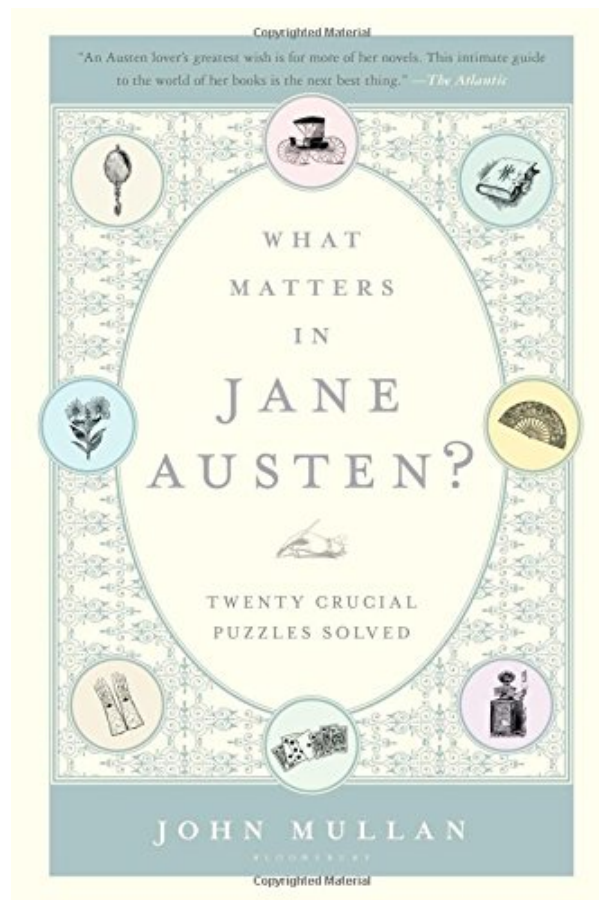
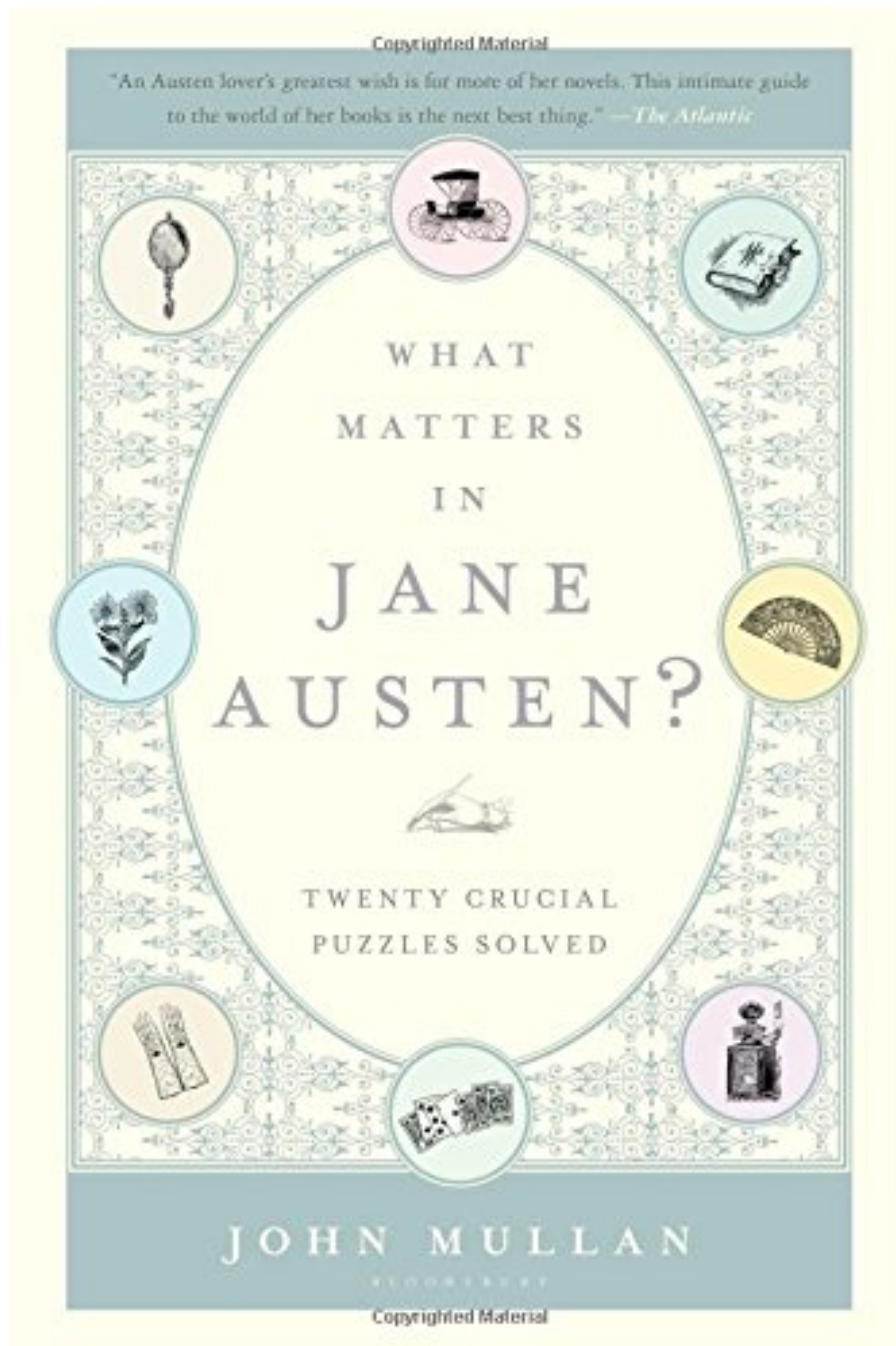


WHAT MATTERS IN JANE AUSTEN?: TWENTY CRUCIAL PUZZLES SOLVED BY JOHN MULLAN



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From Publishers Weekly

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Which important Austen characters never speak? Is there any sex in Austen? What do the characters call one another, and why? What are the right and wrong ways to propose marriage? In *What Matters in Jane Austen?* 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.

In twenty short chapters, each of which explores a question prompted by Austen's novels, Mullan illuminates the themes that matter most in her beloved fiction. Readers will discover when Austen's characters had their meals and what shops they went to; how vicars made good livings; and how wealth was inherited. *What Matters in Jane Austen?* illuminates the rituals and conventions of her fictional world in order to reveal her technical virtuosity and daring as a novelist. It uses telling passages from Austen's letters and details from her own life to explain episodes in her novels: readers will find out, for example, what novels she read, how much money she had to live on, and what she saw at the theater.

Written with flair and based on a lifetime's study, *What Matters in Jane Austen?* will allow readers to appreciate Jane Austen's work in greater depth than ever before.

- Sales Rank: #366247 in Books
- Published on: 2014-10-07
- Released on: 2014-10-07
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.23" h x .97" w x 5.49" l, 1.00 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 352 pages

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46 of 49 people found the following review helpful.

Fascinating read for Jane Austen fans

By Damaskcat

Jane Austen's novels are some of my favourite books to re-read regularly and I also enjoy reading books about Jane Austen's work. This book is a marvellous read for any Jane Austen fans. It provides the answers to some fascinating questions such as which characters never speak in the novels but still play a very large part in the plots. The author explains how significant it is when characters call each other by their Christian names in an age when even husbands and wives would not use them to each other.

Modern readers are apt to think that there is no sex in Jane Austen because the writing is subtle. Anyone who has read the scene between Elizabeth and Darcy when he proposes to her for the first time can be left in no doubt about the sexually charged frisson between them. It is not overtly described but it is still there in the way they both behave and in what they say. Characters in the novels marry and have babies - Mrs Weston in *Emma* and Charlotte Palmer in *Sense and Sensibility* not to speak of Colonel Brandon's sister-in-law, Eliza not to speak of Charlotte Collins in *Pride and Prejudice* who is pregnant by the time the novel ends.

Characters die in the novels - most notably Mrs Churchill in *Emma* who is also one of the powerful non-speaking characters. Jealousy, envy, snobbery and hatred all make an appearance in the novels as of course do pride and prejudice. Jane Austen does not gloss over the less pleasant aspects of life in early nineteenth century England especially for women or over the less pleasant aspects of human nature.

I found this book an absolutely fascinating read and it is written in an easy approachable style. In my opinion it can only add to anyone's pleasure in reading Jane Austen's novels. There are plenty of notes on the text and a bibliography which will give the interested reader plenty of other texts to study.

20 of 21 people found the following review helpful.

Scholarly Book with Appeal for All Readers

By Caroline Niziol

What Matters in Jane Austen is simultaneously both the most scholarly and most enjoyable book I have read in a very long time. I have read my share of Austen scholarship that veers into mind-boggling dullness and/or extreme readings of the Big Six. In What Matters in Jane Austen, Mullan manages to explore the minutia with style, wit, and insight.

My favorite chapter was probably the one about card games. I'll confess that when Austen talks about the games her characters play during parties or afternoon gatherings, my eyes glaze over those sections. The examination of pairings and numbers for those games, as well as expectations regarding gambling, was both historically interesting and enlightening for certain portions of the books.

Despite the potential for academic murkiness, Mullan keeps the text moving quickly. It was quite fun to read and I also appreciated the brief, relevant mentions of the film adaptations.

[note: I received an ARC from Netgalley.]

18 of 19 people found the following review helpful.

Excellent insights, British edition needs proofreading

By Reader

All of us who love Austen know that part of the reason is that she was able to convey in a glance, a blush, or a silence, an entire lifetime of emotion and understanding. What we may not know is how novel at the time were both her desire and her ability to convey the complexity of the inner mind at work. This book quotes some of Austen's competitors and their prose as well as their characters are lifeless and dull. The author believes that Austen knew full well how unique her work was notwithstanding her personal modesty. He also focuses on themes and "puzzles" that run across all of Austen's work that we may not be sensitive to. For example, the many statements of annual income in the work are intended to give the reader a guide to the precise social standing of each individual. Austen actually adjusted these for inflation in later editions. The few mentions of any deaths in the novels are all offstage and do not reflect Austen's daily life, which was filled with illness, premature deaths and omnipresent mourning clothes. Each chapter has similar insights. My one objection is that the British publisher has not proofread the manuscript, which is replete with typos.

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