



## Jane Austen's Letters

*Jane Austen , Deirdre Le Faye (Editor)*

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## **Jane Austen's Letters** Jane Austen , Deirdre Le Faye (Editor)

Jane Austen's letters afford a unique insight into the daily life of the novelist: intimate and gossipy, observant and informative--they read much like the novels themselves. They bring alive her family and friends, her surroundings and contemporary events with a freshness unparalleled in modern biographies. Above all we recognize the unmistakable voice of the author of such novels as *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*. We see the shift in her writing from witty and amusing descriptions of the social life of town and country, to a thoughtful and constructive tone while writing about the business of literary composition. R.W. Chapman's ground-breaking edition of the collected Letters first appeared in 1932, and a second edition followed twenty years later. Now in this third edition of *Jane Austen's Letters*, Deirdre Le Faye has added new material that has come to light since 1952, and re-ordered the letters into their correct chronological sequence. She has provided discreet and full annotation to each letter, including its provenance, and information on the watermarks, postmarks, and other physical details of the manuscripts, together with new biographical, topographical, and general indexes. Teachers, students, and fans of Jane Austen, at all levels, will find remarkable insight into one of the most popular novelists ever.

## **Jane Austen's Letters Details**

Date : Published April 3rd 1997 by Oxford University Press, USA (first published 1932)

ISBN : 9780192832979

Author : Jane Austen , Deirdre Le Faye (Editor)

Format : Paperback 672 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Classics, Biography, History

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# From Reader Review Jane Austen's Letters for online ebook

## Stephanie says

This was a really great look into this time period - although I was painfully aware that this was a well-to-do white woman, especially when she seemed to spend a lot of her time discussing gossip, visits, and clothes. I liked the second half better, when she's talking more about writing and events, and there are more letters to her nieces and nephews. What an excellent large family! I especially admired Cassandra and Jane's close relationship.

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## Marsali Taylor says

Even if these letters weren't by Jane Austen, they'd be worth reading for the way they take you right into the lives lived by the lower country gentry in the late Georgian era. The quiet country life? It's worse even than Shetland ... a constant round of calling on neighbours and them calling on you, keeping in touch with relatives by letter, dinner parties, balls, theatres, visits of a fortnight or more with other relatives ... and in among that you had to harvest your fruit and vegetables and make preserves, wine, brew your beer, make or refurbish your own clothes ... it's amazing Austen got any writing done at all in among it. But as they are by Austen, well, the busy round is told with wit and spirit worthy of Elizabeth Bennet. Most importantly, what a lovely idea you get of Austen herself - lively, interested in everything, so fond of her sister, concerned about her mother, amused by her brothers and giddy niece Fanny. You read the biography written by her brother Henry, in which he speaks of her as a most beloved sister and aunt, and think he's over-egging the pud a bit, and then you read her letters and see how it couldn't help but be true. And I bet you wouldn't pick Jane Austen as the writer of the comment (I'm paraphrasing here) 'The good thing about being older is that at balls I can sit by the fire and drink as much wine as I like.'

The volume (tome) is the sort where you need several bookmarks: one for the text, one for the footnotes and another, if you want, for the biographical section, where there's more information on everyone mentioned in the letters. I read the notes first, for each letter, then the letter itself, and I really could have done with having Le Faye's biography of Austen to hand as well, and to find out what had happened in the times the sisters were together - which wasn't often, as one or other was always being needed to help with the children and house when another baby was being born to one of their brothers, while the other had to stay at home with their mother.

A work of thorough scholarship, which ends with Austen's sister Cassandra's letters written to her favourite niece, Fanny, just after Austen's death: 'I have lost such a sister ...' These moved me to tears - you really felt her loss.

This book was a Christmas treat to myself, with a book token, and worth every penny.

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## Julie says

A joy to read. It's like having afternoon tea with Elizabeth and Jane Bennet, or Marianne and Elinor Dashwood. All the tidbits of daily living, in such a neighbourhood as theirs, circa late 18th, early 19th

Century. Nothing could satisfy more!

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### **Galena Sanz says**

Una excelente recopilación de las cartas de la conocida escritora. Ha sido muy interesante poder conocer a Jane Austen como escritora, saber cómo era su día a día, como se relacionaba con los demás, como reaccionaba ante la publicación de sus obras... El final de su vida es muy triste y su hermana Cassandra lo relata muy bien en una carta a su sobrina Fanny. Normalmente no dejo aquí enlaces a las reseñas de mi blog, pero puesto que esta vez he publicado antes la reseña que mi opinión aquí, lo dejaré para quien quiera conocer más a fondo mi opinión: <http://excentriks.blogspot.com.es/201....>

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### **Kate says**

A close reading of these letters quickly dispels any illusions of Austen as a proper, humourless, spinster aunt. Austen's letters are funny, witty, and occasionally downright cruel.

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### **bookinglibrarian says**

Jane Austen's letters are wonderful reading--pithy, scathing and hilarious observations of her world and the people in it to her sister Cassandra, and interesting advice on writing and love to her nieces Anna and Fanny. For the Austen aficionados, I'd definitely recommend this complete, chronological collection of the known surviving letters over some of the illustrated compilations out there.

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### **Nichola says**

Intended more for scholarly readers than a casual audience, this is exactly what is says, a collection of every surviving scrap of letter Jane Austen wrote to anyone (mainly family) during her lifetime. Everytime someone writes a preface to her books, or creates a new biopic they look here for what she was really like. I did learn that the letters that were destroyed and censored by her surviving sister usually had to do with areas where she had described physical symptoms or made mildly disparaging remarks about family members, and not big juicy secret romance stuff as I had imagined. Has a series of great other features- a notes section detailing how each note was obtained, exactly what it looked like, when it was published, also a biographical index detailing who all the people are, where all the places are and an exhaustive index.

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### **majoringinliterature says**

*Originally published at Majoring in Literature.*

There is something decidedly voyeuristic about reading the private correspondence of another person. Even

if that person happens to have died almost two hundred years ago.

Collections of Jane Austen's letters have been around since the 1930s, when R. W. Chapman first began assembling them for historians and lovers of the famous author to peruse at will. Since then many have been rediscovered, and the collection has grown with every new edition.

So what might prompt someone to read the letters of Jane Austen? For many historians and scholars, it is a case of wanting to discover more about the life and mind of one of English literature's greatest heroes. They approach them, no doubt, hoping that her day-to-day correspondence will enlighten the material she presents us with in her novels.

For others, it may simply be a case of wanting to feel 'closer' to Austen. A peep into her everyday life would surely offer readers an example of what she might have thought, said, worn... the list goes on.

I must confess that I can't be sure what my motivation was for wanting to read Austen's letters. I suppose it was partly a desire to find out more about Austen - her life, manners, company - but also to see whether reading the letters would in any way change my opinion of her work.

In the past, when letter-writing was not just something people did in olde-worlde movies, and the only way to convey news was through paper and ink, many famous writers and politicians elevated letter-writing to the status of a kind of art. Several people wrote letters with the intention of publishing them, knowing that these letters could contribute to the reputation of the writer.

Austen's letters do not strike me as the kind of things intended for mass perusal. In many ways they are like a riddle, containing a great deal of cryptic information about people and places that are long gone, and events which we could not possibly know about. Austen resists offering scholars much in the way of new insights; the writer of the letters maintains her right to privacy with a relentless zeal. In a range of letters dating from 1796 to 1817, the year she died, Austen writes primarily to her friends and family, exchanging news relevant mostly to the family, and to the neighbourhood that the family inhabits. Reading the letters is rather like following Austen from girlhood, through to adulthood (and, of course, authorship), and finally death. But it is by no means a complete and uninterrupted picture. The letters are full of gaps - literal and metaphoric. Some have been damaged, some lost, some destroyed. This is not so much a picture of Austen's life as snapshots, or jumbled voices from the past.

For someone like me, obsessed with promoting the image of Austen as Author, the most interesting letters are those in which she talks about her writing. There are letters to her publisher (including one where, writing to demand the return of her manuscript, she writes under the assumed name of Mrs Ashton Dennis, and signs off the letter with her initials - MAD), and several letters which show Austen staying in London, eagerly overseeing the final stages of *Emma*, and negotiating for a swift publication. She also records the reactions of friends and family to reading her novels, and later in life, offers her nieces long and detailed critiques of the novels they themselves have written.

But it is all too easy to forget, while reading, that unlike anything else Austen wrote, what is being spoken of is real people, places, and events. It is hard not to be moved by the later letters of the collection, which reveal Austen's worsening health, and then finally, the last letter in the collection written by her and - perhaps rather evocatively - cut off, and incomplete, due to the loss of the rest of the epistle.

The volume concludes with several letters written by Austen's sister, Cassandra. In a strange way, these letters are the most affecting of all. I think there are few who would not find Cassandra's letters moving,

particularly when she reaches this famous passage:

*I have lost a treasure, such a Sister, such a friend as never can have been surpassed, - She was the sun of my life, the gilder of every pleasure, the soother of every sorrow, I had not a thought concealed from her, & it is as if I had lost a part of myself.*

(Letter from Cassandra Austen to Fanny Knight, Sunday 20th July 1817)

Or Cassandra's description of the funerary procession, which she watched from her window (women were not permitted to attend funerals at this time):

*... I was determined I would see the last ... I watched the little mournful procession the length of the Street & when it turned from my sight & I had lost her for ever-*

(Letter from Cassandra Austen to Fanny Knight, Tuesday 29th July 1817)

Reading these final remarks brought back to me, with incredible clarity, the fact that I was reading the words of *real* people - not the words of characters in books, but the sensations of human beings who had cared deeply for each other. I put the book down with a little disgust, and wondered what I had actually gained by intruding, for a few days, on the private lives of these people. I had certainly not been invited, and I wondered if I had gained as much as I had imagined. Though the letters themselves were incredibly interesting - revealing the voice in which Jane Austen addressed the people she knew best - I couldn't help wondering if perhaps I had intruded on things that were just a little too private, even after two hundred years.

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## **Laura says**

Her wit and humor resonate on every page—find out just how delightful Jane would be to sit next to at a dinner party, and how much more clever her catty observations would be than your own. Exceptionally footnoted by scholar (and Austen devotee) Deidre Le Faye.

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## **Rikke says**

At first glance this letter collection may just seem like trivial tales of an uneventful everyday life - but under the trifling discussions of silk stockings, dinner menus and minor balls lies the heart of the most accomplished writer who ever lived.

These letters offer intimate insights in Jane Austen's way of thinking, reasoning and living. This book is the most direct impression one could ever gain of Jane Austen herself. And it is fascinating.

From the loving, gentle and comforting letters to her sister and relatives, to the formal business

correspondence concerning her novels, her endearing childhood rhymes composed for the amusement of her nieces, her harsh and sarcastic portrayals of her surroundings and acquaintances, and the mournful accounts of death and loss; these letters show Jane Austen from as many angles as humanly possible. Of course I delighted in the letters that involved literary criticism and details of her reading material along with her own reflections on the construction of her novels, but I also enjoyed forming a clear picture of her simple everyday life.

As I reached the last letters, and finally read Cassandra's grievous account of Jane's death, I felt like I had gotten to know my literary idol a bit better. Because, after all, this is not insignificant letters of an important author; it is touchingly real pieces of a blessed human being.

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## Robin says

Got this for a Christmas present! Woot!

**First part of my Review: The Editing.** Le Faye's work is a concise, scholarly job; this book deserves the reputation it has. It is as heavily detailed and full of excellent minutiae as JA's letters. Included are all the lists you'll need to understand the reading: places mentioned in the letters, general index, list of initials used in reference, bibliography, even a biographical index of the people JA talks about. One thing struck me here: JA had such an incredible amount of extended family (it seemed like almost everybody over several generations had anywhere from 8 to 17 children!), and I wondered: Didn't any families populate the SE corner of England *except* Austens??

My one fault with the book was the presentation. It got so old flipping back every other page to read the background of the letters. If it were presented differently, with perhaps the historical information (date written and from where, what happened to the original MS, when published, etc.) preceding the text of the letter within the pages, and the footnoted information (who JA's talking about, etc.) as actual footnotes at the bottom of the page, I have no doubt the ease of reading would increase 100%!

(Note: my copy is the 3rd edition from 1997, not the current 4th edition which I specifically did not want. The new publication may include those presentation improvements -- I would hope!)

**Second part: The Letters Themselves.** Jane Austen's correspondence was very interesting. Reading this, I felt I was really living in the time period. The minutiae of making orange wine and mead, returning social calls, keeping your clothes fashionable, and how to accommodate their overnight guests grew to be overwhelming (and I only read about it, not did it!) Where did this girl find time to write?? Most of the letters (to about 1806) are from Jane to her sister Cassandra, and only concerned those small aspects of their daily lives (or the lives of their relatives and nearest friends); they made for sluggish reading. I did wish Jane would have a thought that wasn't sheer gossip!

But as the years went by, and as more letters to maturing nieces and nephews were included, the book grew that more interesting. Toward the end Jane spoke on some issues of the day - a possible war, thousands killed in a catastrophe, a fashionable Scandal, or the Importance of Being an Aunt - and this became the Jane I recognized. In her dealings with the Carlton House librarian J S Clarke regarding dedicating Emma to the Prince Regent, I LOL'd! If P&P hadn't already been published, I'd swear she copied the character of Mr. Collins from that intruding, busybody clergyman James Stanier Clarke! Jane's tact when dealing with him

was superb! Several letters give advice to girls in love or budding novelists. (Critiqued by Jane Austen! Wouldn't that be a coup?!) With these subjects I seem to be reading Jane's own journal, not just little ideas in a document that could be passed around and read by any who came to call. She's opening up, letting the bars down, allowing me to see her real thoughts. So at the end, hearing her struggle to overcome her illness, reading her will and then the letters from Cassandra regarding Jane's death - I feel that I have lost a real friend. I had got to know Jane Austen a little bit better.

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## Artfulreader says

I find this book impossible to rate in term of stars. It's a brick of a book of which almost half is footnotes; extremely well researched. On the other hand it's a brick of a book and almost half the book is footnotes so physically difficult to read and nearly impossible to get through. I did it through sheer stubbornness. All the spelling mistakes are kept which is great for accuracy but a small hell to read. The letters(as is always the case) are what they are. This book is great for researchers because it contains a wealth of information. It's not good for the common reader(no matter how much an Austen-fan one is). There are a few nuggets in there but barely worth the effort.

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## Warmisunqu Austen says

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Las cartas están escritas en un estilo llano y sencillo sin cesar esa vena irónica y llena de humor de principio a fin con amplios detalles de su vida cotidiana, sus gustos, sus preferencias literarias, sus opiniones sobre el carácter de la gente que ya conocía y las que iba conociendo por primera vez. Carta a carta nos adentramos en aquellos momentos que compartió con sus seres queridos y amigos, me entristeció todas aquellas misivas que se destruyeron o extraviaron, de las que quedaron destaca el inmenso amor y devoción que sentía por los suyos. Encontraremos constantes revelaciones sobre el carácter de Jane, esa constante picardía y mordacidad al hacer una crítica de alguien por su poca inteligencia, es inevitable que te saque una sonrisa.

Esta obra está basada en la última edición de Jane Austen's Letters de Deirdre le Faye, está sumamente cuidada en su traducción, respetando la esencia del estilo de Jane. Con un completo apéndice y gran cantidad de notas a pie, muy útiles y necesarias para ampliarnos información de lugares, nombres, hechos... Asimismo cuenta con una relación de la bibliografía consultada, una cronología, un índice detallado tipográfico, de nombres, de obras citadas y una galería fotográfica.

La obra está dividida en seis partes. Cada parte coincide con algún cambio importante en la vida de Jane. Hay una introducción aclaratoria de cada parte, haciéndonos un resumen y acercamiento de lo que encontraremos a través de las cartas reunidas.

Si tengo que escoger una parte preferida, están las dos últimas, por acercarnos a sus primeras obras publicadas y las primeras impresiones que recogía de ellas. La última parte es muy conmovedora, ser testigos de cómo su vida se apagaba, fue triste, pero fue aleccionador ver cómo Jane se aferraba a la vida y su fuerte creencia en Dios la sobrepuso a su agonía.

A través de cada misiva nos acerca a vivencias como su experiencia del primer amor; su disfrute por los



bailes; el rechazo a una petición de matrimonio; su primer rechazo de publicación, a la que sería después *Orgullo y prejuicio*; la mudanza a Bath y lo terrible que resultó ese cambio para ella; la muerte de su padre; cada matrimonio de sus hermanos menores, así como los nacimientos de algunos sobrinos; la constante contención económica con la que tenían que vivir; la ilusión y alegría cuando se mudaron a Chawton; los años de calma y creatividad que fueron para ella ese lugar; la publicación de *Sentido y sensibilidad*, *Orgullo y prejuicio* y *Mansfield Park*; los sentimientos que expresaba ante los comentarios de sus obras; el cariño y amor con que hablaba de sus personajes...

Esta obra es para leerla poco a poco, saboreando cada carta, revisando los pies de página, los apéndices para ir familiarizándose con los lugares, personajes y todo lo que se va mencionando en sus misivas, poco a poco iremos sintiendo cómo esta entrañable autora se nos interioriza y sentimos que estamos un poquito más cerca de conocerla mejor. Me quedo con la Jane, creyente, devota, crítica con aquello que no cumplía con sus estándares, sencilla, curiosa con lo que la rodeaba, amante de la vida y de su privacidad, de un espíritu inquebrantable, incluso cuando sentía que su vida se iba apagando...

No puedo dejar de resaltar la magnífica edición que ha hecho *dÉpoca*, en todo lo que ha implicado acercarnos esta obra a nuestros hogares. Una traducción, maquetación, edición, diseño gráfico y acabado de primerísima calidad y el cuidado al detalle de cada una de sus más de 750 páginas. Desde luego esta obra también ha abierto un abanico de libros que han sido del gusto y preferencia de Jane Austen que me encantaría leer.

Solo nos queda estas 161 cartas llenas de ella, de su puño y letra, adoro aquellas especialmente donde Jane Austen saca toda su chispa e ingenio, era una mujer llena de matices, con un encanto natural, vital y con una mezcla de sencillez y humildad.

Termino esta reseña con unas palabras de Cassandra: "He perdido un tesoro, una hermana como ella, una amiga que jamás podrá ser igualada. Era la luz de mi vida, volvía preciosa hasta la más insignificante alegría, aliviaba cualquier pena..."

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## **Lorraine says**

Excellent. Conscious of every word she puts down, as one might expect such a great stylist to be. I can't help but hold it against Cassandra Austen that she burnt a good number of Jane Austen's letters. Written with a good deal of irony and sensitivity; the snippets -- few as they are -- regarding her art and the art of others are quite invaluable. The only thing that irked me was 1. the loss of letters, attributable to CEA, and 2. the proliferation of dashes and lack of paragraphing which made several letters difficult to read. I should have given it 5 stars had the collection simply had *\*more\** on her aesthetics, but as it is... Of course this is a scholarly inclination and I think I should not have minded it as much if I had not been working on her academically

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## **Amle says**

This was a wonderful collection of letters. Austen had an amazing command of words and you see her wit and imagination shine through in every seemingly little detail of daily life and gossip. Not exactly sure why I'm only giving it four stars, perhaps because I would have enjoyed reading it better in a different format,

perhaps because I mourn the days of letter writing, perhaps because of the sadness that none of these wonderful communications were directed to me by what was obviously, an admirable mind.  
Highly recommended.

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