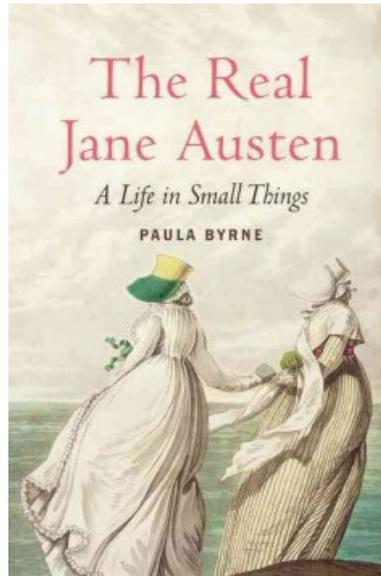


THE REAL JANE AUSTEN : A LIFE IN SMALL THINGS / PAULA BYRNE.



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Author(s): Byrne, Paula

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Abstract:

Summary: A revealing portrait of the beloved novelist, drawn from the most up-to-date scholarship and unexplored sources, presents a modern take on the woman and the world that shaped her.

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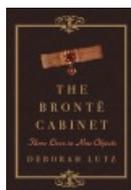
REVIEWS

PW Reviews 2013 February #1

Just in time for the 200th anniversary of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (first published in January 1813), comes Paula Byrne's vivacious new portrait of its author. The approach Byrne (*Jane Austen and the Theatre*) takes is refreshingly material-based and the book is experimental in structure; each chapter unfolds from the biographer's description of a small object associated with Austen's life (chapter titles include "The East Indian Shawl", "The Cocked Hat" "The Card of Lace", "The Crimson Velvet Cushions", and "The Topaz Crosses"). This technique serves two functions: firstly, it honors the precision for which Austen was famed by drawing attention to the material artifacts of her life; secondly, it challenges the "'official' family biography of Jane Austen," which stresses the novelist's "enclosed, sequestered world", coloring Austen's life with the same "ivory miniature" quality she famously ascribed to her fiction. Byrne's Austen, as revealed through this archive of objects, emerges as a worldly woman, profoundly enmeshed in a wider world than she's often acknowledged to occupy. This is an Austen with a sense for the political as well as for the finer points of sensibility—and one who will be unfamiliar (though never unrecognizable) to many readers. (Feb.)

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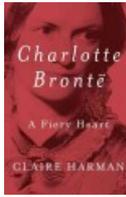


The Bronte cabinet: three lives in nine objects

Lutz, Deborah



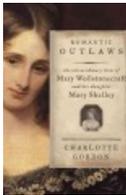
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Small things in Jane Austen's world do not only evoke distant places. They can also be the bearers of big emotions. The intense emotions associated with love and death are often refracted through objects. Byrne has chosen to focus on a series of objects that belonged to Jane Austen or touched her life in some way, ranging from a l True fans of Jane Austen can never get enough of reading about her novels or her life, sparse though both may be. This is a book to please true fans, especially those not deeply immersed in the more academic end of Jane Austen research. It might be classed as biography but is not a "starter" bio, being arranged as a series of essays instead of a birth-to-death narrative. The Real Jane Austen similarly provides us with constantly surprising glimpses of her. Liberated from linear chronology, the book is like an advent calendar: each new object, each new chapter, brings another group portrait, with its own web of personal relationships and intellectual and imaginative associations. Byrne quotes Walter Scott's remarkably perceptive early appreciation of Austen – before he himself had become a novelist – in which he describes her work, with its "current of ordinary life ... [and] its correct and striking representation of that which is daily taking place" Why are we so fond of Jane Austen? Her popularity is indestructible, while our appetite for writers far more famous in her lifetime – Scott, Wordsworth, Byron – is much diminished. One reason lies in the enduring success of the genre that she helped to create. Each of her six novels turns on a skilfully-managed courtship plot, where the trials of a vividly-drawn heroine conclude in a satisfactory marriage. Most of Austen's admirers are women, and they commonly value her fiction for its sympathetic explorations of female experience. Yet Austen is sceptical of excessive sentiment, just as a

The Real Jane Austen: A Life in Small Things is a biography of novelist Jane Austen by the writer Paula Byrne first published in 2013. The biography does not follow her life chronologically; rather her story is told around events or objects in Austen's life as the starting point to describe the famous English author. It received several positive reviews after first publication. In "The Real Jane Austen: A Life in Small Things," Paula Byrne trades rigid chronology for an object-based approach, conjuring the author's world through chapters on "thematic" articles like an East Indian shawl, an ivory miniature and crimson velvet cushions. As with many worthy experiments, the results are mixed; some sections are vividly persuasive, others cursory or too speculative. On the face of it, Jane Austen's life makes for dull reading. She never met the great personages of her day, went abroad or married. She died young "but not too young" attended by loved ones. Why are we so fond of Jane Austen? Her popularity is indestructible, while our appetite for writers far more famous in her lifetime "Scott, Wordsworth, Byron" is much diminished. One reason lies in the enduring success of the genre that she helped to create. Each of her six novels turns on a skilfully-managed courtship plot, where the trials of a vividly-drawn heroine conclude in a satisfactory marriage. Most of Austen's admirers are women, and they commonly value her fiction for its sympathetic explorations of female experience. Yet Austen is sceptical of excessive sentiment, just as s If you are looking for a conventional biography of Jane Austen with a chronological record of her life, then this book is probably not for you. The Real Jane Austen takes a different approach to looking at the life of one of my favourite authors. Byrne presents Jane's story thematically, basing the chapters on visual stimuli - objects owned by Jane herself and others that represent key aspects of her life. She examines each theme in relation to Jane's own experiences, and those of her extended family and friends, and shows how these things influenced her writings "her juvenilia and unfinished