

PREFACE

The novels of Jane Austen have been approached by the critics down the ages from various viewpoints. Some critics have examined Austen's works in terms of social context and social vision, their religious dimension etc. Another group of critics have analysed her novels in relation to the question of women's education and province of womanhood while others have evaluated them from the perspective of politics and French Revolution. There are still some aspects in her novels which, I think, have not received their due critical attention. It is now being increasingly felt that Austen is an ironist in a more subtle way than earlier perceived and her novels offer a fascinating subject of study in this direction. Although it is not altogether an unexplored subject, I feel there is still some scope to show how exactly the device of irony becomes an instrument and driving force at Austen's hands in order to drive the basic themes of her novels. Hence the main thrust of the dissertation is to project Jane Austen as essentially an ironist to trace in whatever detail possible the uses of irony of different shades and meanings in her novels.

In writing this dissertation I am greatly indebted to the works of all my illustrious predecessors in the field whose names have been duly mentioned in the footnotes. I am grateful also to many others whom I have failed to include in the list. A select bibliography has also been appended to the work.

Above all, I take this opportunity to express my deep sense of respect and gratitude to my teacher, Dr. Suhas Kumar Roy Moulick, Professor, Department of English, University of North Bengal, but for whose guidance and inspiration this humble work of mine could never have been completed. I am also indebted to Dr. Parbati Charan Chakroborty, Professor of English, University of Burdwan, for offering me many helpful suggestions in preparing this thesis, and also for helping me in choosing its title.

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All references to Jane Austen's novels are from *The Complete Novels of Jane Austen* of Rupa Classics published by Rupa & Company, New Delhi, 2000. The work has been done in strict adherence to the guidelines prescribed in *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, Joseph Gibaldi, Fifth edition (First East-West Press Edition 2000), Affiliated East-West Press Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi.

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