professor Nardin differs from the many critics who feel that Jane Austen's irony and her morality contradict each other. She analyzes the way in which Jane Austen blends ironic criticism with moral affirmation through her complex and little-understood management of the narrative point of view. She demonstrates that the reader takes a journey of perception similar to that of the central characters in the novels, and that the correct interpretation of events is often unclear until well after the fact, despite the seeming aid of an apparently unbiased, omniscient narrator.

Professor Nardin applies this general viewpoint on Jane Austen's art in her examination of the way Jane Austen uses ideas about propriety in her six novels. For Jane Austen, a person's social behavior--the code of propriety by which he lives--is the external manifestation of his internal moral character. What is the relationship between the conventionally accepted rules of propriety by which the gentry of Jane Austen's era regulated their lives and a morally valid standard of social behavior? This is an important question throughout Jane Austen's work. Those Elegant Decorums is a detailed study of the answers Jane Austen suggests in each novel.



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