



# The Private World of Georgette Heyer

*Jane Aiken Hodge*

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## **The Private World of Georgette Heyer** Jane Aiken Hodge

The classic biography of Georgette Heyer is, finally, back in print and will delight Heyer fans everywhere. She wrote more than fifty novels, yet her private life was inaccessible to any but her nearest friends and relatives.

Lavishly illustrated, and with extracts from her correspondence and references to her work, **The Private World** reveals a formidable and energetic woman with an impeccable sense of style and above all, a love for all things Regency.

## **The Private World of Georgette Heyer Details**

Date : Published April 6th 2006 by Arrow (first published September 6th 1984)

ISBN : 9780099493495

Author : Jane Aiken Hodge

Format : Paperback 223 pages

Genre : Biography, Nonfiction, History, Biography Memoir

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# From Reader Review The Private World of Georgette Heyer for online ebook

## KOMET says

I first became aware of Georgette Heyer 7 years ago while browsing in a downtown BORDERS bookstore one leisurely Sunday afternoon. I eyed her novel, Beauvallet, a Mass Market Paperback, read what was on the cover and back page, and, feeling much intrigued about the content, bought the book.

Since that time, I have purchased several more of Heyer's novels. But, voracious, wide-ranging reader that I am, I've yet to read any of them. So, I thought I'd buy this biography to get a better sense of who Georgette Heyer really was.

I learned quite a lot about Heyer's background: Anglo-Russian. She was also the oldest of 3 children and showed an early talent for storytelling. Her father, who, by profession was a teacher of French, and a man of wide-ranging intellectual and sporty pursuits, encouraged her in her writing. Heyer struck me as a woman who had a strong sense of self who came to know her strengths as a writer (with her husband one of her staunchest supporters - they enjoyed a very complementary marriage of almost 50 years) and up til her death, maintained a high standard of writing.

Heyer knew her subject --- the Regency Era --- in a way that few writers today who have followed her path have managed to achieve. This is a very good book which gives the reader access to the real Georgette Heyer who bewailed the depredations of the tax man, and took great pains to keep the public Heyer the popular writer wholly separate from the intensely private Heyer: the devoted wife and mother.

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## Linda says

For those that did not know, Georgette Heyer was an intensely discreet individual. She had a high code of ethics. Her characters concealed a unique soul that was either loved or respected by most of those people that had the chance to become a part of her life. The book is based on letters and interviews with family members and friends.

Ms. Heyer was extremely thin and tall and her husband Ronald Rougier was devoted to her. They were married for almost fifty years. Their marriage was described as not the most passionate but it was a very happy one. "Romantic I am not.", the author was once heard saying. In between her writing and his pursuit of the law they produced a son, Richard, and Georgette adored him.

When she wrote, which was most of the time, she wrote feverishly. She preferred to do nothing else. I learned that The Reluctant Widow was produced after one of her rare "blank years". Friday's Child was her personal favorite. The Convenient Marriage was heavily influenced by her love of Jane Austen's romances though she claimed to be as "unromantic as Jane Austen was."

A history enthusiast, she carefully researched her characters. She voraciously read up about Napoleon and the time leading up to the Battle of Waterloo. Her description of the Duke of Wellington was based on real-life speeches and personal letters that had been saved.

After her death her husband insisted that none of her stories "drew any of her characters from life" but that remains to be seen. Their son, Richard, may have influenced *The Reluctant Widow*, *Arabella*, *The Foundling*, and *The Grand Sophy*.

In between the cracks I felt Georgette's life held a huge amount of stress. Perhaps it was the way Ms. Hodge presented Ms. Heyer but it seemed as though she wrote as much as to get away from everyday life. She had a love-hate relationship with most of her publishers. Her decisions, opinions and refusal to grant interviews made me think more than once that I may not have liked meeting her if she was alive today and the offer was presented.

Even though I found this book interesting it actually took me a very long time to complete. I read a few pages here and there over a period of months. It also felt superficial at times avoiding the essential core of her life. This is a mild character study of a very creative woman and it will most appeal to those who loved Ms. Heyer's stories.

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### **Hannah says**

Interesting insight into Georgette Heyer's writing life by Jane Aiken Hodge, based upon letters and interviews with her friends and family.

An extremely private person who never promoted her books publicly or granted an interview, Heyer was loved and respected by those she allowed into her personal life, but I felt that she appeared acerbic, condescending and unlikable in the pages of this book. While I greatly admire her work ethic and enjoy her novels, I don't think she'd be someone I'd want to know personally based upon this semi-biographical book.

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### **Sandra says**

I don't normally read biographies, however, this one is on one of my favourite historical romance authors, written by another romance author.

I last read this biography 23 years ago and as I am so familiar with Georgette Heyer's work it still felt like an old friend. It was interesting to read the work again with such a long perspective. It did not disappoint.

It covers all the necessary chronological events in GH's life, yet through Jane Aiken Hodge's own writing (of which I have several) brings a whole new perspective to the inner workings of the author's mind.

Types of Heros and Heroines Mk 1 & Mk 2 are discussed and throughout amusing snippets of the novels are interspersed with the terrible tax problems, and finally in her later years all the health problems caused by 60 years of excessive smoking.

We follow her life madly writing through WWII, raising her son and supporting her husband who decides to qualify for the Bar and ends up a QC. She goes to Garden Parties and has Dinner with the Queen, under sufferance, and she is often quoted as writing a book a year just to satisfy the tax man.

Georgette Heyer comes across as a private, shy and witty person who loved her family and her work and

definitely hated the tax man.

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## **Lynden Wade says**

Georgette Heyer is well-known for writing Regency romances, and started a genre now named after her, though I have yet to come across an imitator who matches her flair for detail or her wry tone. She knew the Regency period inside out, and for this as well as for my enjoyment of her novels I wanted to read her biography, to see how she developed as a mistress of historical fiction.

She did not lead a particularly interesting life, and so the biography is largely about her publishings, her growing family and her fights with the Tax office, but it was interesting to see read about her attitude to her own writing.

She did not start out as a writer of Regency romance. Even if you set aside the contemporary novels she later suppressed and the detective novels that she wrote alongside her romances in the first part of her career, she was first published with a novel of the 18c, and wrote several set in this or an earlier century before finally settling in the early 19c.

It is ironic that what she really wanted to do was write serious works set in the Middle Ages, for which she researched as meticulously. Even more ironic is Hodges' contention that the Regency period with its tight rules about convention fitted her conservative, sceptical personality much better than did the mixture of faith and superstition that was the Middle Ages. It is an intriguing idea, that one's choice of genre and era should fit one's personality as well as one's interests. (Here is a sample of her outlook, one of her regular outbursts about the unexpected tax bills she got on her earnings, suggesting she would have been much happier being born before the National Schools movement: "I can't tell you how MUCH I enjoy working myself to a standstill for the privilege of Educating the Masses, subsidising the cost of strikes, and all the other things public money is squandered on.")

Part of the problem for Heyer was that she alternated between being pleased with her latest work in progress and calling it a "stinker," and she was keenly aware that she was being dismissed as a writer of fluff, usually by people who had not read her, and some of the book covers chosen by publishers did not help that image. Fortunately she had a champion in A.S. Byatt who wrote about her "playing romantic games with the novel of manners" and her world of "romanticised anti-romanticism."

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## **Lyn says**

Joan Aiken Hodge was an author whose style I enjoyed for a long time; she's done an excellent job of bringing my most favorite author to life as a person. I've loved Georgette Heyer's books since I was 17! Her heroines have working brains & good sense, and now I know why: they are a reflection of the author herself! I've also read some of her historical novels: *My Lord John*, *The Conqueror*, and *An Infamous Army* (thoroughly understand why it's recommended reading for student officers at Sandringham), and enjoyed them as well. The attention to detail in the books reflects her extensive research. I think it's time to pull out some of my stacks & start a round of re-reads. I'm planning an enjoyable summer!

Thank you, Joan Aiken Hodge, job well done!

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## **Kate says**

Very interesting and well-written biography/bibliography of Heyer. Fascinating to learn that her husband helped write her mysteries, she really did believe those awful sexist things that are the focus of her contemporary fiction works, and that she kept detailed scrapbooks to help guide her historical writing. A reminder that I don't have to like a writer's personality to like his/her work! In addition, this is a great picture of how an accomplished, intelligent writer works, and how possible it is to be famous without marketing yourself.

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## **Linda Banche says**

Everyone who knows Regency romance knows Georgette Heyer. The bare bones of her life are there for all to see, but not much more. She disliked the cult of author as celebrity and rarely gave interviews. Jane Aiken Hodge's biography, *THE PRIVATE WORLD OF GEORGETTE HEYER*, sheds light about the life of someone so well known and at the same time so well hidden.

A compulsive writer, Ms. Heyer (pronounced "hare") published her first novel in 1921 when she was nineteen. Then, for the rest of her life, with a few exceptions, she wrote one and sometimes two novels a year. She wrote mainly historical romances, but also historical fiction, thrillers, contemporary novels and one collection of short stories, fifty-seven works in all. A monumental output for any author.

She was born on August 16, 1902. Her father encouraged his children to read, and she was a voracious reader as she grew up. She was tall, good looking, intelligent, and never hid her light under a bushel. And on top of it, she was a successful novelist, which scared away many men. But not Ronald Rougier, whom she married in 1925, and they remained married for almost fifty years, until her death in 1974. They had one child, Richard, who became a barrister like his father.

Ms. Hodge uses common knowledge, as well as Ms. Heyer's letters and interviews with people who knew her, to paint a picture of a woman of contradictions. She loved to write, but in her early career, she had to write. She was the main breadwinner for her mother and brothers after her father's death, and also in the first years of her marriage. Later, as her success increased, she raged on and on about how she paid too much in income taxes, but she couldn't be bothered to track deductible expenses that would have reduced her burden. She wrote stories read mainly by women, yet she was not domestic. She spent most of her life around men and preferred their company. She lived in the public eye, but since her novels sold so well, she deemed interviews unnecessary and actively discouraged them.

As rabid as she was about maintaining her privacy, she was also rabid about historical accuracy. Her books are treasure troves of historical detail, both the thrillers, which were contemporary in the 1930's when she wrote them, as well as the novels set in the Regency, Georgian and earlier eras. Ms. Hodge gives a fascinating view of the context in which Ms. Heyer's novels were written, and a chronological list of all her books.

Love Georgette Heyer's novels or hate them, she, along with Jane Austen, remains one of the icons of regency romance. If you want to know more about this fascinating woman, *THE PRIVATE WORLD OF GEORGETTE HEYER* is the book for you.

### **Carolyn says**

I'm so glad this has been rereleased. I have loved Georgette Heyer's novels and have every one in my library. I appreciate her great research into the Regency and Georgian periods. She created the genre. Most of the social slang and other terms have come from her research; other authors use her terms over and over - sometimes without an understanding of them, therefore, in inappropriate ways.

It's rather startling to discover that she was not a very likeable person herself, considering herself on a higher social level than her readers. She thought her writing talents negligible, while her readers reveled in her humor and knowledge of human behavior. She was a wonderful storyteller. Yet, she had disdain for her readers, thinking that they didn't know good writing.

I finished the book with a sense of sadness for her, and a bad taste in my mouth about her persona. It is sad that she didn't appreciate her own work.

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### **Ana Rînceanu says**

The biography is informative, dry in tone with quotes from the author's letters and works. I'm looking forward to reading the more recent and (hopefully) more detailed biography Jennifer Kloester's Georgette Heyer.

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### **Rooh says**

What an engaging book! I started reading it yesterday morning thinking I will eventually get up and do something else but just could not put it down till the last page.

It was quite interesting to read about Georgette Heyer's background & what was going on in her life as she was writing each book. It almost gives each book a new perspective to look at it from. I really enjoyed reading Heyer's letters to her favourite publishers - she seems to be just as witty, stubborn, strongly opinionated and charming as her heroines. This book gives us an insightful look into Heyer's private world, everything from the fact that Barbosa was her favourite illustrator to how her husband would often collaborate with her on her detective novels.

I find it incredibly sad that throughout her life she never got the critical acclaim she so deserved. Critics seemed to have seen her books as yet another Heyer but the amount of research and work she put into each book, the attention to detail to everything from the clothes to the slang shows her as a master craftswoman of her favoured genre rather than a mere "scribbler of trivial romances".

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## **Miriam says**

Having now read a novel by Hodge I'm wondering if I really want this after all...

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## **Tracy says**

Who wouldn't want to know more about the author of so many wonderful books? During her lifetime, Heyer refused all interviews and publicity. Her fans know about as much about her personal life as they know of Jane Austen's. (But isn't there a great market for all of that surmising about Jane?)

This biography gives us a picture of Heyer as a dedicated writer and meticulous researcher. The rare instances where she made historical errors usually occurred when she forced herself to complete a manuscript during an illness. Although her Regency era novels are best-known, I enjoyed learning about her love of the medieval period. Throughout her career writing mysteries and romances to keep the Tax Man at bay, as she put it, she kept returning to her ambitious historical novel of Henry V's younger brother, John, Duke of Bedford. The unfinished work was published after her death as *My Lord John*.

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## **Damaskcat says**

Georgette Heyer was a very private author and never gave any interviews throughout her long writing career. In spite of this her novels achieved world wide fame. She created her own private world in her Regency novels though she also wrote some very well regarded straight historical novels including 'An Infamous Army' which is set around the Battle of Waterloo and is considered one of the best accounts of the battle ever written.

Heyer started her writing career when she in her teens and within a few years she was supporting her mother and brothers as well as her husband with her work. For many years she wrote a romance and a detective story each year. She took great pains with her research so that she got the background and historical facts exactly right but she also wrote at a great rate once she had decided on the plot and the characters often finishing a book within weeks of starting it.

There are many extracts from Heyer's letters in this book - mainly to her publishers and to her friends and they have the flavour of Jane Austen in their humour and irony - just as her books do.

This well written book gives a fascinating insight into the life and work of an author who was and remains popular with young and old alike. I found it interesting and entertaining. I listened to the audio book version read by Phyllida Nash who has also narrated many of Heyer's novels.

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## **Carol ?? says**

A Georgette Heyer fan as obsessive as I would always want to read both this biography & the one written by Jennifer Koestler, but if you are going to choose one, the Hodge would be my pick!



There are similarities of course. GH's desire for privacy meant interviews with her were rare.& some of her manuscripts & letters were lost during WW2. & So, source material was limited. While both biographers had help & permission from GH's late son Richard, Hodge would have been more constrained to consider the feelings of the living. For example Hodge only mentions that Ronald Rougier died not that long after his wife - Hodge doesn't mention it was suicide.

It is a matter of writing style & book length. Hodge has by far the lighter touch & was less bogged down by minutiae. I found it very hard to put this book down - & this in spite of the not being a big fan of Hodge's novels. She was also more careful about spoilers writing her analysis of GH's books. I think Hodge paints a more likeable picture & I can totally picture Hodge's GH being fun to have a gin & tonic with, in spite of the contradictions in GH's personality - shy yet strong willed, intelligent but obstinate, especially regarding financial matters.

& if I may correct a misapprehension I have seen on my travels around GR, Hodge & Heyer weren't friends & never met.

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