

Letter from Chicago

Fall 2010



Birthday Tea

Saturday, December 4, 2010

2:00–4:00 pm

The Fortnightly of Chicago
120 East Bellevue, Chicago, IL

**“Are you sure they are all horrid?”—
Austen’s Degrees of Disagreeability**

Michael Allocca

Chair, Basic Program of Liberal
Education for Adults, University of Chicago
Graham School of General Studies

Parking for a fee at 50 and 100 East Bellevue Buildings

TEA REGISTRATION FORM

Members: \$40; Guests: \$50

Registration deadline: November 29

Member Name _____

Guest(s) Name(s) _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

E-mail _____ Phone _____ Amount enclosed \$ _____

You can register by

1. Going online to www.jasnachicago.org and pay using your Visa or MasterCard.
- or
2. Mailing your check—payable to JASNA-GCR—and this form to **Cathy Feldman, 17 East Goethe St., Chicago, IL 60610-2312.**

Jeffrey Nigro



To paraphrase President John F. Kennedy: it may be necessary for me to introduce myself. I am the man who has to follow **Natalie Goldberg** as Regional Coordinator of JASNA-GCR. Herself taking over the position from

another great lady, our beloved Joän Pawelski, Natalie has magnificently shepherded the group through, among other things, the 2008 JASNA Annual General Meeting in Chicago. With the legacy of a large, active and financially solid organization, she has more than earned the right simply to show up at our events and enjoy them. I only hope I can live up to such an extraordinary list of achievements.

The same can be said of our other long-serving members who are stepping down from the Board after many years of dedicated service: **Elsie Holzwarth**, **Martha Jameson**, and **Beverly Roth**. Each of them has been invaluable, and they also deserve our warmest thanks.

I have given a number of talks to JASNA-GCR many times over the years since I was first invited to speak by none other than dear Bev Roth, so I have had the privilege of being made to sound good by a number of kind introducers. I thought, though, that my first letter as Regional Coordinator should be a little more about, if you will, my “relationship” with Austen (yes, some may scoff, but I’m afraid that Austen lovers do tend to get personal about her). This is not meant as an act of self-indulgence, but to let you know where I stand, as it were, on Jane Austen and our wonderful organization.

I first encountered Austen by watching *Pride and Prejudice* on Masterpiece Theater way back in 1980 (the one with Elizabeth Garvie and David Rintoul). I didn’t read the book

until 1983, and it really gave me some comfort at a time when I needed it (and I have re-read it at least once every year since). I subsequently devoured the other novels in such quick succession that I was soon writing letters (remember those?) in what I liked to think was Austenian prose.

Like many readers, I have continued to use Austen as “comfort food”, something delicious to dip into when times are tough; and yes, she can still make me laugh out loud (“...unless by some cruel and malicious arrangement at the war-office, another regiment should be quartered at Meryton” gets me every time). But I also know that my appreciation of Austen has deepened over the years, and I am sure you can say the same. Is there any writer with a better understanding of human beings (stranger creatures than any zombie could ever be), or greater sympathy with the complex moral dilemmas we face, often under the guise of seemingly ordinary circumstances?

Just as Austen is unique, so indeed is JASNA. I do not know of any other organization that includes both professional scholars and people from all walks of life who are there because they love to read, they love to learn and they love Austen. JASNA-GCR is the quintessence of this phenomenon: you get to know a lot of smart, witty, well-read people and there is something for everyone.

Speaking of which, our Program Director **Elisabeth Lenckos** has once again arranged a diverse and outstanding series of edifying and enjoyable programs for us, which you can read more about on the next page. I hope to see and speak with as many of our members as I can at all of them. Let me know about your first encounter with Austen, your favorite characters and quotations, your thoughts on her most profound insights. Looking forward to delightful conversation!

I hope that the JASNA-GCR Region has enjoyed the past year of exciting interdisciplinary programs featuring distinguished Jane Austen scholar **Elaine Bander**, respected art historian **Greg Nosan**, ever-popular costume historian and milliner-designer **Laura Whitlock**, a lovely turban-draping workshop, and the lecture on the London topography of Austen's novels by *Regency Encyclopedia* web mistress **Sue Forgue**. The Board and I look forward to continuing our exploration of what I call *Austenworld*, the study of the historical and cultural aspects that contribute to our understanding and appreciation of our favorite author's life, work and times. We plan to have further fascinating presentations in 2011 on the theater, dance, and music of eighteenth-century England. For that reason, our 2011 Gala will be entitled *Staging Sensibility: Jane Austen and the Performing Arts*. The day will include, I am proud to say, the full-length premiere of "Jane Austen Speaks," a script authored and performed by **Debra Ann Miller**, whom I invited over a year ago to extend her repertory from Mary Todd Lincoln, a role that she has been enacting successfully for over a decade, to Jane Austen. I am so glad that she said yes!

The news in *Austenworld* is of course that Janeites are eagerly anticipating 2011 and the bicentenary of *Sense and Sensibility*. Our region has already begun to plan and launch its own round of celebrations and events. For October 30, 2010, Debra Ann has created a "Talk like Jane Austen Day," a web event which has since gone viral on the Internet.

On 4 December, **Michaelangelo Allocca**, Chair of the Basic Program at the University of Chicago Graham School and an extraordinarily inspiring lecturer who, despite his angelic name, is known to appear as Mephisto when he talks on the nature of evil, will continue our theme of theatricality with his talk on "Austen's

Degrees of Disagreeability," a witty and learned contemplation on those of Austen's men whom we love to hate. Michael whets our appetites with the following teaser:

"Are you sure they are all horrid?"—Austen's Degrees of Disagreeability:

If you were forced to choose between one and the other, would you marry Wickham or Mr. Collins? Let us hope that none of us is ever forced to make such a choice, but it helps frame some questions about Jane Austen's broad range of unpleasant characters, from those we just plain hate, to those we 'love to hate.' For instance, exactly why do we feel as we do about them? Which ones cross the line from simply aesthetically displeasing, into outright morally evil—and how do we spot that line, as Austen draws it?

Then, on 12 February, 2011, we carry on our theme of the dramatic arts with the Readers' Theatre, directed by **William Phillips**, making a much anticipated reappearance with a script centering on a major theme in *Sense and Sensibility*, as well as in many other eighteenth-century plays and novels: the antagonism and tension between town and country, urban and rural England, and their opposing fashions and values.

Jeff Nigro, William Phillips, and I, the program committee, are at present working hard on identifying and inviting speakers for the Gala and are also looking into a very special summer date for our region, on the progress of which I will report very soon. I am agog with excitement about the fine events we have in store for our fellow JASNA-GCR members for 2010 and 2011 and hope sincerely that you will share my great expectations for the upcoming commemorations of the two hundredth anniversary of Austen's first published book.

Poster

Our Region donated a copy of Anne Davis' first prize poster in our Student Poster Contest for display at the AGM at Portland, Oregon, and here it is:



All I
really need to know
I learned in
*Northanger
Abbey*

All I really need to know about how to live and what to do and how to be I learned in the novel *Northanger Abbey*. These are the things I learned: ¶ **I don't have to look the part to be a heroine.** ¶ I will remember that tomboys can get the guy, too. ¶ Although I can't write sonnets, I should still bring myself to read them. ¶ No young lady of common gentility will reach the age of sixteen without trying to change her name as far as she can. ¶ I'll know he is my hero when he can find seating in a room where there is none. ¶ **Nothing is so disagreeable as knowing no one in the room.** ¶ The best men are excellent judges of muslin. ¶ Every self-respecting girl keeps a journal. ¶ I will look for a man who is nice to his sister. ¶ **Never trust a man who can talk of nothing but his equipage.** ¶ When I say something naïve and he says of my comment that it "convinced me of your being superior in good nature yourself to all the rest of the world," he is my hero. ¶ **Nothing in the world advances intimacy so much as teasing.** ¶ Anyone who says, "You bid me be surprised on your friend's account, and therefore I am" is worth his weight in gold. ¶ Friendship is the finest balm for disappointed love. ¶ I will remember that woman is fine for her own satisfaction alone. No man will admire her the more, no woman will like her the better for it. ¶ A woman in love with one man cannot flirt with another. ¶ I will bear in mind that no man is offended by another man's admiration of the woman he loves; it is the woman only who can make it a torment. ¶ **The best men read novels.**

Jane Austen font created by Pib Frow



September Meeting

Jane Austen refers to London in all six of her novels. At our September meeting **Sue Forgue**, in her wonderful PowerPoint presentation, informed us of the locations Austen mentioned. Sue used Richard Horwood's 1813 map of London—actually 40 panels put together that she obtained from the Guildhall Library, London. These can be seen on her website reg-ency.com, user ID: JA Scholar, password: Academia, both case sensitive.

The 1811 census, Sue informed us, totaled one million habitants in London. She guided us on a tour from east to west. First, we visited unfashionable Cheapside, a market area where the Gardiners lived on Gracechurch Street. Mr. Gardiner was a man who lived by trade and “within view of his own warehouses,” Austen writes. Sue explained a warehouse would have been a large shop or emporium. She likes to think of Mr. Gardiner as a linen draper, a gold or silversmith, or perhaps a book seller. Darcy looks down his nose at him because money made “from trade” is tainted. In the commercial Holburn district the Steele sisters and their cousin Richard lived at Bartlett's Buildings. Deirdre LeFaye describes them as “cramped, dark and dingy.” No wonder these “impoverished gentlewomen” are on the lookout for a suitable husband.

John Knightley, of the middle to upper gentry, lived on Brunswick Square, then still surrounded by open fields. “We are so very airy,” Isabella tells her father. From this northern expansion of London it would have

taken John Knightley half an hour each way to go to the Old Bailey and the Inns of Court to practice law, and perhaps to get away from his wife.

The “London season” was from about February to June 4, the king's birthday. The Rushworths were at Wimpole Street and John and Fanny Dashwood at Harley Street in Marylebone. In these streets also lived slaveholders, (a possible clue to understanding these characters), who were later compensated by the government for the loss of their property: the slaves. Oxford Street was “the social dividing line” separating Marylebone to the north from the truly fashionable Mayfair district to the south. Mrs. Jennings and Mrs. Churchill lived north of Oxford Street. South of Oxford Street, in Mayfair, lived Mother Ferrars and the Middletons. The Palmers lived at Hanover Square. But “the poshest” was Grosvenor Square, and Mr. Hurst lived on a street to the side of it. Sue compared him to the Prince Regent: gluttonous, drinking to excess, gambling, estranged from his wife, lacking the money expected for his social level, indolent, and living to eat, drink and play cards.

Turban Workshop

This summer's event was hosted by **Jeanne Steen** at her store Figaro at Vintage Pine Antiques and Interiors in Chicago. **Laura Whitlock**, President of the Millinery Arts Alliance, assisted by **Debra Ann Miller**, instructed attendees in the making of Regency Era turbans. Laura provided the materials, including bases, a pre-made lining, appropriate beautiful and colorful fabric, as well as trimming items, such as silk flowers, lacquered fruit sprays, ribbons and ostrich plumes. She also equipped the turban makers with the necessary tools of the trade: tape measures, head blocks, millinery hand sewing needles and thread. The beautiful turbans and hats emerging from the workshop are sure to be treasured by their creators.

Turban Making



Row 1, l to r: Instructor Laura Whitlock; Bonnet model Penny Boye; Host Jeanne Steen
 Row 2, l to r: Michal Raz-Russo, Debra N. Mancoff, Becky Dolin; Sandra Bass & Turban base; Jennifer Sustar
 Row 3, l to r: Terry Arliskas; Margaret Eissa & Turban; Ric Lee
 Row 4, l to r: Natalie Goldberg, Judy Chernick; Elisabeth Lenkos, Pat Wieber, Martha Jameson



Reading Jane Austen

by Mona Scheuermann

Palgrave Macmillan, 224 pp. Oct. 2009.

Hardcover. \$80.00

Mona Scheuermann, Professor of English at Oakton Community College, will be a featured speaker at one of our future meetings. She has held visiting professorships at the University of Hamburg, the Free University of Berlin and the University of Berne, and she is the author of three other books on Austen's era: *Social Protest in the Eighteenth-Century English Novel*; *Her Bread to Earn: Women, Money, and Society from Defoe to Austen*; and *In Praise of Poverty*.

Among the six completed novels of Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park* with its moral agenda and its submissive protagonist has been my least favorite. Recent talks at AGMs and GCR meetings have focused on Fanny Price's inner strength, suggesting, perhaps, that Fanny might be a proto-feminist. Scheuermann, in *Reading Jane Austen*, gives a conservative analysis of Fanny's role and argues that understanding the historical and social context is central to recognizing Austen's personal beliefs and her theme of British morality in this and three other novels: *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma*, *Persuasion*. While I prefer the sparkling and witty Elizabeth, the clever but clueless Emma, and renewed beauty of capable Anne, Scheuermann's analysis has helped me appreciate Fanny and the social contract which she must navigate.

To understand Austen's protagonists, Scheuermann explains, we must realize that nearly Austen's entire adult life was lived during the French Revolution; her family felt the social and political upheaval with the execution of a cousin. The British ruling classes feared the prospect of



revolution spreading and banned the publication of Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man*. Indeed, the cover image depicts the views of the majority of the class to which the Austens belonged; it is a 1798 political cartoon by James Gillray that shows French soldiers tearing down curtains in what looks like the king's bedchamber and replacing the headboard with a guillotine; the high canopy has a new motto: "Confusion To All Order."

The book is divided into three parts: Part I, "A Moral Tapestry" focuses on *Mansfield Park*; Part II, "Social Grids" analyzes the other three novels; Part III, "Politics and History" concludes with "The World of Jane Austen." Scheuermann begins her analysis with conduct books, pointing out that the conservative Hannah More, friend to Samuel Johnson, and the more radical Mary Wollstonecraft both subscribe to the same set of basic moral premises. "So self-evident are these values," explains Scheuermann, Austen does not write to defend the status quo. She simply assumes its rightness. *Mansfield Park* is a "series of set pieces in terms of moral situations."

In all the important Austen novels, "wealth is good" if "used for the furtherance of morality." Some concern for money is

always appropriate for marriage, but purely mercenary motivation is wrong. Maria Bertram's marriage to a man she cannot respect is bad, but we see the negative outcome from Fanny Ward's marrying a man "without education, fortune or connections." Austen approves the use of "interest" to advance young men in the navy and the clergy. Despite questionable motivation, Henry's advancement of William Price's career through his uncle, the Admiral, is good, and his stated plan to care about the tenants on his family estate is proper for a gentleman of his class. We laugh at Mr. Collins's obsequiousness toward his patroness, Lady Catherine, because of his mixture of pride and ignorance, but we approve Sir Thomas's reserving a church preferment for his younger son Edmund.

Scheuermann argues that the relationship of Fanny and Sir Thomas is detailed as much as that between Fanny and Edmund; "for to Austen the relationship of the individual to the larger family and community circle is almost as important as that between the man and wife." The moral base of family and social circles is central in the other three novels. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen writes about women on the verge of economic disaster, but Scheuermann does not see Austen arguing for women's economic independence. Darcy's money allows the rescue of Lydia and is the reason Elizabeth initiates the discussion that will lead to Darcy's second proposal. But their important philosophical discussion, in the end, defines their relationship and establishes their equality. Whether focusing on the courtship story in *Pride and Prejudice*, the ethical development of a young woman in *Emma*, or the shifting social and economic conditions in *Persuasion*, Austen has "no ambivalence over moral behavior." Public humiliation (Emma's jab about Miss Bates), secret engagements, and economic ruin (Sir Elliot's debts and Mr. Elliot's perfidy) are "transgressions against a common social code."

I recommend this excellent analysis of Austen's moral vision. I wish a reading of *Sense and Sensibility* were included, especially as 2011 is the centennial of its publication.



Elizabeth Jenkins

The last surviving founder of the Jane Austen Society in England in 1940, biographer and novelist Elizabeth Jenkins recently died at age 104. At 100

she published a memoir *The View from Downshire Hill* in which she writes: "We have, so many of us, seen too much of selfish neurotics who damage other people's lives."

Her 1938 *Jane Austen: A Biography* is still wonderful reading on Austen's life and writings. In 1986 she added a Postscript citing "interesting material" which had been published since her book and gives generous credit to other authors' works on Austen. Jenkins writes, "Jane Austen uses a perfectly simple sentence, stating a commonplace fact; none of the words in it is beyond the scope of daily conversation; but used by her they have an evocative power entirely unsuspected; ... a few ordinary words put together by Jane Austen produce a scene of absolute solidity and conviction... Her method has this virtue, that whatever the restrictions of type and circumstance under which she practices it, when she has waved her hand and thrown her spell, it seems that the greater is, after all, included in the less; that limited as the circumstances are in which she shows her characters, for the time at which we read about them, their vicissitudes seem to cover a vast range of human experience."

Sightings/Cittings

Elsie Holzwarth

Conference

Gender, Law, and the British Novel was the title of a two-day Conference presented by the University of Chicago Law School and the Center for Gender Studies, and attended by our members **Shirley and Rick Holbrook** and your correspondent. Of special interest was the talk by Robert Ferguson of Columbia University, New York.

Ferguson began by noting that “a reader hardly ever finds a full-blown, articulated, successful marriage proposal” in nineteenth century novels. But “in keeping with the comic mode, fully articulated unsuccessful marriage proposals proliferate in the plots of these novels, and the proposers who fail most egregiously often have a professional identity.” He cited the clergymen in Austen and the lawyers in Dickens as “misguided” professional men who fail at marriage proposals. Mr. Collins “is a pompous fool given to sycophantic worship of those above him.” Mr. Elton “is a ludicrous class climber who utterly mistakes his situation and station when proposing to Emma Woodhouse. Even Austen’s ministerial heroes, Edward Ferrars, Edmund Bertram and Henry Tilney are slow to realize their true situations and are outmaneuvered by those around them.” In Dickens’ *Bleak House* the unsuccessful marriage proposals come from the lawyer, Mr. Guppy.

“The more Jane Austen and Charles Dickens care about a marriage, the less we hear of the actual proposal that secures it. . . Where primary heroes and heroines are concerned, the crucial exchange takes place off stage in *Sense and Sensibility*, *Mansfield Park* and *Northanger Abbey*. Partial dialogue and indirect discourse give us the moment in *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma* and *Persuasion*. Actual assent—the word ‘yes’ to a proposal of marriage—is forbidden.”

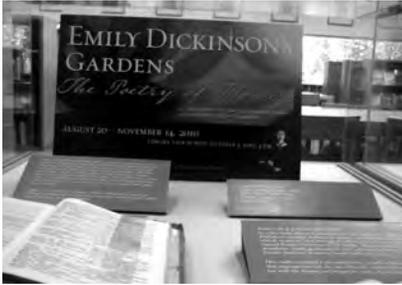
Of Edward’s proposal to Elinor, Austen writes, “How soon he had walked himself into the proper resolution, however, how soon an opportunity of exercising it occurred, in what manner he expressed himself, and how he was received, need not be particularly told.” It is “the worst of unsuccessful marriage proposals” that “are indeed given and in the most painful detail.” (But even the accepted proposals of Mr. Collins to Charlotte Lucas and Mr. Elton to Augusta Hawkins, are not set forth.)

There is a “complicated decorum surrounding the ideal nineteenth century marriage.” Ferguson questioned why “the biggest talkers in nineteenth century, ministers and lawyer, are ineffective speakers within the speechless realm that novelists favor for the ideal proposal of marriage.” He concludes that their professional development has “narrowed the scope of their understanding and general sensitivity. . . Satire levels the professional proposer through his permanent failure in understanding, his failure to connect language with feeling, a fate that Darcy escapes.” The words of the professional man’s “always elaborate proposal suggest that only the lady will have to change. Of course, one sees the same fault in the first marriage proposal to Elizabeth by Darcy, but Darcy is shaken by the rebuff of Elizabeth in a way that the professional man is not. Darcy agonizes and seeks to correct himself while the unchanged professional men immediately seek other recipients of the same proposal.”



Emily Dickinson

The Chicago Botanic Garden in Glencoe, Illinois has on exhibit in its Library, until November 14, various printed material concerning Emily Dickinson.



Some of it comes from the original exhibit at the New York Botanical Garden; most of it is from the Chicago Garden's 2002

purchase of the rare book collection of the Massachusetts Horticulture Society.

As a young girl Dickinson studied Latin, history and botany. “Flowers would provide her with the themes and images for many of her future poems,” according to the exhibit notes. At 14 she created a herbarium, a book of her collected dried plants, a copy of which is on display. In September, 1846, almost 16, she wrote she has “been to Mt. Auburn [Cemetery]—attended 2 concerts and 1 Horticultural exhibit.” Dickinson wrote a letter to her girlhood friend Susan Gilbert mentioning the Crown-Imperial, a plant with a large central stalk and several small foot-stalks, each turned downward bearing one large flower. “I have to go out in the garden now and whip up a Crown-Imperial for presuming to hold its head up, until you have come home.” We learn that she maintained a two-acre garden and a conservatory attached to the house. “For 25 years she tended to a jasmine given to her by Samuel Bowles—a family friend and editor of the *Springfield Republican*—where he published five of her poems.”

In 1856 Susan Gilbert married Dickinson's brother Austin. They and their three children lived in The Evergreens, next door to the Dickinson Homestead, in Amherst,

Massachusetts. In her recent book, *Lives Like Loaded Guns: Emily Dickinson and Her Family's Feuds*, **Lyndall Gordon** writes of the arrival of Mabel Loomis Todd and her husband David, an astronomy teacher at Amherst College. “Susan Dickinson liked to mix with people of intelligence” and she “took up” Mabel who often came to “teas.” “They began at 8 p.m. and, later, light refreshments with oysters would be brought in and placed on little tables beside each guest, a style of entertaining reminiscent of early nineteenth-century England: Emma offering scalloped oysters to her father's guests in Highbury.”

Gordon relates the aftereffects of the affair Austin Dickinson began, after twenty six years of marriage, with Mabel; he was 53 and she was 27 years younger. Their frequent assignations were in the library of the Homestead. “Next to her room upstairs, this was [Dickinson's] space, central to her daily life.” During the hours the lovers were there, Dickinson and her mother and sister Lavinia “who lived in the house could not walk freely downstairs, particularly Emily, who was determined never to meet Mabel.” And for the next three years, until Dickinson's death in 1886, Mabel never did actually see her. Yet, as Gordon vividly describes it, the family feud over the posthumous publication of Dickinson's poems was won by Mabel and her daughter Millicent.

Gordon sheds light on the surprising true nature of Dickinson's relationship with Judge Otis Lord and on the evidence that Dickinson was epileptic and how this was reflected in her poetry, those “startling little poetic bombs.” But “nineteenth century families project an image of an authoress as retiring lady whose gift shades into an uneventful life. Nothing could be said of sickness, love, adultery”—“any more than Jane Austen's family saw fit to mention her sarcasms.”

LETTER FROM CHICAGO
JASNA-GCR
Elsie G. Holzwarth
1410 East 55th Street
Chicago, IL 60615-5409

Saturday, December 4
Jane Austen Birthday Tea

Calendar

- November 5** *Monsters and Monstrosity: Desire and Corporeality in Jane Austen's Novels.* Talk by Elisabeth Lenckos, Chicago Cultural Center, Claudia Cassidy Theater, 12:15 pm–1:00 pm.
- November 7** *Jane Austen and the Body.* Talk by Elisabeth Lenckos and Cheryl Kinney, Harold Washington Library Center, Pritzker Auditorium, Chicago, IL 3:30 pm – 4:30 pm. www.chicagohumanities.org
- December 4** Birthday Tea. “*Are You Sure They Are All Horrid?*” *Austen's Degrees of Disagreeability.* Talk by Michael Allocca. The Fortnightly of Chicago, 120 E. Bellevue, Chicago, IL 2:00 pm–4:00 pm.
- February 12** Luncheon, Parthenon Restaurant, Chicago, IL.
- April 30** Annual Gala, Maggiano's Banquet Room, Chicago, IL.

Our website is www.jasnachicago.org