

جامعة الانبار
كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية
قسم : اللغة الانكليزية
مادة: الرواية الفكتورية
مرحلة: الثالثة
التدريسي: م. محمد درع

محاضرات مادة رواية ايما

The story of a self-deluded heroine in a small village, Jane Austen’s Emma hardly seems revolutionary. But, 200 years after it was first published, John Mullan argues that it belongs alongside the works of Flaubert, Joyce and Woolf as one of the great experimental novels

In January 1814, Jane Austen sat down to write a revolutionary novel. Emma, the book she composed over the next year, was to change the shape of what is possible in fiction. Perhaps it seems odd to call Austen “revolutionary” – certainly few of the other great pioneers in the history of the English novel have thought so. From Charlotte Brontë, who found only “neat borders” and elegant confinement in her fiction, to DH Lawrence, who called her “English in the bad, mean, snobbish sense of the word”, many thought her limited to the small world and small concerns of her characters. Some of the great modernists were perplexed. “What is all this about Jane Austen?” Joseph Conrad asked HG Wells. “What is there in her? What is it all about?” “I dislike Jane ... Could never see anything in Pride and Prejudice,” Vladimir Nabokov told the critic Edmund Wilson.

Austen left behind no artistic manifesto, no account of her narrative methods beyond a few playful remarks in letters to her niece, Anna. This has made it easy for novelists and critics to follow Henry James’s idea of her as “instinctive and charming”. “For signal examples of what composition, distribution, arrangement can do, of how they intensify

the life of a work of art, we have to go elsewhere.” She hardly knew what she was doing, so, implicitly, the innovative novelist like James has nothing to learn from her.

There have been scattered exceptions. The year after he published *More Pricks Than Kicks*, the young Samuel Beckett told his friend Thomas McGreevy, “Now I am reading the divine Jane. I think she has much to teach me.” (One looks forward to the scholarly tome on the influence of Jane Austen on Samuel Beckett.) Contemporary novelists have been readier to acknowledge her genius and influence. Janeites felt a frisson of satisfaction to see that the most formally ingenious British postmodern novel of recent years, Ian McEwan’s *Atonement*, opens with a lengthy epigraph from *Northanger Abbey*. McEwan alerts the reader to the fact that his own novel learns its tricks – about a character who turns fictional imaginings into disastrous fact – from the genteel and supposedly conservative Austen.

Emma, published 200 years ago this month, was revolutionary not because of its subject matter: Austen’s jesting description to Anna of the perfect subject for a novel – “Three or four families in a country village” – fits it well. It was certainly not revolutionary because of any intellectual or political content. But it was revolutionary in its form and technique. Its heroine is a self-deluded young woman with the leisure and power to meddle in the lives of her neighbours. The narrative was radically experimental because it was designed to share her delusions. The novel bent narration through the distorting lens of its protagonist’s mind. Though little noticed by most of the pioneers of fiction for the next century and more, it belongs with the great experimental novels of Flaubert or Joyce or Woolf. Woolf wrote that if Austen had lived longer and written more, “She would have been the forerunner of Henry James and of Proust”. In *Emma*, she is.

To measure the audacity of the book, take a simple sentence that no novelist before her could have written. Our privileged heroine has befriended a sweet, open, deeply naive girl of 17 called Harriet Smith. It is a wholly unequal relationship: Emma is the richest and cleverest woman in Highbury; Harriet is the “natural daughter of someone”, left as a permanent resident of the genteel girls’ boarding school in the town. While cultivating

their relationship, Emma knows very well that Harriet is her inferior. “But in every respect as she saw more of her, she was confirmed in all her kind designs.”

The sentence is in the third person, yet we are not exactly being told something by the author. “Kind designs” is Emma’s complacent judgment of herself. Even the rhyme in the phrase makes it sound better to herself. In fact, the kindness is all in the mind of the beholder. Emma has set out to mould Harriet. Emma’s former companion, Miss Taylor, has got married and become Mrs Weston, leaving her solitary and at a loose end. Harriet will be her project. Her plans are kind, she tells herself, because she will improve this uninstructed and wide-eyed young woman. We should be able to hear, however, that her designs are utterly self-serving. Soon she is persuading Harriet to refuse a marriage proposal from a farmer who loves her, and beguiling her with the wholly illusory prospect of marriage to the smooth young vicar, Mr Elton.

Take another little sentence from much later in the novel. By now Emma is convinced that Harriet, scorned by Mr Elton, can be paired off with the highly eligible Frank Churchill. The only impediment seems to be the inflexible Mrs Churchill, Frank’s adoptive mother, who expects him to find a much grander wife. Then news arrives of Mrs Churchill’s sudden death. Emma meets Harriet, who has also heard. “Harriet behaved extremely well on the occasion, with great self-command.” Obviously she is learning self-possession from her patron. “Emma was gratified to observe such a proof in her of strengthened character.”