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Jane Austen

Brian Wilks



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Jane Austen, one of the best-loved novelists of the English language, is unique in that her approach to art is without complication.

She never attempted to exceed the limitations of her capabilities or of that with which she was familiar, but wrote of ordinary people engaged in familiar pursuits and doing ordinary things.

Born the daughter of a country parson, Jane lived what many consider to have been a quiet and uneventful life. Yet in this book, Brian Wilks shows how rewarding a study of this deceptively quite life can be.

Jane was a member of a remarkable family, and her story is one of her close involvement with its members. Personal relationships and their portrayal are the keynote of her art and they are also the key to understanding her life.

The successful novelist who, while being asked to dedicate a novel to the Prince Regent wrote to advise her ten year old niece on good "Auntship", would have preferred to be remembered as an aunt rather than as a famous writer, and the glimpses of her life and family we have in her letters abound with the same wit, liveliness and shrewd observation that are found in her novels.

Yet there is also a wider dimension to her life. She lived at one of the most formative periods of English and European history, the time of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars abroad, and of social unrest and upheaval at home.

If these events find but a dim echo in Jane's novels, it is not because she was unaware of them. Through her wide family circle she had first-hand contact with many of the social and political currents of her day: she had two brothers who became admirals and who fought in the Napoleonic Wars, an aunt who narrowly escaped hanging for an offence she did not commit, and a cousin whose husband met his death at the guillotine.

These incidents are as much a part of her life as the drawing-room at Chawton where she wrote most of her novels.

Brian Wilks recreates Jane Austen's world with excerpts from her letters, providing a series of fascincinting vignettes of her, her family, and of her world, which was that of the emerging industrial revolution, as well as of elegant Regency Bath and rural Hampshire.

Brian Wilks is the best-selling author of 'The Brontës' and 'Charlotte in Love' and was Vice-president of The Brontë Society.

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