



An Accomplished Woman

Jude Morgan

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As a young woman, clever, self-reliant Lydia Templeton scandalised society by rejecting Lewis Durrant, the county's most eligible bachelor. Ten years later, Lydia has no regrets and, having concluded that matters of the heart need no longer trouble her, she is quite happy to remain unwed.

But others still seek Lydia's advice on their love lives, and when her godmother implores her to take her young ward Phoebe's search for a suitor in hand, it's hard to refuse. In truth, the prospect fills Lydia with horror (especially as she must go to *Bath* of all places to do it), but poor Phoebe, having managed to promise herself to two men at once, rather needs her help.

However, finding a solution to Phoebe's dilemma proves far trickier than anyone imagined. As affairs become increasingly tangled, Phoebe more muddled and Lydia's exasperation grows, the confirmed spinster finds that her own heart is not quite the closed book she thought it was...

An Accomplished Woman Details

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Laura says

In spite of a slow start, this was diverting enough that the author's obvious looting of Jane Austen characters and situations didn't give me heartburn. Our heroine, Lydia, is as sure of herself as Emma, as ruled by her sense of reason as Elinor Dashwood, and even more outspoken than Elizabeth Bennet. And, like Anne Elliot, she turned down a proposal in her youth and is now on the precipice of confirmed spinsterhood. However, Lydia is content to be single, as it affords her the freedom to pursue her own interests and generally please herself. Plus she enjoys relatively easy terms with her rejected suitor, the eligible if irascible Mr. Durrant. (This, clearly, is where we enter the realm of fiction: in my experience, rejected suitors don't stay in the neighborhood for ten years making amusingly sardonic conversation; they marry someone else and maybe keep you on their Christmas card list. But I like Mr. Durrant – he's blunt and crabby – so I won't quibble.)

The story gets moving when Lydia is enlisted to accompany a friend's young ward to Bath. At first Lydia balks at the request – Bath, after all! The capital of shallowness and stupidity! But she relents, partly from a sense of duty to her friend and partly to prove that she's capable of anything. For who better to guide a young woman through the treacherous waters of courtship than a lady of sense and taste?

Turns out the young charge, Phoebe, is all sweetness and fresh beauty and fifty thousand pounds, but she's torn between two lovers...feeling like a fool. The reader probably isn't torn between them, though. One of them exudes good breeding; the other exudes the sort of impetuous romanticism that makes you want to throw things at him. Happily, Mr. Durrant also descends on Bath to find a wife – for the sole purpose of blighting the hopes of his spendthrift nephew – which adds to the fun. Soon the nephew shows up, impossibly charming. Intrigue, misunderstandings, and romance abound.

The critic who called Jude Morgan "a latter-day Jane Austen" is sadly mistaken, or bribed. However, while this certainly lacks the finesse and depth of Jane Austen's works, it's still entertaining, if at times rather too consciously witty. But I enjoyed it. The characterizations aren't subtle, and I was irritated by a shameless caricature of Mrs. Elton, minus the humor, but we can't have everything, and *An Accomplished Woman* is enough for a pleasant evening.

Wealththeow says

Lydia is that most beloved of Regency heroines, a woman past her "prime" but with a quick wit and an entertaining inner monologue. After turning down a marriage proposal in her youth, she has spent the last decade going to art exhibits, translating old texts, and in every way living a satisfying life of the mind. But then her godmother asks her for a favor, and Lydia finds herself escorting a pretty young heiress around Bath. And though Phoebe is smart and has good taste in every other respect, her swains leave something to be desired...Luckily, Lydia's old friend the sarcastic and pessimistic Mr. Durrant is also in Bath at the time, and she keeps herself entertained through a merry battle of witticisms with him.

Lydia is a great character, fully realized and fleshed out. Her supporting cast is entertaining, each with their own motives and manner of speaking. Morgan's writing has an easy style and cleverness to it that I find refreshing after years of reading stilted dialog. The writing is a cross between Austen's character-insights and Heyer's frothy fun.

Leslie says

Morgan's clever pastiche of Austen knocks the many recent imitations and sequelae out of the park! Light-hearted, tongue-in-cheek - Morgan's frequent references to tipping wine as a refuge for spinster ladies, especially - yet as tartly amusing as Austen herself, *An Accomplished Woman* manages to mock the Heyer ideal of Regency romance while at the same time abiding by its conventions. Morgan's tone is eerily similar to Austen's while remaining indefatigably modern.

Truly enjoyable and a definite read-alike for fans of Austen, Stephanie Barron, Julia Barrett, Joan Aiken, and Pamela Aidan, among the many, many Austen-ators.

Kelly says

This review first appeared on my blog *Shoulda Coulda Woulda Books*.

This is my third Morgan. Two main things to say, really: First, I liked it better than either of the others by him I've read so far, and second, I think I understand why so many people seem to have a problem with him.

This book centers on a thirty-year old single woman named Lydia Templeton. Of course, this being a novel that models itself after Regency social comedies, that "single" status matters rather a lot to the plot. Ten years ago, Lydia rejected Lewis Durrant, eligible local bachelor, for a mixed bag of reasons that become clearer over the course of the novel- a major one being the fact that, at an adventurous, intelligent, defiant twenty, with life just opening up before you, marrying the man who lives next door that it makes a lot of sense for you to marry is pretty low on the list of things that one actually wants to do. In any case, it's ten years later, and Lydia is enjoying a comfortable life with her scholar father. But then her old friend asks her to go to Bath to be a companion to a young heiress who is making her debut into society and choosing between various men. Lydia's role as a "wise old woman" when she is *way* too young for the job commences, and obviously, many, many complications follow for her and everyone around her.

I thought this novel was far superior to the previous efforts I've read by him. Unlike in *A Little Folly*, Morgan did a much better job of creating naturalistic dialogue, actions, and thoughts for the characters that sounded as if they might be things that people would actually say rather than say only in a staged play of the time period. In part because of this, also unlike many of characters in *Folly*, I had absolutely no trouble attaching to the main characters or caring about their stories getting proper resolution. Morgan also created a spirited, intelligent heroine with obvious flaws, whose flaws become even more obvious over the course of the novel, but who nonetheless the reader wants to stick with until she learns and grows from them. (I really thought Morgan did good work with showing, in particular, Durrant's perspective without ever actually letting us inside his head.)

Morgan is also proved again that he is capable of turning memorable and witty phrases throughout the novel- this time I was even surprised into laughter more than once while reading him- first time that's happened. Moreover, his narrative voice, that marvelously magisterial third person omniscient thing he's great at imitating, continues the best part of the whole thing. I was just sad there was far less of it this novel. I would have been glad for the book to be several chapters longer if we just inserted more of that and, honestly, even amplified it so that it became Thackeray-esque, long chapters of zoomed-out commentary on the proceedings. In addition, he has a great feeling for the rhythm of the plot and when it should begin to wind

up or wind down and just how much. He's done the work, he's spent the time here, and it shows.

But, and this is going to be a fairly big caveat, I also maybe totally get some reasons why people ultimately don't *love* his work, even if they recognize his undeniable talent. I felt it myself at several points and nearly gave up reading at one point it pissed me off so much.

First of all, I'm increasingly suspicious Morgan holds himself just a little bit above the company of some of his readers. He is totally fine with demonstrating how well he understands his genre, but also makes it clear that there's some nonsense about it he will *not* be participating in, thank you! For example, this is now the second straight book he's had his characters rant for him about how silly the Regency-era slang is- he writes a paragraph of it to prove he knows it and can do it, and then proceeds to have his characters refuse to utter it for the rest of the book, even where it might be appropriate for his characters. Because throwing away a legitimate means of characterizing someone and amusing your readers because you feel you're too good for it seems like the right plan? This is a relatively minor example, but there are bigger ones, such as when he has his main character essentially dismiss the entirety of the Regency romance genre as just too unbearably silly for words. I think he makes fun of his audience a little bit, and not in a loving way where he's one of them. It seems smug, like he's just analyzed readers of the genre and cleverly figured out how to be a success- while of course also scolding readers who like Regency-set novels for *inferior* reasons, like roooooooooooooomance. (*sigh implied here*)

Second, and this is a bigger problem, Morgan's novels have problems on a purely structural level. I think he wants to avoid writing straight updates of the Austen novels, so he mixes things up and puts in Heyer elements in an attempt to create something new. But what often ends up happening is that you end up feeling like you've started to read one novel, wandered off into the borders of another one for a side adventure in the middle, and finally ended up in a third that doesn't make a whole hell of a lot of sense given the first two novels it seemed like we were in. At the beginning we were reading *Pride and Prejudice* mixed with *Persuasion*, where Lizzie has become old and made some mistakes along the way. Then it became one of Heyer's Bath romances about ladies past their prime mixed with *Emma*, where it suddenly became evident that Lydia was more Emma Woodhouse than Lizzie, and was definitely no part of Anne Elliott. That could have been a brilliant twist, and for a hot second it really was- but it turned out that while Morgan made that brilliant shift for his heroine, he left all the other characters behind in the Bath novel or suddenly turned them into *Emma* characters to make the plot work, when they had been P&P or S&S or Heyer characters with no connection to Austen at all. For example, one of the perfectly blameless male suitors was suddenly forced to become Mr. Elton to make the whole thing work- no unsuspecting and wholly delightful character deserves such a fate! Similarly, a perfectly awful Willoughby/Heyer silly melancholic-poetic character suddenly became the likeable version of this archetype- which would have been a great transformation to watch slowly, over the course of the novel, but was infuriating to be told happened off-stage, over the course of a few pages, with no previous sign that it might happen having been given. By the time we get to the conclusion, we've got Emma Woodhouse marrying Mr. Darcy and we're wondering what the hell these two characters are doing in the same room to begin with. While I appreciate that there are a lot of great raw ingredients to work with in this genre, I really think that Morgan needed to decide exactly which novel he was writing and stick with it from beginning to end, rather than bouncing around until his characters and his plot didn't ring true any longer.

Finally, basically what this ends up meaning is that Morgan often sets expectations for himself really high at the beginning of the novel- people start to judge it using, if not higher, than at least different standards (this ain't no run-of-the-mill Regency romance- you told us so yourself!), and unfortunately, his writing is uneven enough that it sets the reader up for disappointment. I said he was capable of great, witty lines. He is- but only at scattered points throughout the novel- there are definitely some memorably clunky parts, some characterization that doesn't quite work, some dialogue that feels off, some plot that doesn't make organic sense. Oh, none of it is quite terrible, but it's just off enough to make you feel disappointed, because he got you to expecting more of him, because he's shown he's sometimes capable of great quality writing- he turned

on the part of your brain that's into that- and then it abruptly goes away. It may come back again, but it leaves again enough times for you to register the drop in quality.

I would still like to read *Indiscretion* but I think I will have to make sure my expectations are adjusted and decline to get too excited when his narrative powers kick into their highest gear- I wonder whether he will be able to sustain the quality, or to refrain from looking down his nose at what he's writing for long enough to improve some of the problems with it. We'll see- if nothing else, I still have to say it remains the best of the Austen homages I've read- a low bar, but something nonetheless.

Krista says

I liked this one better than *A Little Folly*. Maybe because the lead character is one of those politely sarcastic females, dripping their futile world-changing toxins within the constraints of a society that does not allow women to be powerful or single-minded.

Morgan again delights with his writing style and his sharp, observant tongue, which fits so well here because of his sharp, observant leading lady:

"Susannah did not so much sit down as demonstrate sitting down's beautiful possibilities. From the sofa, all full breasts and flowing muslin, she beamed at her children and her life."

"'Oh, Culverton, yes,' cried George, who rowed in and out of conversations with a cheerful disregard for their drift..."

"'Really, I protest--what is left for the satirical mind to invent when reality so surpasses it?'"

"The removal of the first course interrupted, though it did not entirely stop, Mrs Vawser's tireless waving of the flag of personality. She could still subject Mr Durrant to glances, glances away, and sharp suppressions of hilarity accompanied by slaps with her handkerchief: to all of which Mr Durrant presented the same look of a man being turned slowly into stone, and welcoming it."

"Lydia formed a dispiriting impression of a man living within thick walls of self-regard, unpierced by any ray of humour."

"'How do you like the music?' she asked. 'Artificial,' he snapped, 'miserably artificial,' and he stared away: leaving Lydia to the interesting philosophic exercise of imagining what music with no artifice would sound like. A man falling off a step-ladder, perhaps, as long as he did it spontaneously, and with no soul-destroying preparation."

While I was disappointed in the typical Regency romance ending (strong woman melting into the arms of reticent and powerful man) I found I rather enjoyed the prospect of two of them making a life together; not an altogether happy ending but an ending that is really the beginning of the story. It's how all books should end.

Ilze says

Interesting and very well-written, but drags in places, especially in the first part of the book. Less than the sum of its parts, unfortunately.

A few things bothered me throughout the story:

Lydia Templeton and Lewis Durrant are the main characters and are supposed to be crazy in love with each other, and have been so for 10 years. But Lydia turned down Lewis' offer of marriage nine years ago and ever since has pretended outwardly and to herself that she doesn't care about him. Well, no, romantic love doesn't work like that, and if it did, the human race would die out pretty quickly. There is a HUGE, unrealistic deficit of lust on the part of the heroine in this story! (The book is written entirely from Lydia's POV, so I can't say if there is a similar deficit of lust on the part of the hero.)

Phoebe Rae is the young lady Lydia is supposed to chaperone on a visit to Bath. Phoebe is a beautiful heiress who has decided that she is equally in love with two young men, who initially both appear to be in love with her as well. Well, no, romantic love doesn't work like that - I've NEVER heard of a woman being equally in love/lust with two men simultaneously! Just couldn't get over my disbelief there.

Finally, there is a rather nasty thread running throughout the book of middle-aged women who are absolutely dreadful characters. Even Lady Eastmond, who is Phoebe's guardian and is supposed to be a sympathetic character, is rather manipulative, at least with Lydia, and she has the most tedious conversational style imaginable, which the author portrays at excruciating length. But Mrs. Vawser and Mrs. Allardyce are major characters in the story, and they are both horrible. And there aren't any sympathetic, normal middle-aged women in the story to balance this. So one gets the impression that Lydia and Phoebe, delightful as they are in the story, will end up like this in their middle age, in Jude Morgan's Regency world. Not an edifying prospect. Also not edifying for the middle-aged female who is reading the book!

Caz says

As others have said, this book is a little slow to start, and it felt, to me, as though the opening chapter was somewhat of an irrelevance. But once the story got going, I found myself eager to find out what happened next - even though it was fairly obvious how things were going to turn out!

Lydia Templeton bears many similarities to Emma Woodhouse, in that she lives with her father (thankfully, Dr Templeton seems to be rather more sensible than Mr Woodhouse!) and is a woman of independent means who does not mean to marry. Unlike Emma, Lydia is thirty and regards herself as being "on the shelf". I loved the writing and the characterisation; the grotesque Mrs Allardyce and Mrs Vawser; the charming but ultimately selfish Hugh Hanley and the young, beautiful Phoebe, who can't make up her mind and choose between her suitors - are all very well drawn. Lydia is gradually revealed to be somewhat of an unreliable narrator - although she appears to be less sure of herself and her abilities to guide a younger woman than Emma does, she nonetheless has a wilful, selfish streak, although that doesn't detract from her appeal, because it makes her less than perfect. If I have a complaint about the characterisation it's that Mr Durrant - rather like Mr Knightley - seems to reside mostly in the background, and I would have liked to have known more of him. And thus, the element of romance between the hero and heroine takes a back seat to the comedy of manners being played out among all the other characters, which is why I've not given this book

five stars. If you're looking for a well-written Regency ROMANCE - with the emphasis on the ROMANCE, then I'm not sure this is the book for you. But if you want sparkling dialogue and wit, good characterisation and plenty of nods towards the Great Jane, then look no further.

Jamie Collins says

This is an old-fashioned Regency romance from a modern writer; something very like a Georgette Heyer novel. It's well written and great fun to read.

Admittedly, this book is weaker than Morgan's *Indiscretion* and *A Little Folly*, mostly because it borrows too noticeably from Jane Austen's plots and characters. (The nudge-and-wink of having characters muse about "sense" and "sensibility" didn't help.) Based on that observation, I thought this must be the earliest of these three books, and I was surprised to find that it isn't. So I can only suppose it to be a deliberate choice. I can overlook similar plotting, but one characterization in particular I found grating, because it was too much like the unpleasant woman in *Emma* who repeated compliments her friends supposedly gave her.

Lydia is the the older, fiercely independent heroine we love to see in these romances, and her internal dialogue was a pleasure to read. She's cast as an unusually well-educated woman, although Morgan does not do a particularly good job of depicting this: we are told of her accomplishments, but she does not demonstrate them in a believable way, nor does she seem particularly intellectual.

Lydia reluctantly agrees to chaperone a young heiress during a summer in Bath, helping her to choose between two eligible suitors. Meanwhile Lydia finds herself in frequent company with the man whose proposal she turned down several years ago. Predictable romantic adventures ensue.

Never mind the faults; it's still a fun book, and I wish Morgan would write a dozen more of them.

QNPoohBear says

Though set in 1799, this book could have been written by Jane Austen or Georgette Heyer, therefore, I place it in the Regency category.

Thirty year-old Lydia Templeton in as accomplished woman, a bluestocking, well-educated in the classics and coolly determined not to let her heart, or any man, rule her. Though Lydia dreams of travel, she is happy at home with her father in the country, writing literary criticism and trading verbal jabs with their cynical bachelor neighbor, Lewis Durrant, whose hand she rejected nine years ago. Lydia is reluctantly talked into chaperoning her godmother's ward, the beautiful young heiress Phoebe Rae, in Bath in order to help the young woman choose between two suitors. Mr. Durrant has also come to Bath in search of a wife in order to cut his extravagant nephew out of an inheritance. Soon Lydia and Phoebe are involved in a social whirl, making new acquaintances and forming and reforming opinions of old ones. Finally, Lydia discovers that she has a heart after all. The first half of this novel reads very much like a Jane Austen novel. It reminded me a lot of *Emma*. However, the pace is extraordinarily slow and not much happens, much like *Emma*. The second half of the novel could be a new Georgette Heyer novel with romantic entanglements and quirky characters. None of the characters really appealed much to me though. As much as I really wanted to like Lydia, I found her too cynical and hardened to be the heroine of a romance. I would have preferred it if she didn't make the decision she did. The ending of the story almost belonged to a different book entirely. Many of the characters were reminiscent of Jane Austen characters and there are a few little winks to Jane Austen fans who will immediately recognize the references. I think this is a good read for Jane Austen and Georgette

Heyer fans. Those who prefer the more modern, sweet (or spicy) romance novels would do best to avoid this one.

Vanda Field says

Hi,

I've been prompted to join this site and write a comment solely on the basis of the disparaging reviews of Jude Morgan's *An Accomplished Woman*. I must admit I was surprised - not, of course, on the diversity of opinions - but moreso on the extreme denouncements of those who gave the book a very low rating. I have difficulty in understanding how those reviewers who, as they are subscribers to the site and to this specific area of the site, must have a general liking and appreciation for this genre, could post such derogatory comments on an author's work which exemplifies all that is so charming and satisfying about Regency romance: literate, witty, intelligent, replete with Austenesque / Heyeresque (if these aren't real words, they ought to be) characters, and thoroughly charming.

Jude Morgan's "*An Accomplished Woman*" is a modern classic of this genre, and a reading of this book the natural progression for lovers of Austen and Heyer. It would also be a lovely introduction to that genre for those not acquainted with its many treasures.

I hope the dubious reviews do not discourage anyone from reading such a wonderful book. As with my collection of Austen and Heyer books previously, I am now on my 5th reading of Lydia Templeton's (the accomplished heroine) Bath "entanglement" - and enjoying it completely.

An Accomplished Woman is a book you read for the read - it's very much a case of smelling the roses along the journey. Pretty much like works of Austen and Heyer after all.

Katharine says

Years ago I saw a recommendation for Jude Morgan's regency romances, something like "If you like Georgette Heyer then try..." But he seems to be a little bit obscure because I've never run across any of his novels until last month when I found one at the library book sale. I immediately snapped it up and started reading in down moments while we were working on the house. It IS like Heyer, and in fact many of the tropes are recycled from classic Heyer - trip to Bath, heroine banter with somewhat misogynist hero, scandalous elopement, etc. But Morgan makes the inner thoughts of Lydia, his heroine, snarkier and more incisive than the typical Heyer, while not seeming anachronistic. This book opens with a scene in which Lydia accidentally runs into another lady who, not recognizing her, tells her gossip about herself. It's a little contrived but so wittily managed I was immediately hooked. The whole novel is extremely well written and halfway through I was already raving to friends about it. Unfortunately in the second half, Morgan draws a little too obviously and heavily on character types from Austen herself. There's one side character who is not just an homage but almost a direct copy of Mrs. Elton from *Emma*. The author tries to pass this off with some broad winking to the reader but it still feels a little clumsy when the writing is clearly good enough to stand alone. But that was my only critique - it was still a delightfully enjoyable read.

Suzanne says

The 3 stars is an average of the rating I would have given the beginning, 1, combined with the rating I would have given the ending, 5. I pushed myself through the first 200 pages or so because the author has a brilliant way with a simile. For example:

"Lydia was precisely divided between agreement with what Mr. Durrant said, and disgust at the arrogance with which he said it: emotionally the effect was like one of those sneezes that do not quite come."

That's just one example; there are many elegant similes in this book, some even better than this one.

So I loved the similes, but for the first two-thirds of the book didn't particularly like the main character. However, by the last third of the book I was hooked, and could hardly put it down. And the ending was excellent, and made the dragged-out portion seem like almost a distant memory.

So I'd recommend you read the first half as quickly as possible, so you can get to the really good part which, when you get there, is worth the journey.

Mela says

It is a great example how should be written Regency romances. Wittily, with adequate language (vocabulary), with complex, interesting characters, with surprising plot twists.

What can I add? There are characters you think you understand but then someone did something you hadn't foreseen. Nonetheless, after he did it you knew that it made sense. Just like it is in the real world with the people you don't know much.

This book/story is evidently completely thought out. A really good job.

I laughed a few times and many times I have a smile on my lips.

It is like mixed Heyer with Austen. Witty Heyer with more philosophical, sociological Austen.

My quotes:

"I believe, for instance, that love is an infection best contracted and got over when one is young, like the smallpox; and then one may rest secure from it and get on with life"

"the way the people closest to us are able so effortlessly to thrust us to the farthest distance"

"How odd that we always exclaim over children growing, as if in the ordinary run of things they shrink"

"She had lived with the story as you live with a favourite book, which changes with you as you change and grow"

"as one looks instinctively at the clock: that must be right. That will tell me where I am."

"as disappointment is the inevitable result of life, better to seek it out than wait tamely for it to come to you"

"The advantage of a head, or mind or brain, is that it will be a resource and support to you in life,' Lydia said crisply, 'while the heart is liable chiefly to cause you pain"

"the stupidest people suddenly become a little cleverer when we learn that they think well of us."

"There is no greater tyranny, Miss Rae, than convention"

"Absence makes the heart grow fonder"

" choice, Lydia reflected, was not a simple act. It depended not only on what you thought and felt, but on things you were quite unconscious of thinking and feeling, and to which only an outside agency could alert you. Choice implied a clear view of the object before the chooser: but whose view was not impeded, not smeared a little by the careless accretions of self? Surely to polish up that glass to perfect transparency was not to interfere with choice: really it was doing a service both to the chooser and to "

"It was perturbing to look long at your reflection: to realise that all the time you were there in the world, visible, undeniable"

Res says

The one where bluestocking spinster Lydia is persuaded, against her better judgment, to accompany a young woman to Bath and help her choose between two suitors.

I loved the writing. I hated the characterization.

The story is beautifully told, with all sorts of delightful moments of insight and wit. (*"How do you like the music?" "Artificial," he snapped, "miserably artificial," and he stared away, leaving Lydia to the interesting philosophic exercise of imagining what music with no artifice would sound like. A man falling off a step-ladder, perhaps, as long as he did it spontaneously, and with no soul-destroying preparation.*")

But the characters ... well, first of all, several of them (Mrs. Vawser and Juliet Allardyce, for instance) seem lifted right out of the pages of Emma. Second, *both* the suitors apparently have personality transplants in the middle of the book, so that by the end they're doing things that are hopelessly out of character for the way they behaved at the beginning.

And then there's Lydia, confusing Lydia. She's the POV character, and so I attribute to her all the insight and wit I mentioned above, and it makes me love her. But if you look only at what she actually *says* and *does*, you see a rather different person. When she talks to Mr. Durrant, she's perpetually spoiling for a fight; her wit is not so much witty as mean-spirited. When she talks to Phoebe, she makes pronouncements rather than asking questions. Looking only at her actual behavior and not at the narration, she's not a character I like very much, or even sympathize with.

So I'm left with these wildly mixed feelings, and don't even know if I would seek out another book by the same author.

Sophie says

What a delight to find an author who respects the art of the historical novel, who cares about accuracy, and who creates characters that seem like products of their era. *An Accomplished Woman* is a joy to read and I loved immersing myself in country walks, Bath assemblies, and post-chaise chases. Jude Morgan writes about adult characters who have witty conversations and generally behave precisely as we imagine people in the Regency would behave. How refreshing that even though the heroine, Lydia Templeton, is the accomplished woman of the title, her accomplishments don't come from running a business, or a spy ring, or any kind of secret society, or any of the other ludicrous occupations that pepper today's historical novels. This is a Regency very much in the style of Jane Austen, but therein lies my only complaint. Occasionally, what felt like an homage to Austen--at one point, the author manages to work the titles of several Austen novels into a conversation--teetered perilously close to derivation. When entire speeches sound as if lifted from one of Austen's novels, I think it goes beyond wink-and-a-nod territory. But, fortunately, that did not happen often, and I was able to enjoy the novel for its own sake most of the time. All in all, I'm delighted to have discovered this author and can't wait to find Jude Morgan's other titles.
