

Letter from Chicago

Spring 2011



Spring Gala

Saturday, April 30, 2011 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Maggiano's Banquet Room 111 W. Grand Avenue, Chicago IL
Valet and nearby garage.

Continental Breakfast and Luncheon

Staging Sensibility: Jane Austen and the Performing Arts

Dr Gillian Dow, Chawton House Library and University of Southampton presents
*An excess of Sensibility (for which we were always remarkable):
Jane Austen, Marianne, and the French Tradition*

Dr. Erin J. Smith, Western Governors University presents
Jane Austen and the Ballet: Dances of Hysteria in Sense and Sensibility and Giselle

Mrs. Debra Ann Miller, actress, playwright, and historical impersonator
Jane Austen Speaks



Regency Emporium and Book Table

GALA REGISTRATION FORM

Members: \$65; Non-members/Guests: \$75; Students: \$25

Registration deadline: April 23

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



A “first impression” might lead one to believe that Jane Austen and modern technology have little in common. One of the appeals of Austen to some of her admirers is that the reader is transported to a world that, for all its

recognizable qualities (who, sad to say, doesn’t know a Lady Catherine de Burgh?), is different enough from our own to seem glamorous and romantic. It seems such a leisurely atmosphere of candles and carriages, of gracious manners and handwritten letters, and the only “tweeting” comes from birds in trees.

Yet, for all the accusations of escapist nostalgia often leveled at Austen lovers today, we are among the most tech-savvy people around, with countless blogs and websites devoted to her and her work. A quick internet check confirms that she is usually represented by multiple titles on lists of the most popular ebooks. There is a certain pleasure in knowing that Austen’s entire oeuvre can be contained on a pocket-sized smart phone, so that her wit and wisdom are within easy reach in a way that were never possible before.

The challenge for all of us in JASNA-GCR is to negotiate the 21st century, while remaining respectful of Austen’s art and its appeal to a broad swath of humanity. One area of potential adaptation is with this

very newsletter you are now reading. A number of JASNA Regions have converted their newsletters to a digital format that can be e-mailed to members. JASNA-GCR would like to join this new era.

Why would we want to change? One reason is that we could provide you with high quality color pictures, without making the newsletter prohibitively expensive to print. There would also be considerable savings in postage as well as printing costs, which would enable us to put our members’ dues toward the best quality programs. There is also the Convenience Factor: I don’t know about you, but it’s much easier for me to find digital documents on my computer these days than in the piles of papers that never seem to diminish.

As we understand that some of you might prefer to have the newsletter sent to you via the post, we could make those arrangements, with a few adjustments (color printing would not be possible, due to cost).

Of course we would never take a step like this without consulting you, our loyal and supportive membership. To that end, I provide a simple survey in order to gauge your thoughts. **The survey can be mailed to the following address:**

Survey
5439 Dierks Drive
Rockford, IL 61108

Thank you in advance for your thoughtful feedback.



I would prefer *Letter from Chicago* to be e-mailed to me in digital format.

YES

NO

I would prefer to receive *Letter from Chicago* to be mailed to me in hard copy format, even if it means no color images.

I would be willing to pay extra to receive a full-color *Letter from Chicago* in hard copy format.

The Year of Sense and Sensibility

There is something special about being first, and like a firstborn child, Jane Austen's 1811 novel holds an iconic place in her readers' hearts for the simple reason of coming before the others. Otherwise, it is rarely listed as anyone's favorite, that distinction goes to the "middle" masterpieces, lovely, funny *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and elegant, magisterial *Emma* (1816), or the latecomer, wistful, romantic *Persuasion* (1817). Yet there are many wonderful, remarkable traits that set *Sense and Sensibility* apart from Austen's other novels: the title that proves how keenly our writer was aware of the prevailing fashions of her time, the portrayal of a family of women without male protection, the absolute devotion of two sisters, and a rational person who marries for love alone. There is also the fascination we feel as we peruse the book that "started it all" and notice the nascent brilliance of the writing.

We might prefer the later works, but still, we hold our breath as we turn the pages of *Sense and Sensibility*, thinking that this was Austen's first published work, the one that heralded her debut in the world of literature! It is this beauty and this promise which we celebrate this year, and I hope that our Chicago-area JASNA members will join us in our wonderful undertaking. We got off to a splendid start with **William Phillips'** *Readers' Theatre* in February, and we mean to continue in the same excellent, dramatic vein. For that reason, our Spring Gala on April 30, as well as our Summer Gathering on June 18, which promise to be brilliant events, will focus *Sense and Sensibility* and the arts, including theatre, ballet, and music. I am happy to report that two of my Chawton House Library friends, who are also most eloquent, erudite and humorous speakers, **Dr. Gillian Dow**, Fellow at Chawton House Library and Professor at the University of Southampton,

as well as **Dr. Erin Smith**, Scholar of Dance and Ballet, have both accepted our JASNA-GCR invitation to give a lecture at the Gala. The program for the day will conclude with "our own Jane," **Debra Ann Miller**, historical impersonator, and playwright, who will take time out from being Mrs. Lincoln and turn herself into Miss Austen. Theatricality, dance, and performance—our Gala will be an exceptional experience for the Austenite!



On June 18, thanks to Jeff Nigro's wonderful contacts, we will feature pianist **Stephen Alltop**, in *Sensibility in Sound: Music of Austen's Time*, with soprano **Josefien Stoppelenburg**, at the Women's Athletic Club of Chicago. The concert will be accompanied by a High Tea.

On this occasion, as on the others, please come and celebrate with us, both the accomplishment of Jane Austen's premiere success and the dedication of the new JASNA-Board: **Pat Wieber**, who ensures that our members are registered, **Cathy Feldman**, who looks after our finances, **Shirley Holbrook**, who records our meetings, **Diane Capitani**, **Lori Davis** and friends, who make sure that we reach out to the Chicago community, **Sara Okey**, who is our new publications director, **Sue Forgue**, who is helping us with venues and other things, and **Jeff Nigro** and **William Phillips**, who oversee our efforts so capably. And don't forget to fete yourself, for your wholehearted love of one of the finest writers to have graced our world. *Sense and Sensibility* anniversary, here we come!

Austen Entertains Teachers

On Friday, February 25, Jane Austen was well represented at the DuPage County Schools English Teacher Institute Day held at Wheaton North High School in Wheaton, IL. The institute, titled, *Celebrating Language Arts: Getting Serious About Humor*, featured over 35 presenters, including

two familiar figures from JASNA-GCR members. **Sue**

Forgue presented, *Jane Austen in the 'hood*, in which Forgue led a colorful tour of Regency London through a period map and colorful prints, while exploring the neighborhoods



where Jane Austen placed her characters, discussing the social geography of the time, and revealing some unexpected character clues that readers of the day would have instantly understood by naming the street address. Sue reprised this talk from last fall at the Evanston Public Library and will present it again on March 22 at the Park Ridge Public Library. Sue, an accountant by trade, is a life member of the Jane Austen Society of North America, a board member of the local Chicago chapter, as well as a history buff. She is also the creator and webmistress of the research website the Regency Encyclopedia—www.reg-ency.com.

Another face familiar to regular attendees at Austen functions presented at the DuPage County Institute. **Debra Ann Miller** performed *Jane Austen Speaks*. Drawing from Jane Austen's letters, novels and juvenilia. Miller, in the persona of Jane Austen, spoke from the perspective of the autumn of 1815, when Austen's first three novels, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Mansfield Park* had been published, and when *Emma*

was completed. This presentation reflected perhaps the most vibrant and hopeful time of Austen's life. Debra Ann Miller has been an actress, and voice over talent for over 25 years. Miller has toured the country with Child's Play Touring Theatre, Artreach, and the Reading is Fundamental program, as well as working in Chicago theatres including The Organic, Royal George, Noble Fool and Victory Gardens. In 2004, Miller won the Best Actress award at the Chicago Indie Fest. In addition to portraying Jane Austen, Miller is currently touring the country in With Lincoln Productions' *Visiting the Lincolns*, as Mary Todd Lincoln. Miller has been working as an historical impersonator for the last 15 years. Contact information:

janeaustenspeaks@gmail.com

www.talklikejaneausten.com (773) 398-8983

JASNA-GCR was also represented at an information table organized by board members **Lori Davis** and me, an English teacher at Wheaton North High School. I was not well acquainted with Jane Austen's novels until I entered graduate school in 2001. I had attended a JASNA-GCR meeting at the invitation of fellow high school English teacher & graduate student **Elizabeth Murphy** held at the Drake Hotel. Lori Davis invited me to several events and I became a member. After attending the 2008 AGM in Chicago and bringing a dozen students to compete in the essay contest, I was hooked. The interesting people at the events are the best part of membership. I have a deep respect and devotion to Austen. I am fortunate to fold Austen studies into my career and enjoy Austen, even in a seminar course I shared with **Sara Okey**. More recently, I have taught *P&P*, *Emma*, and *S&S* in the classroom with high school students in a course titled Women Writers. Maybe it's a bit selfish, but I attend meetings almost equally for social purposes and taking notes for the next time I have the chance to teach the novels.

From Prada to Nada

New to Hollywood film reviewing, I was surprised no limo ever showed. Sheepishly, I drove myself to see *From Prada to Nada*. But as the only ticket holder for the noon show, I did have my private screening. Just as well, because this freed me to laugh as loudly as I wished throughout all 107 minutes of this insightful retelling of *Sense and Sensibility* with a Latino flair. And, as with *Titanic*, knowing what has to happen makes the story all the more interesting, a bit like playing the commentary track your first time through a film.

The title is its worst and best recommendation. At first hearing, it made so little sense to me that I called the film *From Nada to Prada* half the time. But, in fact, the now-I-get-it-clever title tags the film with rare accuracy. Prada, as in the fashion label, represents the world of Beverly Hills that Prius-driving Nora (Elinor) and BMW-sporting Mary (Marianne) Dominguez must leave behind when their father suddenly dies. *Nada*, Spanish for nothing, are their prospects when they must move in with their aunt in a struggling Latino section of East L.A. But as the movie's website says, "they learn that the life of PRADA really means NADA without love, family and community." A rather nice summary of *Sense and Sensibility*, as well.

In this update, the usurping elder brother is not from a first marriage but a youthful affair. Where the Dashwoods always knew their fate would rest with John Dashwood's sense of duty, the existence of Gabriel Dominguez comes as a total shock to the sisters—as do their father's ruinous debts. Though, in this version, Gabriel only inherits a third, his wife, Olivia, edges out the sisters with a slight-of-hand trick even Fanny Dashwood would envy. Gabriel and

Olivia move in to prep the mansion for sale. With no loyalty to the daughters of a man who abandoned him at birth, Gabriel doesn't rein in his wife. Olivia relegates Mary to the basement so her own brother, Edward Ferrars, can have the bedroom with the mountain view; Nora announces they'll be moving out anyway.

Mary votes for the Four Seasons Hotel. Nora has a firmer grasp on reality and has accepted Aunt Aurelia's invitation to move into her home in a Latino section of East L.A. Culture shock doesn't begin to describe Mary's reaction. The next-door neighbor is an edgy-looking ex-gang member named Bruno. When he carries her luggage to the house, she insultingly warns there will be no tip. The house is bursting with a sewing business giving jobs to illegals. Escaping to their room, Mary says, "Nora, there's lice on that mattress." Nora shrugs, "Then you won't sleep alone." Mary sobs, "I miss Dad." We suspect she misses her old life at least as much.

Edward Ferrars is the only person whose name remains unchanged. Even so, his situation and personality are so different it forces a major plot adjustment. Because Edward is heart whole and unattached from the start of *From Prada to Nada*, the resistance to love has to come from Nora. When her father dies, Nora decides to postpone law school to get Mary through college. Edward kindly shows up at Aunt Aurelia's with a moving truck of treasures left behind and offers Nora a job, which she turns down. He hands her today's paper. When she answers the only law-related job listed, she's promptly hired and taken upstairs . . . to work for Edward. They make a great team; as she brings him poor by worthy clients, he rediscovers his joy for law. But when he finally shows his

feelings for her, she pulls back. “I have my ten-year plan. That’s all I want and all I have room for.” When he argues that there could be room for him, she says, “I’m just another girl who answered your ad in the newspaper.” In pain, he says, “Well, I guess it’s time to place a new one, then.” At this point, the Austen track in my head said, “You know who’s going to show up now.” The next second, snooty Olivia says to Edward, “Meet my friend Lucy.” But this updated Elinor isn’t willing to wait on fate. When Olivia sends an invitation to Edward’s engagement, and Nora realizes her mistake, Mary insists they accept the invitation, saying, “He announces an engagement that quick? It just says he’s way more confused than you are.” At the party, Nora admits to Edward, “I avoid relationships because I can’t count on them. I’ve built my whole life on the one thing I can control—my career. And then you came along. I resisted you. I was afraid I’d lose myself in it.” When Lucy calls, Edward walks away without speaking. (Very Mark Darcy in *Bridget Jones’s Diary*.) But we know he’s too wise to walk far.

Meanwhile, Mary seeks out Gabriel, who sits in his father’s study. Mary gives him a stack of letters found in their father’s papers. Each letter is to Gabriel, marked Return to Sender: proof that his father tried to have a relationship with his son. The healing in the letters begins a rift between Gabriel and Olivia that romance readers (if not literature lovers) would love to see in *Sense and Sensibility*. Mary is a closer, but less complex, version of Marianne. She has Marianne’s enthusiasm, but not Marianne’s delight in higher things—poetry, nature, music, the picturesque. Mary’s *joie de vivre* centers not on the Romantics, but power shopping Rodeo Drive. A supposed English major, Mary never reads until a gorgeous Teaching Assistant takes over her poetry class. Rodrigo, too, is Mexican, but he’s everything her Aunt Aurelia’s family isn’t: sophisticated, rich, and privileged. Mary pretends another mansion is her home so he will see her as she was.

When her wise aunt (more Aunt Gardiner than Mrs. Jennings) accuses her of being ashamed of her family, Mary invites Rodrigo to her real home for a Mexican Revolution Day party. Rodrigo takes the deception well, even bringing Mary back to his place their first encounter. The next morning, Rodrigo tells her he has to go back to Mexico for two or three weeks. Unlike Marianne’s deep sorrow when Willoughby leaves, Mary admits to Nora that part of Rodrigo’s appeal is that he’ll bring her back to Beverly Hills. Nora says frankly, “It makes you a whore.” Mary snaps back, “It’s better than a spinster.”

Mary embodies every fault that Marianne repented of after her illness: “imprudence, want of kindness, want of fortitude, negligence of my own health, fretful selfishness, duty neglected, failing[s] indulged, insolence and unjustness, ungrateful contempt” (chapter 46). Indeed, Mary could chime in with Marianne when she says, “The kindness, the unceasing kindness, of Mrs. Jennings [Aunt Aurelia], I had repaid with ungrateful contempt. . . I had been insolent and unjust; with a heart hardened against their merits, and a temper irritated by their very attention.” (chapter 46) When Rodrigo betrays her (satisfyingly right on cue), Mary has her own brush with death (more believable than Marianne’s near-fatal walk in the rain). After Mary regains her senses, she, too, sees herself and others with new eyes and embraces her loving relations and her Latino heritage with a sincere love even Marianne would applaud. Rodrigo is forgotten, and Mary returns home to Brandon [er, I mean Bruno] with eyes ready to see his unfailing kindness as true attachment, and his hidden merits, as well.

With fresh insights into *Sense and Sensibility*, and an understanding how it would play out in a new century and culture, *From Prada to Nada* would make a great conversation starter for Austen lovers.



William Phillips, please list a brief biographical information, including education, occupation, family, and other pertinent facts!

If you've never met a hillbilly, I'm one. I was born and raised in the small Missouri town of Eldon (about 2,500 people in those days) near the Lake of the Ozarks, where I lived until I went away to college. I graduated from Culver-Stockton College in Canton, MO (even smaller than my home town) with three majors: speech/theater; psychology; and education. After an MA in rhetoric and psycholinguistics at Wisconsin-Madison, I taught in the Department of Communication at UW-Stevens Point. I moved to the Twin Cities and studied Applied Linguistics at Minnesota because I had become interested in working in international English education. That's where I met my life partner—fellow ESL/EFL professional, lover of language, and Austen collaborator—Russell Clark. We celebrate 35 years of our relationship this summer. During the 1980s, I taught at King Fahd University of Petroleum & Minerals in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. In 1989, I moved to Nagoya, Japan (to follow Russell who had taken a job there). After two years at a women's junior college, I became a Foreign Professor in the Department of British/American Studies at Aichi Prefectural (Provincial) University, coming home in 2005. I taught international graduate students of business and public administration at I.I.T. until 2010. I'm still teaching part time for the English Language Academy of DePaul. I'm an active member of the Unitarian Church of Evanston, where one of my favorite activities is that I was a co-founder (with a 10 year old chum) of UCE's Intergenerational Book Group, comprising readers ranging from 11 to 75. We're currently reading *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak.

When is your first memory of JA? What was the first book? What was your first reaction to it?

I grew up in a family of readers including a live-in Grandmother, who taught me to read when I was four. Always something of an Anglophile, my first of 20-some visits to Britain was almost 50 years ago (1962). However, I can't remember reading Austen until I was 50. My first Austen was *Emma*. I loved it because Highbury reminded me a lot of my home town. I grew up knowing virtually all the characters in that novel. I've been hooked on all of Austen ever since. I read and/or listen to unabridged versions of all six of the mature novels at least once a year.

For you, what is the most memorable moment in JA's writings: rural or urban? Please describe it and your reasoning in your own delightful words.

It's almost impossible to give just one answer to that question. I have a number of favorite passages in each of the novels. Most of my favorite passages are usually those that speak to my personal bent for the ironic, which I've worked for 70 years to develop. If I may, I'll mention three examples. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Vol. II, Ch. vi, we meet Lady Catherine for the first time. We see Mr. Collins at his worst (although we might ask when he is not at his worst). The chapter ends when, "The party then gathered round the fire to hear Lady Catherine determine what weather they were to have on the morrow." I love the deliciously ironic description of Mrs. Goddard's school in *Emma*, Vol. I, Ch.iii. It was not a place "where young ladies for enormous pay might be screwed out of health and into vanity—but . . . where girls might . . . scramble themselves into a little education, without any danger of coming back prodigies." Since it's 2011, I'll feature the language with which Austen skewers the nasties in *Sense and Sensibility*. The final chapter (III,xiv) is as

“spot on wicked” as any pen could produce. The opening sentence sets the tone. “After a proper resistance on the part of Mrs. Ferrars, just so violent and so steady as to preserve her from that reproach which she always seemed fearful of incurring, the reproach of being too amiable, Edward was admitted to her presence, and pronounced to be again her son.” Wonderful!

According to you, what is the most morally righteous moment in an urban setting in JA writings? Why?

It is tough not to give pride of place to the final section of *Persuasion* in Bath when Anne and Captain Wentworth show both their vulnerability and their better selves. However, I'd like to stay with *Sense and Sensibility*. I think Elinor is one of the most admirable main characters in all of Austen. In the scene at Mrs. Jennings's house (Vol II, Ch xiii), Elinor absorbs enormous emotional distress when she takes a long time to go fetch Marianne, leaving Edward and Lucy alone because she believes that the right thing to do is to give them some private time. Now that's genuine strength of character.

During JA's time, what other writers or artists celebrated the rustic life? You mentioned Samuel Richardson, JMW Turner, and Ben Franklin during your speech! You could elaborate here! Or list ones I didn't catch!

Like Mr. Yates in *Mansfield Park*, I bespeak your indulgence in that I'm mostly self-taught in these areas, so can't claim profound knowledge. While I didn't use names, the piece we performed in February does mention the Romantic poets. I'm not the greatest reader of Romantic poetry, so leave it to you folks to fill in the blanks. I've learned from Jeff Nigro's splendid presentations about art in Austen's era that lots of the wonderful portraiture of the era: Gainsborough (also a landscape painter), Reynolds, Romney, and others you can ask Jeff about) often placed their central figures in rustic, outdoor settings.

A favorite of mine was provided by Jeff for a presentation on Beau Brummell that he and I



did together in 2010. It's a 1781 portrait of Sir Brooke Boothby by John Wright of Derby from the Tate British in London. The nattily clad Sir Brooke is portrayed recumbent (as at a Roman banquet), but on the ground in a forest glade. Among writers of novels, I might mention another influence on Austen, Anne Radcliffe. She is noted for her painterly depictions of landscapes, which I'm sure Austen borrowed or at least consulted when she wanted an exterior description. I'm also sure that many GCR readers can think of lots more examples in all these areas.

What is the most ideal rustic setting in JA's writings? Why?

Austen is not known for her lengthy descriptions of physical environment. As I've suggested above, she may have borrowed or consulted the works of others for some of her descriptions. Two rather nice rural exteriors come to mind, one each from the two most rural of her works. Interestingly, both of these involve the interior reflections of a single character. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth muses on the beauty of the advancing spring around Rosings, a beauty that almost compensates for the rigors of her encounters with Mr. Collins and Lady Catherine. At the Donwell Abbey outing in *Emma*, Emma contemplates the lovely “Englishness” of her surroundings. One might argue that this moment is the beginning of Emma's awareness of her love for Mr. Knightley. In that regard it seems to echo Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice* when

joking with Jane that she might date her love for Darcy from the time she first saw his lovely grounds at Pemberley.

Why is setting such an important element in JA's writings?

Here I'll defer to those who have written a lot about Austen and "place." In general, my view is that character is a great deal more important in Austen than setting. I've written two Readers' Theater scripts on themes of "setting" in Austen. For our 2009 summer meeting at the Chicago Botanical Garden, we performed a piece I wrote on Jane Austen in the out of doors. As I prepared, one discovery that was interesting to me was that Austen sometimes placed discussions of the out of doors in interior settings and just the reverse. Discussions of indoor events sometimes took place in the out of doors. Of course, more recently, we performed the Readers' Theater reflection on the conflict between city and country in Austen at a winter meeting (February, 2011), which prompted the questions I've responded to here. In both cases, these commentaries concluded that the setting was secondary to what happened and who did it—in other words—plot and particularly character. It is these psychological interiors and interpersonal elements that, for me, make Austen's work both universal and timeless.

Now in Paperback

"*Sense and Sensibility* is transported to present-day Connecticut in [**Cathleen Schine's** shrewd novel] *The Three Weissmanns of Westport* reported *The N.Y. Times Book Review*. "When Joseph Weissmann divorces Betty, his wife of 48 years, she leaves their New York apartment and takes refuge in a beach cottage in Westport with her two daughters: Annie, an even-tempered librarian, and Miranda, a fiercely emotional literary agent disgraced by scandal. . .reviewer, **Dominique Browning**, said Schine's homage to Jane Austen 'has it all: stinging social satire, mordant wit, delicate charm, lilting language and cossetting materialistic detail.' "

The Award goes to . . .

Surely our favorite Darcy, **Colin Firth** now has an Oscar for his role as King George VI of Britain in *The King's Speech*. More than six months ago our member **Martha Jameson** pegged this film as a winner when she saw it at the Telluride Film Festival. In *The King's Speech* Firth portrays the monarch who obtains help for

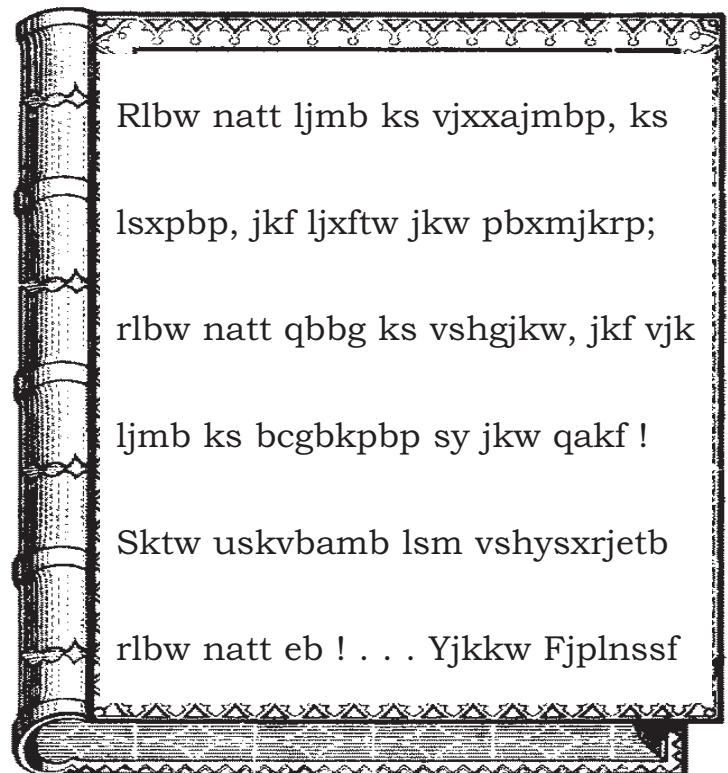


a stammer from speech therapist Lionel Logue played by Geoffrey Rush. Our Darcy's Elizabeth in the 1995 *Pride and Prejudice* film, **Jennifer Ehle** is cast in

The King's Speech as the wife of speech therapist Logue.

A Sense and Sensibility Quiz

The following is a quote from *Sense and Sensibility* in code. Each letter stands for another letter. Can you decipher it?



Neo-con Persuasion?

The Neoconservative Persuasion: Selected Essays, 1942-2009 by Irving Kristol, edited by **Gertrude Himmelfarb**, contains the following commentary by Kristol on his conversion to conservatism. Note who is mentioned *first*. “I have reached certain conclusions: that Jane Austen is a greater novelist than Proust or Joyce; that Raphael is a greater painter than Picasso; that T.S. Eliot’s later Christian poetry is much superior to his earlier; that C.S. Lewis is a finer literary and cultural critic than Edmund Wilson; that Aristotle is more worthy of careful study than Marx; that we have more to learn from Tocqueville than from Max Weber; that Adam Smith makes a lot more economic sense than any economist since; that the Founders had a better understanding of democracy than any political scientists since; that . . . well, enough.”

And George Eliot

In her *New Yorker* article, “Middlemarch and Me: What George Eliot teaches us”, **Rebecca Mead** writes of the literary society, George Eliot Fellowship. “These days there are about four hundred members—a figure that compares unfavorably with the popularity enjoyed by Jane Austen, whose society in North America alone has four thousand members, and whose works are the inspiration for bankable spinoffs, from ‘Clueless’ to ‘Pride and Prejudice and Zombies.’ Austen’s greater popularity is understandable: she wrote crystalline, comic novels of medium length. Eliot’s work was more varied in its attainment, and more verbose. . . Eliot admired Austen: she and [her lover George Henry] Lewes read Austen’s novels aloud to each other in 1857, when she was embarking upon her own first effort at fiction . . . [Eliot] went on to surpass her precursor. She is as adept as Austen at the ironic depiction of high and middle-class society. . . But Eliot’s satire stops short of

cruelty. She is inveterately magnanimous, even when it comes to her most flawed characters; her default authorial position is one of pity. . . A reader marvels at Jane Austen’s cleverness, but is astonished by George Eliot’s intelligence.”

What’s on your shelf?

In *A Book Addict’s Treasury* **Julie Rugg** and **Linda Murphy** quote **Hugh Walpole** who wrote in *These Diversions: Reading* (1926): “I believe it then to be quite simply true that books have their own personal feelings about their place on the shelves. They like to be close to suitable companions, and I remember once on coming into my library that I was persistently disturbed by my ‘*Jane Eyre*.’ Going up to it, wondering what was the matter with it, restless because of it, I only after a morning’s uneasiness discovered that it had been placed next to my Jane Austen, and anyone who remembers how sharply Charlotte criticized Jane will understand why this would never do.”

Now, however, it’s only book bindings that matter. *Family Circle Magazine* suggests we “group books by color or size so that they work well together visually.” The *N.Y. Times* profiled **Thatcher Wine** who “creates custom book collections and decorative book solutions.” One client “wanted literary classics mixed with art books for a silver-inflected art library. So Mr. Wine chose works by Kate Chopin, Jane Austen and Robert Browning and wrapped them in matte silver paper to match silver hardware in the room.” The *Times Magazine* interviewed **Nora Ephron** sitting in front of her book shelves. The literary character she identifies with is Emma “because she is just—I am sorry, but I don’t identify with her in a good way—because she is so bossy. I do see myself in her, I am afraid.” Behind Ephron were books of all sizes and colors. There didn’t seem to be a single Austen among them.

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

Annual Gala
Saturday, April 30

Calendar

- April 30** Annual Gala. *Staging Sensibility: Jane Austen and the Performing Arts*. Maggiano's Banquet Room, 111 W. Grand, Chicago, IL. 9:00 am–3:00 pm
- June 18** *Sensibility in Sound: Music of Austen's Time*, concert featuring Stephen Alltop, pianist, and Josefien Stoppelenburg with High Tea. Women's Athletic Club, 626 N. Michigan Avenue, Chicago
- September 24** "Which is your favorite—*Sense and Sensibility* or *Pride and Prejudice*? A Battle of Wits." Debate with Paula Marantz Cohen, best-selling author of *Jane Austen in Boca* and *What Alice Knew: A Most Curious Tale of Henry James and Jack the Ripper*. Harold Washington Library, Multipurpose Room, 400 S. State, Chicago, IL. Free and open to the public. 2–4 pm.
- October 14–16** Annual AGM. *Jane Austen: 200 Years of Sense and Sensibility* Fort Worth, Texas
- October 28–30** Weekend Retreat presented by the University of Chicago Basic Program. *Jane Austen's Sense and Sensibility and the Culture of Sympathy*.

Our website is www.jasnachicago.org