

“Plan of a Novel” according to Hints from Various Quarters

by Jane Austen (1816)

Introductory Note:

Written in 1816, partly as a result of her encounter with Mr. Clarke, Jane Austen returns here to her earlier habit (in the *Juvenilia* and *Northanger Abbey*) of parodying what was ridiculous in the popular literature of her day -- in this case perfectly virtuous heroines (she confessed in one of her letters that "pictures of perfection make me sick and wicked"), villainous aristocratic would-be ravishers, and high toned literary sentiments and vehement emotions instead of a natural depiction of real life. The Plan of a Novel also incorporates some of the would-be helpful "advice" that most authors can't help receiving from family, friends, and strangers (the original manuscript includes marginal notes indicating those who were responsible for certain suggestions).

E-text of the “Plan of a Novel”

SCENE to be in the Country, **Heroine** the Daughter of a **Clergyman**, one who after having lived much in the World had retired from it and settled in a Curacy, with a very small fortune of his own. -- He, the most excellent Man that can be imagined, perfect in Character, Temper, and Manners -- without the smallest drawback or peculiarity to prevent his being the most delightful companion to his Daughter from one year's end to the other. -- **Heroine** a faultless Character herself, -- perfectly good, with much tenderness and sentiment, and not the least Wit -- very highly accomplished, understanding modern Languages and (generally speaking) everything that the most accomplished young Women learn, but particularly excelling in Music -- her favourite pursuit -- and playing equally well on the PianoForte and Harp -- and singing in the first stile. Her Person quite beautiful -- dark eyes and plump cheeks. -- **Book to open** with the description of Father and Daughter -- who are to converse in long speeches, elegant Language -- and a tone of high serious sentiment. -- The **Father** to be induced, at his Daughter's earnest request, to relate to her the past events of his Life. This **Narrative** will reach through the greatest part of the first volume -- as besides all the circumstances of his attachment to her **Mother** and their **Marriage**, it will comprehend his going to sea as Chaplain to a distinguished naval character about the Court, his going afterwards to Court himself, which introduced him to a great variety of Characters and involved him in many interesting situations, concluding with his opinions on the Benefits to result from Tithes being done away, and his having buried his own Mother (Heroine's lamented **Grandmother**) in consequence of the High Priest of the Parish in which she died refusing to pay her Remains the respect due to them. The **Father** to be of a very literary turn, an Enthusiast in Literature, nobody's Enemy but his own -- at the same time most zealous in discharge of his Pastoral Duties, the model of an exemplary Parish Priest. -- The heroine's friendship to be sought after by a **young woman** in the same Neighbourhood, of Talents and Shrewdness, with light eyes and a fair skin, but having a considerable degree of Wit, Heroine shall shrink from the acquaintance.

From this outset, the Story will proceed, and contain a striking variety of **adventures**. Heroine and her Father never above a fortnight together in one place, he being driven from his Curacy by the vile arts of some totally unprincipled and heart-less young **Man**, desperately in love with the Heroine, and pursuing her with unrelenting passion. -- No sooner settled in one **Country of Europe** than they are necessitated to quit it and retire to another -- always making new acquaintance, and always obliged to leave them. -- This will of course exhibit a

wide variety of **Characters** -- but there will be no mixture; the scene will be for ever shifting from one Set of People to another -- but **All the Good** will be unexceptionable in every respect -- and there will be no foibles or weaknesses but with the **Wicked**, who will be completely depraved and infamous, hardly a resemblance of humanity left in them. -- Early in her career, in the progress of her first removals, **Heroine** must meet with the **Hero** -- all perfection of course -- and only prevented from paying his addresses to her by some excess of refinement. -- Wherever she goes, somebody falls in love with her, and she receives repeated offers of Marriage -- which she refers wholly to her Father, exceedingly angry that he should not be first applied to. -- Often carried away by the **anti-hero**, but rescued either by her Father or by the Hero -- often reduced to support herself and her Father by her **Talents** and work for her Bread; continually cheated and defrauded of her hire, worn down to a **Skeleton**, and now and then starved to death. -- At last, hunted out of civilized **Society**, denied the poor Shelter of the humblest Cottage, they are compelled to retreat into Kamschatka where the poor Father, quite worn down, finding his end approaching, throws himself on the Ground, and after 4 or 5 hours of tender advice and parental Admonition to his miserable Child, **expires** in a fine burst of **Literary Enthusiasm**, intermingled with Invectives against holders of Tithes. -- **Heroine** inconsolable for some time -- but afterwards crawls back towards her former Country -- having at least 20 narrow escapes from falling into the hands of the Anti-hero -- and at last in the very nick of time, turning a corner to avoid him, runs into the arms of the **Hero** himself, who having just shaken off the scruples which fetter'd him before, was at the very moment setting off in pursuit of her. -- The Tenderest and completest **Eclaircissement** takes place, and they are happily united. -- Throughout the whole work, Heroine to be in the most elegant **Society** and living in high style. The name of the work not to be *Emma*, but of the same sort as *S. & S.* and *P. & P.*

Notes

"curacy": A "curate" was a Church of England clergyman on the lowest rung of the hierarchy of ecclesiastical endowment (entitlement to agricultural tithes, and security of tenure): curate, vicar, rector.

“Eclaircissement”: The clearing up of anything that is obscure or not easily understood; an explanation.

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