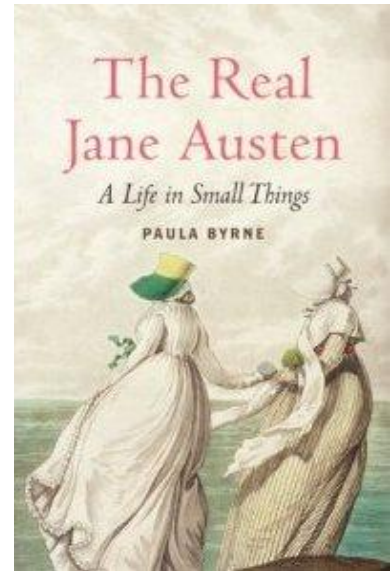


Reading Guide:

***The Real Jane Austen:***

***A Life in Small Things***

Paula Byrne (2013)



1. In "Prologue: Captain Harville's Carpentry," Byrne states that "Both her [Austen] world and her novels can be brought alive through the texture of things, the life of objects." Do you think that Byrne is able to do this throughout her book? Why or why not?
2. In order to make connections between real life objects, places, and people and Austen's novels, Byrne seeks "permission" from Austen's brother Admiral Francis Austen. Do you think that the fact that Francis Austen saw a little of a character in himself is enough to associate her life with her novels?
3. Throughout the book Byrne indicates that Austen was raised in a more progressive family than a modern reader would think an eighteenth-century woman would have been. Do you agree or disagree? How important is this in learning about Austen and her writing?
4. In chapter four, "The Subscription List," Byrne seems to indicate that another female writer, Frances Burney, was a significant influence on Austen. Do you agree?
5. What does this book tell us about late eighteenth and early nineteenth century British society? What types of social movements does Byrne suggest that Austen was aware of or had feelings about?
6. How important were the relationships that Austen had with others? In particular, her sister Cassandra and her neighbor, Mrs. Lefroy?
7. Out of all the objects Byrne presents, which one do you think spoke the most about Austen? Which one spoke the most to you?

**About Paula Byrne**

Paula Byrne's first book, *Jane Austen and the Theatre*, was shortlisted for the Theatre Book Prize and has been described by Paul Johnson as "the best book on Jane Austen." Her second, *Perdita*, was a much praised biography of the eighteenth-century actress, poet, novelist, feminist, celebrity and royal mistress Mary Robinson; and her third book, *Mad World*, was a highly acclaimed and brilliantly original biography of Evelyn Waugh. In 2011, Paula Byrne made a BBC documentary about her discovery of a portrait of Jane Austen, thought by many experts to be the only professional portrait of the novelist painted from life. She is married to the critic and biographer Jonathan Bate and lives in Oxford.

### Other Books by Paula Byrne

- ***Mad World: Evelyn Waugh and the Secrets of Brideshead***, Paula Byrne (2011) | A biography of the acclaimed novelist and how a personal tragedy inspired what many consider to be his fiction masterpiece.
- ***Perdita: The Literary, Theatrical, Scandalous Life of Mary Robinson***, Paula Byrne (2006) | A biography of the eighteenth century actress that wooed London, and most importantly, the Prince of Wales.
- ***Jane Austen and the Theatre***, Paula Byrne (2002) | Paula Byrne shows how *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma* and *Mansfield Park* are all shaped by the comic drama of the period and by Jane Austen's own understanding of men and women as actors playing parts.

### Other Related Texts

- ***Jane Austen's England***, Roy & Leslie Adkins (2013) | A cultural snapshot of everyday life in Jane Austen's England.
- ***What Matters in Jane Austen? Twenty Crucial Puzzles Solved***, John Mullan (2013) | John Mullan shows that we can best appreciate Austen's brilliance by looking at the intriguing quirks and intricacies of her fiction. Asking and answering some very specific questions about what goes on in her novels, he reveals the inner workings of their greatness.
- ***Jane Austen's, Game Theorist***, Michael Suk-Young Chwe (2013) | Game theory--the study of how people make choices while interacting with others--is one of the most popular technical approaches in social science today. But as Michael Chwe reveals in his insightful new book, Jane Austen explored game theory's core ideas in her six novels roughly two hundred years ago.
- ***Matters of Fact in Jane Austen: History, Location, and Celebrity***, Janine Barchas (2012) | In this text, Barchas makes the bold assertion that Jane Austen's novels allude to actual high-profile politicians and contemporary celebrities as well as to famous historical figures and landed estates.