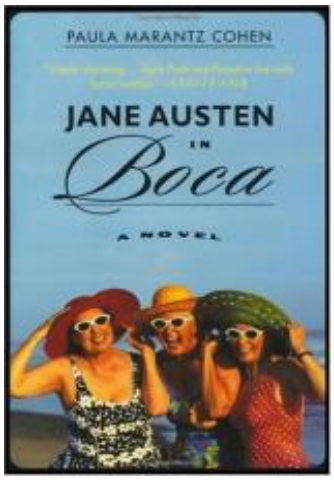
Jane Austen in Boca: A Novel

by Paula Marantz Cohen



About the Book

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a nice Jewish widower must be in want of a wife.

Jane Austen centered her classic novels around "three or four families in a country village." So does Paula Marantz Cohen in this witty twist on **Pride and Prejudice**---except this time the "village" is Boca Raton, Florida. Eligible men are scarce in Boca. When good-hearted meddler Carol Newman learns that the wealthy and personable Norman Grafstein has lost his wife, she resolves to marry him off to her lonely mother-in-law, May. Even May's sharp-tongued friend Flo approves of Norman---although Norman's best friend Stan, a cynical professor, keeps getting under Flo's skin.

Will May and Norman eventually find happiness? Will Flo succumb to the charms of the suavely cosmopolitan Mel Shirmer? Misunderstandings abound until love conquers both pride and prejudice in this perceptive, engaging comedy of manners.

Complications and misunderstandings abound in this romantic and perceptive comedy of manners.

Discussion Guide

1. How does **Jane Austen in Boca** combine satire with romance? Is the tone of the novel primarily critical or affectionate (or both)?

2. The novel deals with older people in a retirement setting. In what ways is this fundamental to the plot and in what ways is it incidental? How do you think different age groups would respond to the novel?

3. How does the use of Yiddish and the particular focus on customs and ethnic humor ground the book in a specific cultural group? How might some of these aspects ? for example, food, shopping, child-rearing ? be translated to other

groups?

4. The book deals with romance, but it also deals with friendship. It?s been said that May, Flo, and Lila resemble high school girlfriends. Why might aspects of friendship that we knew in high school get revived at this later stage of life?

5. The book contains many dramatic scenes or set-pieces (the Valentine?s Day Dinner Dance, Hy and Lila?s wedding, Hy?s funeral, May?s birthday present, Flo and Stan?s confrontation, the final seminar, etc). Discuss the dramatic nature of these scenes and their function in moving the plot forward. You might also consider how these scenes might be staged in a movie?and who might play the key roles.

6. There?s no sex in the book (excluding of course the Viagra scene?which is recounted rather than dramatically represented). Is the absence of sex a function merely of discretion, given the age of the characters, or is it fundamental to the novel?s kind of romantic plot? Some people have said that the absence of sex in a book or a movie can be sexier than its presence. What do you think?

7. Jane Austen in Boca draws on the plot and, to some extent, the satirical style of Jane Austen?s **Pride and Prejudice**. What do the two books have in common, and what are the differences? What does this say about changes in society over nearly 200 years?

8. One of the themes of **Pride and Prejudice** is that first impressions may be misguided. How do our views of the characters and community change as we read **Jane Austen in Boca**?

Author Bio

Paula Marantz Cohen is Distinguished Professor of English at Drexel University in Philadelphia. She lives in Moorestown, New Jersey, and her in-laws live in Boca Raton, Florida. Her previous non-fiction books include SILENT FILM AND THE TRIUMPH OF THE AMERICAN MYTH and THE DAUGHTER AS A READER: Encounters Between Literature and Life. This is her first novel.

Critical Praise

"Page-turner of the week.... In this witty romp, widowed Jewish women and their extended kin fill in for the country families in **Pride and Prejudice**.... What's not to like?"

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