



Jane Austen and Eighteenth-Century Courtesy Books (Contributions to the Study of World Literature)

By Penelope Fritzer

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Jane Austen and Eighteenth-Century Courtesy Books (Contributions to the Study of World Literature) By Penelope Fritzer

One of the most important novelists of the early 19th century, Jane Austen (1775-1817) continues to be read and studied today. Throughout her novels, she creates characters who embody various virtues and limitations. The best characters represent the best behavior, just as the less admirable ones behave in less admirable ways. The courtesy books of the 18th century advise certain moral behavior for character development. This book studies Austen's parallels to 18th century courtesy books. Educational and recreational activities in Austen's novels, such as reading, dancing, card-playing, and theatre-going, are often similar to those activities recommended in the courtesy books with which Austen would have been familiar. So too, various social activities and personal characteristics depicted in Austen's novels frequently accord with courtesy book recommendations.

Proper behavior was of great concern to Austen's contemporaries. Throughout the 18th century, numerous courtesy books were written, advocating certain moral behavior for character development. Austen would have been familiar with these books, for they were influential during the late 18th century, when she grew up, and in the early 19th century, when her works were published.

Although Austen is known as a novelist of manners, surprisingly little work has been done to compare the manners recommended by the courtesy books of the time with the manners of the characters in her novels. This study demonstrates Austen's parallels with 18th century courtesy books in shaping her characters. Educational and recreational activities in her works are often similar to the activities recommended by the courtesy books of her time. So too, the social activities and personal characteristics she presents frequently accord with the recommendations of the courtesy books. Austen's reliance on courtesy books is of great importance, for scholars have generally held that her novels are reflective of the manners of the period. Without the documentation that this study provides, such assertions would remain empty of authority.

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Jane Austen and Eighteenth-Century Courtesy Books (Contributions to the Study of World Literature) By Penelope Fritzer Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #2149679 in Books
- Published on: 1997-11-20
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.50" h x .38" w x 5.51" l, .61 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 136 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

"What distinguishes Fritzer's approach is that she offers a full definition of courtesy books, drawing a good deal on primary sources. She pulls together, reexamines, and enlarges previous notions of how these concepts appear in Austen, devoting chapters to education, recreation, social intercourse, and personal characteristics. Faculty and graduate students will find most use for Fritzer's sparse, focused, and well-researched examination, though upper-division undergraduates in courses exploring the rich cultural background of Austen's life and times will also be glad to have it."-Choice

"Fritzer's work provides valuable insights into what Austen believed regarding conduct and morality, and what courtesy book authors espoused....Fritzer allows us to rediscover Austen by way of discovering courtesy book literature."-JASNA News

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About the Author

PENELOPE JOAN FRITZER is Assistant Professor at the Davie Campus of Florida Atlantic University. Her research interests include 19th century British literature, detective fiction, and humor studies, along with various aspects of English and social studies education.

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