



# What Matters in Jane Austen?: Twenty Crucial Puzzles Solved

By John Mullan

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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.

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Virginia Woolf once remarked that of all great writers Jane Austen was the most difficult to catch in the act of greatness. If only she'd had Mullan's delightful, though repetitive, book at hand, perhaps Woolf would have discovered the reasons that Austen remains among the greatest, yet most enigmatic, of English authors. Austen expert Mullan (*How Novels Work*), an English professor at University College London, cleverly captures the novelist's brilliance by answering a set of 20 questions—ranging from unpromising ones such as How much does age matter? and Why is the weather important? to more seductive ones such as Do sisters sleep together? and Is there any sex in Jane Austen?—that uncover the details that give Austen's novels their depth and lasting appeal. Through his answers, Mullan demonstrates that Austen introduced free indirect style to English fiction, filtering her plots through the consciousness of her characters, and perfected fictional idiolect, fashioning habits of speaking for even minor characters that rendered them utterly singular. In one amusing chapter, he provides many examples of the subtle ways that Austen requires the reader to think about sex. Mullan's humorous guidebook encourages first-time Austen readers to pick up her novels and lovers of Austen to re-read for new details. Agent: Derek Johns, AP Watt. (Jan.)

From [Booklist](#)

Nearly 200 years after her death, Jane Austen continues to inspire a publishing boomlet. Books in the nonfiction column range from the lightweight to the academic. This entry from the author of *How Novels Work* (2006) is just right. Mullan poses 20 questions related to strategies Austen employs to reveal character or advance plot. Chapters examine, for example, How Much Does Age Matter?, Is There Any Sex in Jane Austen?, and Why Do Her Plots Rely on Blunders? Some chapters deal with matters related to the characters' milieu, such as the games they play and the books they read. Mullan isn't concerned with explaining Regency-era customs, however, except to make clear to the modern reader what would have been apparent to a reader in Austen's time. The focus is always on showing how Austen puts various devices to work in the service of a story's arc or a character's psychology. Mullan's close reading will provide serious fans with plenty of new insights for the next time they pick up one of Austen's books. --Mary Ellen Quinn

Review

"[Mullan] brings fresh new and insights into the literary details and truths found within Jane Austen's fiction." ?*Shelf Awareness*

"Substantial yet conversational, this is scholarship without pedantry . . . An Austen lover's greatest wish is for more of her novels. This intimate guide to the world of her books is the next best thing." ?*The Atlantic*

"Delightful . . . Mullan's humorous guidebook encourages first-time Austen readers to pick up her novels and lovers of Austen to re-read for new details." ?*Publishers Weekly*

"A box of 20 literary chocolates for Austen fans to savor." ?*Kirkus Reviews*

### Users Review

From reader reviews:

**Lawanda Beverly:**

Have you spare time for the day? What do you do when you have more or little spare time? That's why, you can choose the suitable activity regarding spend your time. Any person spent all their spare time to take a wander, shopping, or went to typically the Mall. How about open as well as read a book titled What Matters in Jane Austen?: Twenty Crucial Puzzles Solved? Maybe it is to get best activity for you. You recognize beside you can spend your time with the favorite's book, you can wiser than before. Do you agree with its opinion or you have additional opinion?

**Allen Schlemmer:**

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