



Helen

Maria Edgeworth

Sort Of Books

By Stephanie Mann

Helen was written by Maria Edgeworth in 1834, when she was in her sixties. Although Edgeworth is now a somewhat forgotten writer, she was a fascinating character; she worked with her father on political texts, campaigned to help the poor affected by the Irish potato famine and was an associate of Byron. She was also admired by Jane Austen and Ruskin declared her bestselling work the most re-readable of the age.

Yet despite the unconventional author, the novel itself is very much in the mould of 19th-century women's literature: a humble, penniless orphan becomes the live-in companion of a rich, newly-married friend, an older woman to offer advice and morality. Despite the presence of male characters, this is definitely a female-driven story.

So far, so Regency drama. But what makes this novel stand out are the little twists and turns that the reader does not notice until after the event; little lies and hints of a possible scandal are deliciously laced throughout the story. Although you can tell Helen's destiny fairly early on, Edgeworth keeps readers eagerly anticipating the next clue.

I would heartily recommend *Helen* to any Austen fans, I think I'll just stick to reading the Brontes instead.