

## Mukai: The Loiterer, A Periodical Work edited by James Austen and Henry Austen

From the Preface by Hidetada Mukai: The Loiterer was a weekly periodical comprising essays of Jane Austen's elder brothers, James and Henry, who were living in Oxford at the time of its publication. It ran for sixty issues from 31 January 1789 to 20 March 1790. The Austen brothers wrote articles under the motto 'Speak of us as we are' and, as they declared in the first issue, their aim was to 'supply their countrymen with a regular succession of moral lectures, critical remarks, and elegant humour, conveyed through the channel of a Periodical Paper'. It was first circulated locally, but all the issues were bound into one or two volumes and published in Oxford, Birmingham, Reading, Bath, and London. Although they followed the examples of major periodicals such as The Spectator and The Rambler, it can be called a college journal because the Austen brothers were motivated by several college and schoolboy journals. In this sense, The Loiterer provides a valuable source of information on this literary genre which is said to have been in full flourish during the late 1780s and early 1790s. Jane Austen allegedly contributed an essay to its ninth issue under a pseudonym Sophia Sentiment when she was at the age of thirteen. It has turned out to be an unsuccessful attempt to provide external and substantial evidence to demonstrate that the name is Jane's pseudonym, but there has been an excavation of material which most likely will help indicate the nature of Jane's early literary environment and artistic development. The remark of J. E. Austen-Leigh, a son of James, found in A Memoir of Jane Austen, says that James had 'a large share in directing her reading and forming her taste'. A mere reading of the essays in The Loiterer will reinforce the claim that the Austen brothers, especially James, were excellent essayists. Recently James' literary talent has been reassessed, and general recognition of him as a poet has been confirmed by the publication of a complete collection of his poems. He was indeed the scholar of the family as his mother praised him for 'Classical Knowledge, Literary Taste and the Power of Elegant Composition'. It might not be bold to assume that at an early stage he had a more promising future as a writer than Jane, and undeniably he deserves Janeite scholars' recognition not only as a brother of the famous novelist but also as a full-fledged writer. This facsimile reprint was published to commemorate the inauguration of the Jane Austen Society of Japan.

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