THE REAL JANE AUSTEN: A LIFE IN SMALL THINGS / PAULA BYRNE.
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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In THE REAL JANE AUSTEN, Byrne’s engaging prose and thoughtful, determined analysis of tangible objects from her life give us a picture of Austen as a vivid, vital woman committed to her career as a novelist, clear-eyed and part of the wider world. Well worth a read. (Literary Omnivore). “Biographer Paula Byrne has taken objects from Jane Austen’s real life and times and used them as if we were dropping in on Austen on any given day...a dynamic new biography in which Austen lives and breathes.” (NPR/All Things Considered). Byrne takes Austen seriously as a writer...[she] brings to life a wo 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&qu 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.