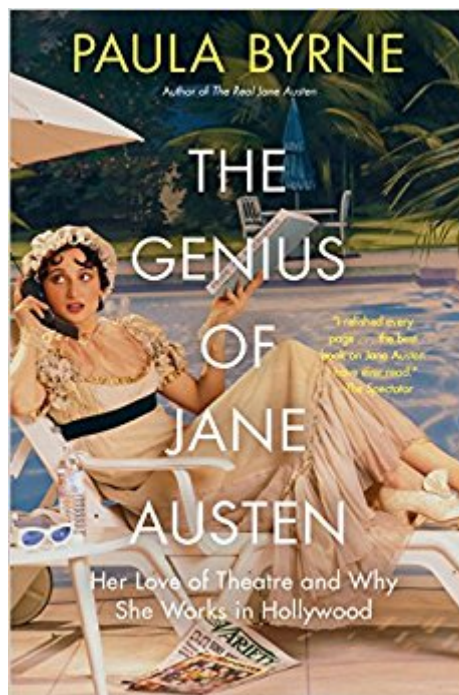




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The Genius Of Jane Austen: Her Love Of Theatre And Why She Works In Hollywood



Synopsis

Perfect for fans of Jane Austen, this updated edition of Paula Byrne's debut book includes new material that explores the history of Austen stage adaptations, why her books work so well on screen, and what that reveals about one of the world's most beloved authors. Originally published by Bloomsbury Academic in 2003 as *Jane Austen and the Theatre*, Paula Byrne's first book was never made widely available in the US and is out of print today. An exploration of Austen's passion for the stage—she acted in amateur productions, frequently attended the theatre, and even scripted several early works in play form—it took a nuanced look at how powerfully her stories were influenced by theatrical comedy. This updated edition features an introduction and a brand new chapter that delves into the long and lucrative history of Austen adaptations. The film world's love affair with Austen spans decades, from A.A. Milne's "Elizabeth Bennet," performed over the radio in 1944 to raise morale, to this year's *Love and Friendship*. Austen's work has proven so abidingly popular that these movies are more easily identifiable by lead actor than by title: the Emma Thompson *Sense and Sensibility*, the Carey Mulligan *Northanger Abbey*, the Laurence Olivier *Pride and Prejudice*. Byrne even takes a captivating detour into a multitude of successful spin-offs, including the phenomenally brilliant *Clueless*. And along the way, she overturns the notion of Jane Austen as a genteel, prim country mouse, demonstrating that Jane's enduring popularity in film, TV, and theater points to a woman of wild comedy and outrageous behavior. For lovers of everything Jane Austen, as well as for a new generation discovering her for the first time, *The Jane Austen Handbook* demonstrates why this beloved author still resonates with readers and movie audiences today.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“Byrne presents an Austen immersed in her time, as popular entertainment...any Austen devotee should appreciate the thorough analysis of the novels and the crediting of previously overlooked influences.” (Publishers Weekly)

“Paula Byrne, as THE GENIUS OF JANE AUSTEN gives us the most insightful analysis of the making of the Austen legacy. Byrne’s investigation into Austen’s enjoyment of plays gives us real insight into how Austen learned to focus her material, make it amusing and give it critical punch.” Byrne demonstrates her own ample knowledge of the history of the English theater. The illustrations she has included are colorful and instructive.

Thanks to Paula Byrne, I now readily see that the amusement Austen is giving me (and herself) was inspired by plays Austen knew well and techniques she saw on the stage. (Jane Smiley, New York Times Book Review)

Paula Byrne is the critically acclaimed author of five biographies, including *Belle: The Slave Daughter and the Lord Chief Justice*, *The Real Jane Austen*, and *Mad World: Evelyn Waugh and the Secrets of Brideshead*. She lives in Oxford, England, with her husband, the academic and biographer Jonathan Bate.

Great!

Paula Byrne’s *The Genius of Jane Austen* is subtitled *Her Love and Theatre and Why she is a Hit in Hollywood* and represents an expanded edition of her critically acclaimed 2002 book *Jane Austen and the Theatre* in which the central thesis was that Austen’s comic genius was decisively shaped by her love of theatre. The book charts Austen’s interest in drama, originating in private family theatricals (sometimes wholly written by the Austen family), and developing through her attending professional performances in London, Bath and Southampton, before explaining how the theatre influenced Austen’s comedic fiction. This influence is most obvious in relation to the rehearsals of Kotzebue’s play *Love and Laughter*.

Vows (1997) which dominates the first quarter of *Mansfield Park* (1814). Byrne not only considers this in great detail but combs all of Austen's novels and even her juvenilia to justify her view that Austen was much influenced by drama both thematically and stylistically. This is done convincingly and in the process much light is shed on Austen's texts, as well as helping to overturn the once conventional view, originating with Lionel Trilling, that Austen was morally opposed to theatrical undertakings. When *Jane Austen and the Theatre* (1997) was first published alongside Penny Gay's book with the same title, that coincidence was attributed by at least one reviewer (John Mullan in *The Guardian*) to "the spate of film and TV adaptations of recent years" which "alert us to the dramatic qualities of Austen's fiction, whilst reminding us of our ignorance of the contemporary experience of drama out of which the novels come." In the fifteen years since that appraisal there's been no let up in the interest in dramatizing Austen and it's therefore fitting that the expansion to Byrne's original volume should consist of the concluding chapter "Why She Is a Hit in Hollywood", although given that this is only one of eleven chapters its prominence in the new title is somewhat misleading, as is the reference to "Hollywood", which serves as shorthand for all stage and film adaptations of Austen's novels. Indeed, in Byrne's hands A.A. Milne's 1936 play *Miss Elizabeth Bennet* justifiably receives more attention than M.G.M.'s 1940 *Pride and Prejudice*. Byrne's assessment of various Austen-based productions is characteristically shrewd, particularly in explaining why Amy Heckerling's *Clueless* succeeds much better than Douglas McGrath's *Emma* (because the former finds a way of treating Emma ironically which is much more in keeping with Austen's intention of portraying "a heroine whom no one but myself will much like"). In short, it is very gratifying indeed that *Jane Austen and the Theatre* has been expanded and reprinted, to complement the author's equally excellent biography of Austen (*The Real Jane Austen: A Life in Small Things*), in this year marking the bicentenary of Austen's death.

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