



Jane Austen: A Life

By Claire Tomalin

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At her death in 1817, Jane Austen left the world six of the most beloved novels written in English—but her shortsighted family destroyed the bulk of her letters; and if she kept any diaries, they did not survive her. Now acclaimed biographer Claire Tomalin has filled the gaps in the record, creating a remarkably fresh and convincing portrait of the woman and the writer.

While most Austen biographers have accepted the assertion of Jane's brother Henry that "My dear Sister's life was not a life of events," Tomalin shows that, on the contrary, Austen's brief life was fraught with upheaval. Tomalin provides detailed and absorbing accounts of Austen's ill-fated love for a young Irishman, her frequent travels and extended visits to London, her close friendship with a worldly cousin whose French husband met his death on the guillotine, her brothers' naval service in the Napoleonic wars and in the colonies, and thus shatters the myth of Jane Austen as a sheltered and homebound spinster whose knowledge of the world was limited to the view from a Hampshire village.

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Jane Austen: A Life By Claire Tomalin **Bibliography**

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

The author of *Pride and Prejudice*, *Persuasion*, and other comedies of manners gets a biography similar in tone to her own books: intelligent but not intellectual, witty without being nasty. Claire Tomalin, author of four previous biographies of notable British women, treats Jane Austen (1775-1817) with the respect her genius deserves. Tomalin eschews gossip and speculation in favor of a sober account of the writer's life that nonetheless sparkles with sly humor. Perceptive analyses of each of Austen's novels, with autobiographical links suggested but never insisted upon, add to the value of *Jane Austen: A Life*.

From Library Journal

Despite only a few surviving personal papers and letters, no autobiographical notes, and no diaries written by Jane Austen, attempts to piece together the life and personality of the author abound. An experienced biographer, Tomalin makes do by focusing more on the Austen family, acquaintances, and friends than on Austen herself, forthrightly acknowledging, "It is only because of her writing that we think them worth remembering; and yet she is at almost every point harder to summon up than any of them...she is as elusive as a cloud in the night sky." Like David Nokes's recent biography, *Jane Austen* (LJ 9/1/97), Tomalin's presents an engaging story of the life and times of the Austen family. Although Tomalin's biography is not as detailed as Nokes's, it offers a freshness in its attention to, and compassion regarding the child-rearing practices of the Austens, the physical demands on child-bearing women, and to the portrayal of Austen's will, determination, and energy in her final days. Recommended for literature collections for its perspective and minimal speculations. —Jeris Cassel, Rutgers Univ. Libs., New Brunswick, N.J.

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From [The New Yorker](#)

...brisk and sparkling--a page-turner, in fact...

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