



Why Jane Austen?

Rachel M. Brownstein

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From the first publication of *Pride and Prejudice* to recent film versions of her life and work, Jane Austen has continued to provoke controversy and inspire fantasies of peculiar intimacy. Whether celebrated for her realism, proto-feminism, or patrician gentility, imagined as a subversive or a political conservative, Austen generates passions shaped by the ideologies and trends of her readers' time—and by her own memorable stories, characters, and elusive narrative cool.

In this book, Rachel M. Brownstein considers constructions of Jane Austen as a heroine, moralist, satirist, romantic, woman, and author and the changing notions of these categories. She finds echoes of Austen's insights and techniques in contemporary Jane-o-mania, the commercially driven, erotically charged popular vogue that aims paradoxically to preserve and liberate, to correct and collaborate with old Jane. Brownstein's brilliant discussion of the distinctiveness and distinction of Austen's genius clarifies the reasons why we read the novelist—or why we should read her—and reorients the prevailing view of her work. Reclaiming the rich comedy of Austen while constructing a new narrative of authorship, Brownstein unpacks the author's fascinating entanglement with readers and other admirers.

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