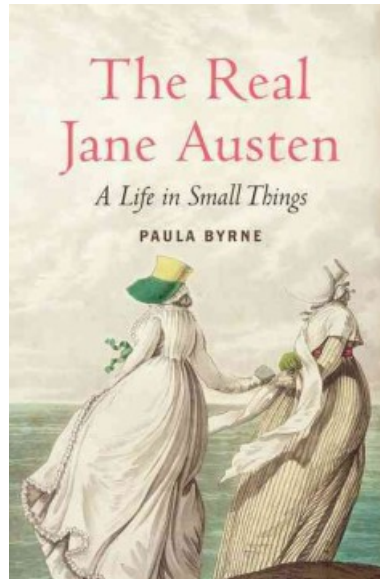


**THE REAL JANE AUSTEN : A LIFE IN SMALL THINGS / PAULA BYRNE.**



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**Author(s):** Byrne, Paula

**Language:**

English

**Publication Information:**

New York : Harper, c2013.

**Publication Date:**

2013

**Physical Description:**

xi, 380 p. : ill. (some col.) ; 24 cm.

**Publication Type:**

Book

**Document Type:**

Bibliographies; Non-fiction; Individual biography

**Subject****Terms:**

Women novelists, English -- 19th century -- Biography Novelists, English -- 19th century -- Biography

**Subject****Terms:**

Austen, Jane, 1775-1817

[> Additional Information](#)**Publication Information:**

1st U.S. ed.

**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.

**Notes:**

Originally published: London : HarperPress, 2012.

Includes bibliographical references (p. 331-357) and index.

**ISBN:**

9780061999093 : HRD

0061999091 : HRD

**Accession Number:**

bl2012046784

**Accession Number:**

fay.373778

[> Citations](#)[> Comments](#)

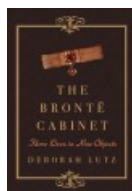
## REVIEWS

### 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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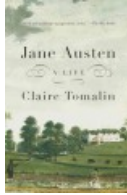
Lutz, Deborah



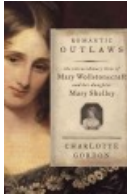
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Not only is it the first rigorous biography on Austen to appear in print since Claire Tomalin and David Nokes both published their works in 1997 (both entitled *Jane Austen: A Life*), but it is also an example of a refreshingly different approach to biographical presentation. Like the famous British hermit and art critic, Sister Wendy, Byrne begins each chapter with an image and a short commentary which then serve as gateways into the central details about Austen's life that she wishes to highlight. This allows her to avoid the expected plodding pace of a chronology so that she can then linger on 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 skillfully-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