


# Letter from Chicago

Summer 2017


## *A Taste of the Jane Austen Society*

*Saturday, September 16*

*1:00 pm to 4:00 pm*



Whether you prefer a hearty, full bodied discussion, or just a little something sweet, there will be something for everyone's taste at this year's JASNA AGM. We will be offering a tasting menu of our own members' creations to whet your appetite to learn more about the life, work, and world of Jane Austen.

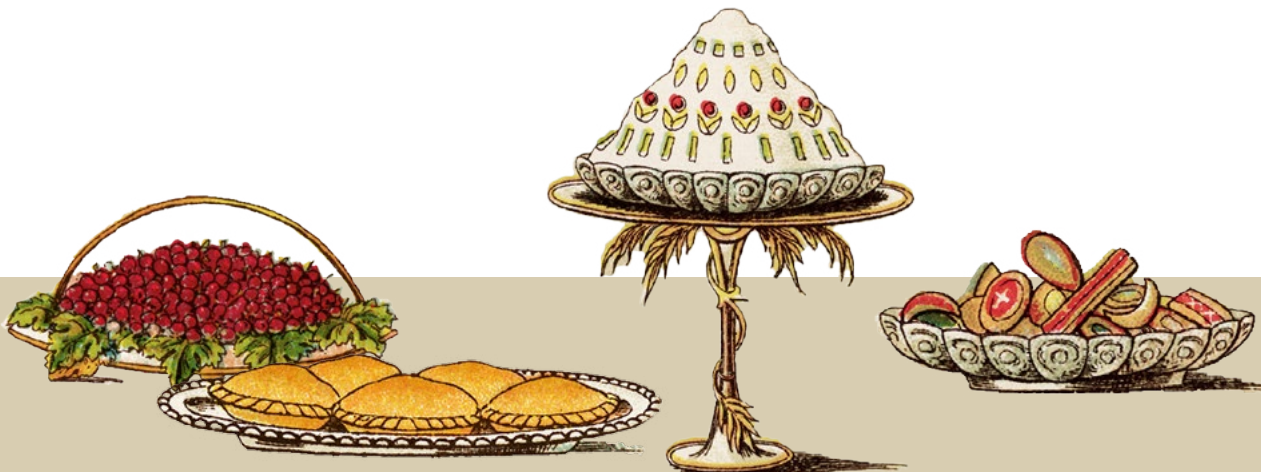


Join us for our annual free event (open to the public) to sample the many delights of being a member of the Jane Austen Society.

And there will be real treats, too!  
Coffee, tea, and cookies will follow the presentations.

Evanston Public Library, 1703 Orrington Avenue  
Evanston, IL 60201

Paid public parking lot next to the library. Close to the Davis Street stops on the CTA Purple Line and Metra Union Pacific North Line.



**Debra Ann Miller**

Change is hard. I will admit—I have been struggling to fulfill all the duties of a Regional Coordinator—there is so much more to keep track of and so many changes in the organization that I feel a little overwhelmed.

Our financial model has been altered, we are saying goodbye to some of our Board members, and summer plans make keeping in touch with friends and associates difficult.

Change brings new perspective. I have always admired the work that Jeff Nigro did as RC, and now I have a fuller appreciation of his organizational and diplomatic skills. I will continue to begin each interaction in my role as RC with “What would Jeff do?”. In our search for new Board members, I have a greater gratitude for the time and dedication that our outgoing members have given to GCR, a more complete understanding of each position, and a clearer idea of who the ideal candidate would be. In

reworking our fiscal model, I can see how we got to where we are and why the decisions were made that brought us this far.

Change brings delightful surprises. Since the letter about our change in dues was sent out, the outpouring of support and enthusiasm from our members has been beyond my wildest expectation and encouraging beyond my ability to express. Guidance from fellow RCs, particularly Mary Miller in Indianapolis, has been invaluable, and I look forward to the annual AGM in October where I will have the opportunity to meet more of my counterparts.

We will continue to change. We will make missteps—for these I apologize in advance. We will have great successes—these will be directly tied to the continued enthusiasm and support of you, our members. Please consider channeling that support into becoming a member of our Board, or volunteering on the decorating committee for the Gala or another JASNA-GCR event.

## LETTER FROM CHICAGO

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The JASNA membership year begins September 1 and ends August 31. Dues can be paid online at [www.jasna.org](http://www.jasna.org) or mailed to **JASNA**  
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 3140 S Temperance Way  
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Heraclitus wrote: “The only thing that is constant is change—”. We will continue to change. The most effective, constructive way to continue to move forward is to keep the dialogue going. Please check our Facebook page and webpage when your busy schedule allows. Check out JASNA’s webpage redesign (yes, more change) and discover the new information it has to offer. And as always, I encourage you to attend our quarterly meetings. Stop me, and talk to me after the event; let me hear your

ideas and tell me about your unique talents and how you would like to make JASNA-GCR better.

As Jane Austen wrote to her sister Cassandra on December 25th of 1798: “You deserve a longer letter than this, but it is my unhappy fate seldom to treat people so well as they deserve.” I would write more in appreciation of our tireless Board, and our wonderful members, but I have a show today and so I must...change.

# Review

## **Alan Ayckbourn's *Improbable Fiction***

**Linda E. Reinert**

**Buffalo Theatre Ensemble at McAninch Arts Center,  
Glen Ellyn, May 4 through June 4**

This 2005 play takes its title from *Twelfth Night*: “If this were played upon a stage now, I could condemn it as improbable fiction”—(3.4).

In late May, I attended a performance of *Improbable Fiction* (2005), a comedy billed as featuring a range of genres, “from supernatural thrillers to Jane Austen fiction to children’s stories to film noir,” and so on the cue of “Jane Austen,” I was asked to provide a review.

If the Jane Austen ingredient is a must, you might re-consider, but would be missing out on a whole lot of fun conjured up by prolific British playwright Alan Ayckbourn—this is the 59th of his 81 plays. Ayckbourn is a writer and director, known for *Private Fears in Public Places* (2006), *A Chorus of Disapproval* (1989) and *Smoking/No Smoking* (1993). *Improbable Fiction* centers on a writers’ circle in which writer’s block and lack of originality have prevailed in prior meetings. The setting of this English countryside living room is maintained throughout the play. In the second act, after being given a challenge to move forward in their writings, five of the six writers depart. A sudden storm suddenly cuts the electricity. Reality and time are warped as the audience witnesses the various would-be authors play in their various

stories, apart from a confused Arnold who carries on being himself. The same six actors appear as characters across the current six works under construction. These works range across from Brontë-esque romance to P.D. James detective mystery, to science fiction, to children’s books, to how-to-books. Zig-zagging in and out of these genres really is fun, and is made more enjoyable by a number of factors present in this production from the Buffalo Theatre Ensemble. Special touches provided by director Bryan Burke make the play capture audience attention. The staging, from initial feel of cozy English home on a winter’s eve, into the multi-set shenanigans, are all wonderfully set. As the various genres, set in multiple historical periods, are traversed, a bit of fun detail to monitor is the version of the phone (or lack of it) which fills a small cubby-hole at stage left. Another detail and almost a character itself is an outrageous wig that appears later in the play, but from start to finish, the cast is what absolutely makes the performance work. The British accents are beautifully mastered. Our host and owner of the cozy home, Arnold, wins the audience’s trust immediately as he battles to accommodate all his guests, and his ailing mother, along with her caretaker. The most fun is watching to see what will happen in each writer’s text to make each story probable.

Jeffrey Nigro, Program Director

## Mining the Austen Treasure Trove

I have noticed an interesting phenomenon whenever I have the great pleasure and privilege of speaking to an audience: when the person introducing me mentions my involvement with the Jane Austen Society of North America, no matter what the topic of my talk, a ripple of delight seems to run through the audience. I have come to think of this as a kind of genteel version of “The Wave”. Afterwards, invariably someone will come up to me and say: “I didn’t know there was a Jane Austen Society! I love Jane Austen!” Of course I am always happy to give them more information about JASNA and encourage them to join. This explanation is usually followed by a question along the lines of: “So, what do you do at Jane Austen Society meetings?”

It’s an understandable question coming from people who have not been to JASNA-GCR events. As we are constantly reminded by the media, especially in this year that commemorates Austen’s death 200 years ago, *she only wrote six novels* (plus some Juvenilia, a few fragments, lots of letters, etc., but media people seem to forget about all of that). How much can there be to say? Those of us who do attend JASNA-GCR events know that Austen’s writings offer a seemingly inexhaustible treasure trove of insight into our fellow human beings, brilliant literary artistry, sparkling wit, and an often subtle but nonetheless palpable sense of the tumultuous times she lived in. We never seem to run out of things to say about Jane Austen.

The GCR Fall Program on September 16 will demonstrate this point in spades, and it will

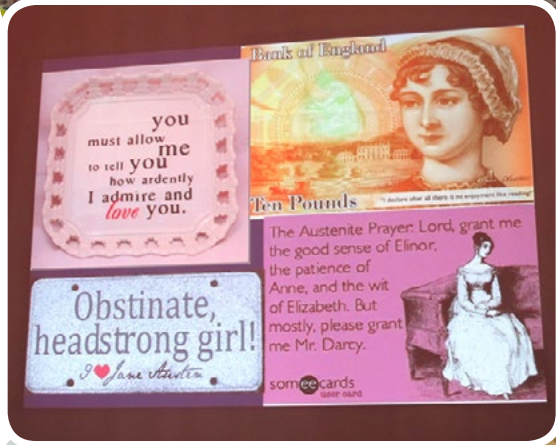
connect to the ultimate in Austen treasure-trove-mining, the JASNA Annual General Meeting. The 2017 AGM is called “Jane Austen in Paradise”, a witty and touching play of words, based on the fact that we will be observing the 200th anniversary of Austen’s arrival in Paradise (however you define the afterlife), and it will take place in a setting that many would define as a paradise, Huntington Beach, hosted by our friends in the Southern California Region of JASNA.

This year’s AGM will do GCR proud, as a number of our members have been selected to present breakout sessions. This inspired our RC, Debra Ann Miller, to come up with a particularly brilliant idea for our Fall Meeting: we realize that many of our members cannot make it to an AGM, so we thought it would be fun to bring the AGM to you! Some of the GCR members who will be presenting at the 2017 AGM will be presenting portions of their work at the September 16 meeting. Whether you plan to attend the AGM or not, this will give you an opportunity to experience the many ways our own members are contributing to new ways of thinking about, understanding, and enjoying Austen’s work.

We are delighted that we will be returning to the Evanston Public Library for the event, which means we will be deliciously near our own “ocean view”, beautiful Lake Michigan. And the event is free and open to the public, so if you know anyone who says “So what do you do at Jane Austen Society events?”, bring them along and they’ll find out!

**Wanted:** Intrepid reporter to infiltrate and report upon the Jane Austen Society-Greater Chicago Region’s September meeting. No experience required. We are looking for a volunteer to attend and write a summary of our annual free September meeting that will take place at the Evanston Public Library on September 16th. Enthusiasm is a must. A friend that has never been to a meeting and their perspective is encouraged, but not essential. The article will be due by mid October. No pay, but there will be cookies. To volunteer, contact Deb Miller at [rc@jasnachicago.org](mailto:rc@jasnachicago.org).

# Gala in Photos



Starting top left: Table centerpiece; RC Debra Ann Miller with seller Jeanne Steen and member Pat Wieber; Teresita Diaz Lewis, Joan Turk and Judy Chernick; Mom Cindy with daughter Frances Cahill; Slide from Janet Messmer's presentation; Table centerpiece; Cheryl Cole with Savi Charm (who found out about the meeting on Facebook); Table centerpiece; Liza Pilch with Maria Hrycelak sporting a charming hat; Linda Wagner and Julie Rowan checking out the program; Table centerpiece; Presenter Laura Whitlock; One of Laura's slides; Slide from Jeff Nigro's talk; Presenters Jeff Nigro and Janet Messmer; A shot of the attendees.



# Sightings/Citings

Elsie Holzwarth



## Financially Speaking . . .

The Bank of England has unveiled the Jane Austen £10 note, to be circulated in September. Not everyone is happy. The portrait is not based on her sister Cassandra's artwork. "It's an author's publicity portrait after she died in which she's been given the Georgian equivalent of an airbrushing," Lucy Worsley, TV presenter and historian, told *The Sunday Times*. Containing plastic, the note will be unrippable. But, again, not everyone is happy. Complainers object that traces of tallow, being animal fat, will still be found in the note. A commemorative £2 coin will also be issued, this time with a silhouette—possibly of Austen, who knows. *The Telegraph* reported, "Historians cannot recall the last time a figure other than the reigning monarch graced both coins and notes simultaneously." And the Royal Mint described the novelist in its official statement as "a revolutionary romantic."

In her article "Cents and Sensibility", published in *The Financial Times*, Kathryn Sutherland writes, "Austen's lifetime earnings of around £630 were modest by any contemporary standards. Her writing never provided financial independence. Posthumous profits and Cassandra Austen's sale of her sister's copyrights in 1832 brought Austen's overall earnings from her novels to around £1,625, most of which were received after death. Despite mounting

esteem in her lifetime and latterly the prestige of working with John Murray, the most glamorous publisher in London, Austen earned much less than her contemporaries, Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth and the best seller Walter Scott, all now little read by comparison. 'The Rich are always respectable,' Austen quipped. She too has always been respectable, but she would surely have relished the irony that ... when hers [is] the face of the Bank of England £10 note, she will at last have money and fame."

## Statistically Speaking . . .

Austen is, of course, a featured author in Ben Blatt's book *Nabokov's Favorite Word is Mauve: What the Numbers Reveal About the Classics, Best Sellers, and Our Own Writing*. Blatt has used computers and algorithms to come up with a book filled with charts, graphs, and all sorts of numerical analyses of works of fiction. Of Austen we learn that for every 10,000 words in her six novels, 128 are adverbs ending in -ly. (Blatt points out that Ernest Hemingway was dead set against using these kinds of adverbs.) When it comes to exclamation points she uses 449 of them for every 100,000 words!!! Among writers who have written at least one work of fiction, she ranks #2 in the use of the word "suddenly", (it's not clear why this is important), at the rate of 8 "suddenlies" for every 100,000 words. According to Blatt, she is #1 among authors in having the longest first sentences—at a median length of 32 words. And, for him, the first sentence of *Pride and Prejudice* is #1 on the list of the 20 best first sentences in fiction. As for the "he:she ratio" of pronouns, Blatt writes that Austen "is the only writer I could find who never wrote a book with he more than she." (He notes that includes Charlotte Brontë.) Who says she wasn't a feminist?

# William's Quiz Key

William Phillips

I thought this one of the more diabolical quizzes I've offered. At the same time, I suspected that our clever GCR Members would do well. You did. If you think of things that might be added to the answers, please feel free to e-mail me and make suggestions waphil3@gmail.com. Your suggestions would no doubt make for a delightful further discussion.

## JANE AUSTEN & DEATH

All answers should come from what people at your table remember. Please DO NOT use phones, tablets, laptops, or copies of the novels as resources. If today's presentations or conversations gave you any of the answers, be my guest. By "OCCUR" is meant a death that takes place during the novel's "present time." By MENTIONED is meant a death that took place *prior* to the "present time" of the novel. Please complete ONE answer sheet for your whole table.

**A.** One or more deaths or the idea of death either occur or is/are mentioned in the very first chapter of FOUR of the SIX novels.

**1.** For each of the novels, circle either YES or NO as appropriate.

Sense and Sensibility:	<input checked="" type="radio"/> YES	NO
Pride and Prejudice:	YES	<input checked="" type="radio"/> NO
Mansfield Park :	YES	<input checked="" type="radio"/> NO
Emma:	<input checked="" type="radio"/> YES	NO
Northanger Abbey:	<input checked="" type="radio"/> YES	NO
Persuasion:	<input checked="" type="radio"/> YES	NO

**2.** For each novel for which you answered YES, identify the death(s) or circumstance(s) on the lines provided. Following the two novels for which you answered NO, leave the lines blank. Recall that in the case of each novel we're talking about Vol. I, Chapter 1.

**S & S:** In Chapter 1—MENTIONED: (1) Henry's uncle (the old gentleman); (2) the uncle's sister; OCCURS: Henry himself

**P & P:** Blank

**MP:** Blank

**E:** Her (Emma's) mother had died too long ago for her to have more than an indistinct remembrance of her caresses, . . .

**NA:** She [Catherine's mother] had three sons before Catherine was born; and instead of dying in bringing the latter into the world, as any body might expect, she still lived on—lived to have six children more—to see them growing up around her, and to enjoy excellent health herself.

**P:** MENTIONED: . . .by which lady (who died 1800) he has issue [stillborn son? Could be controversial, but I would have given credit for this.]

**B.** Deaths occur and/or are mentioned in all six of the novels. In this section, for each novel identify the people whose deaths OCCUR and any whose deaths are MENTIONED. Do not repeat your answers from Section A. [In the printed quiz, I used the word "implied" too. This caused some confusion. I tried to give credit, whenever I could, even though I'm a bit of a "language curmudgeon."

**S & S** OCCUR(S): Eliza Williams; MENTIONED: Col. Brandon's brother; Eliza's mother; Mr. Ferras died a very rich man; Mr. Jennings [Mrs. Jennings loved to tell about his final illness and what he said to her just before he died.]

**P & P** OCCURS (at least the language suggests it has just happened): Mary King's grandfather; MENTIONED: Mr. Collins's father; Fitzwilliam & Georgiana Darcy's father & mother; Mr. Wickham's mother and father; [accepted Sir Louis DeBourgh]

**MP** OCCUR(S) Mr. Norris; Dr. Grant MENTIONED: Henry's, Mary's and Mrs. Grant's mother; [M & H's father] the wife of Admiral (Uncle) Crawford; a near connection of Lord Ravenshaw (prevents the party at Ecclesford from performing); Mary Price

**E** OCCUR(S): Mrs. Churchill; MENTIONED: the 1st Mrs. Weston (nee Miss Churchill, i.e., Frank's mother; both the mother and father of Jane Fairfax)

**NA** MENTIONED; Mrs. Tilney. One we can deduce is the brother of Eleanor Tilney's husband at the end, leaving him a Vicount, so tangentially a part of the plot.

**P** MENTIONED: [Mr. Clay]; Richard Musgrove; Miss [Phoebe] Harville; Mr Charles Smith \_\_NB: Mr. Clay is not named, and there is no mention of any action of his, so I would list this under "implied." Given that Mrs. Clay is a widow who has two children, and doesn't have much to live on, we can deduce that there was a Mr. Clay, he lived, assisted in the conception of children, died, and didn't leave much money.

At the first AGM I attended (Colorado Springs, 1999), there was an informal vote asking attendees to list their favorite Austen novel (or rank order the first three). Even though the theme of that AGM was *Emma*, arguably her greatest masterpiece, and in spite of subsequent passion for Elizabeth and Darcy, *Persuasion* came in first. Since next year's AGM has *Persuasion* as a theme, I'd be delighted to have any of you suggest ideas for a "diabolical" quiz about those AGMers' favorite. [Once again waphil3@gmail.com]

LETTER FROM CHICAGO

JASNA-GCR  
11133 Meadow Lark Lane  
Belvidere, IL 61008

**Fall Meeting**  
**Evanston Public Library**

# Calendar

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## **Saturday**

**September 16** **A Taste of the Jane Austen Society.** 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm.  
Evanston Public Library. 1703 Orrington Avenue, Evanston, IL 60201.  
The event is free and open to the public.

**October 6-8** **JASNA AGM.** Jane Austen In Paradise. Huntington Beach, CA  
See [www.jasna.org](http://www.jasna.org) for details

## **Saturday**

**December 2** **Annual Birthday Tea.** The Fortnightly. 120 E Bellevue Pl, Chicago, IL 60611. 1:00 pm-4:00 pm.

Our website is [www.jasnachicago.org](http://www.jasnachicago.org)