

Saving Jane Austen: A Comedie Grotesque

Daniel Curzon

IGNA Books (Aug 15, 2012)

Softcover \$15.95 (452pp)

978-0-930650-30-8

For an author who only published six novels (the posthumous *Sanditon* is a partial novel not published until recently), Jane Austen's Regency-era fiction has immense staying power. Not only have her books spawned innumerable fan-fiction items, works such as *Pride and Prejudice* now have sequels, prequels, and spinoffs. Many of these works continue Austen's characters' stories or take those characters down fictional side roads.

Then there are the zombies (*Pride and Prejudice*), vampires (*Emma*, *Jane Bites Back*) and sea monster send-offs (*Sense and Sensibility*). Starting about 2009, the idea of creating a mashup of Austen and a horror icon took root, beginning with *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*. One could argue that this trend has continued with other historical figures such as Abraham Lincoln and Edgar Allen Poe in computer games, movies, and fiction.

Saving Jane Austen belongs with those novels, but it's quite different in approach and content. Daniel Curzon takes a decidedly satirical view of Ms. Austen and her writing style, crafting a novel composed of e-mails between the cryogenically frozen and revived head of the famous authoress and an elderly American rare books dealer (now retired) named Aubrey Oxbridge, president of the What Would Jane Austen Do club. More than this, by way of summation, would spoil the fun.

Curzon's Jane Austen retains her era's viewpoint on matters public and private. Her lack of a body to which her head can be attached—and the limitations thereby forced on her—doesn't stop her from getting back to writing. What she produces is a dizzying blend of nineteenth-century British society and modern life that seems to want to go in two directions at once. It's also hilarious.

Curzon is very adept at taking on the Austen writing style and melding it with a contemporary story of a woman transported into the future who must learn to adapt. This novel mirrors Austen's focus on Regency-era class divisions and social manners by bringing in several topics of current concern (gender identity, neo-Nazis, immigrants, and longer lifespans) to replace them. The result is a roller-coaster ride, chuckle-per-page gem that will probably outrage "true" Austen fans and delight readers who can handle humorous approaches to famous authors. Satire is an acquired taste, and one which Curzon uses to great effect.

This is not a beach read by any means (one must know at least the basics about Austen to get the majority of the humor): *Saving Jane Austen* is a novel best enjoyed by readers who like guilty pleasures. It's a book well worth savoring.

J. G. STINSON (August 6, 2012)

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