Join Us for Our Winter Meeting and Luncheon

Saturday, February 2
12:00 - 3:00 PM
Lloyd's Chicago
1 South Wacker Drive, Chicago

Engaging the Age of Jane Austen
by Danielle Spratt and Bridget Draxler

With action figures, Band-aids, films, and more, Jane Austen is more popular than ever. Still, many people tend to think of her (and by extension her readers and fans) as frivolous or disconnected from the modern world. Responding to this assumption, Danielle Spratt and Bridget Draxler argue for Austen's enduring relevance for 21st-century issues related to race, class, and gender.

This presentation will explore the ways that studying Austen can forge connections between diverse communities, and help us claim a stake in public life in ways that make us more actively engaged, thoughtful, and empathetic.
citizens. Using Austen's *Emma* and *Northanger Abbey* as particular case studies, Draxler and Spratt offer fresh perspectives on ways these novels are increasingly relevant in our current cultural moment.

The Winter Meeting includes this thought-provoking program and a three course Luncheon including Lloyd's house salad, choice of entrée (Gluten-free Vegan Stir Fry, Lemon Chicken, or Seared Haddock) and assorted mini desserts. Complimentary coffee and soft drinks. Cash bar available.

**Tickets are $55**

To register online, click the button.

Register Here

Parking is available in the 1 S. Wacker Drive Building for $16. Please see the registration page for details.

Seating is limited, so please sign up early.

To register by mail, please use the form below.

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**Winter Meeting and Luncheon Pay-by-Mail Registration Form**

**Tickets: $55 per person**

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Entrée choice (one per person):

- Vegan Stir Fry
- Lemon Chicken
- Seared Haddock

*Please make check payable to JASNA-GCR. Mail form and check to: JASNA-GCR c/o Elizabeth Schraft; 175 N. Harbor Dr. Apt. 2506; Chicago, IL 60601*

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**Danielle Spratt** is an Associate Professor of English and Director of Faculty Engaged Practices and Service Learning at California State University Northridge in Los Angeles, CA. She is a member of the California Southwest chapter of JASNA.

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**Bridget Draxler** is a Writing and Speaking
Specialist and Adjunct Assistant Professor of Writing at St. Olaf College in Northfield, MN. She is a member of the Minnesota chapter of JASNA.

We are currently seeking reviewers and photographers for all 2019 GCR programs.

If you would like to help us, please contact Publications Director Laura Whitlock, llwhitlock@yahoo.com

Save the Date for Our Next Event

JASNA-GCR Spring Gala
Saturday May 4, 2019
Woman’s Athletic Club
Chicago

“I wish, as well as everybody else, to be perfectly happy; but, like everybody else, it must be in my own way.”

—Jane Austen, Sense and Sensibility

JASNA-GCR Wishes You Every Happiness in the New Year

From the
Gentle readers,

As I clear away the tinsel and the trappings, let me take the time to send my best wishes for the New Year.

As I go about this business of putting things back into their place, and finding a home for all of the lovely gifts, I am struck by how my friends and family graciously acknowledge my Austen addiction. Think of it—there are catalogs and websites devoted exclusively to Austen paraphernalia. I am fairly confident that I own much of what they have to offer!

What would Jane think of Elizabeth and Darcy salt and pepper shakers (got ‘em!)? Of wall hangings with her sayings and a poster featuring the entire text of her most famous work (check and check)? Let us not forget the candles—oh the glorious candles. These are not used to light our writing desks as we toil away in the wee hours. No, these are devotional candles (see below). These are candles that smell like Jane Austen (OK not literally, but they do carry the lovely scent of old books). These are candles that feature her visage, however dubiously reproduced, so that we can soak in the tub, light the candle and bask in the glory of her sumptuous prose (which I fully intend to do as soon as I finish that last load of laundry...). There are notecards upon which we can only hope to write something as luminous as Jane’s. I admit to commissioning a rug-hooked pillow featuring Jane’s face to adorn my bed (It is actually the guest room bed. My husband has his limits...). I have healed my wounds with Jane Austen bandages, and used temporary tattoos to try on the possibility of that real one I fully intend to get once I work up the nerve and whittle down all of the possibilities.

Is this wrong? Should we be appalled at the crass commercialism of it all? I call upon my life motto to answer this question—what would Elizabeth Bennet do? Ah, Elizabeth. She turned down a vast fortune to stick to her cherished ideals of love over comfort. What would Elizabeth think of all of this Jane junk? Surely, she would turn her back in disgust and walk gaily into Merryton to merely peer in shop windows featuring more useful items like ribbons and gloves.

Sadly, I am no Elizabeth Bennet. I love it. Love it all. The more, the better. I have tried to contain all of the paraphernalia into several locations, but I am always willing to make more
room by getting rid of things like cookbooks and jeans in unrealistic sizes. And it brings those who love me great pleasure and relief. There is no more struggle to decide what to buy me. And relief on my end as well as I am sure to love it and not request a return receipt (really-exercise clothes—what were you thinking?!). So bring it on. In my opinion, the more Jane in the world, the better the place it will be.

From the Program Director

Jennifer Swenson

There is nothing I would not do for those who are really my friends. I have no notion of loving people by halves, it is not my nature.

--Northanger Abbey, 1817

Dear Janeites, how many of you have stories like mine? I remember being a young woman first falling in love with Austen and yet being a bit ashamed to tell people. I was happy to say that I loved reading Salinger or Huxley, but Austen? Sure, Pride and Prejudice is a classic...but it’s just a romance. Just a women’s book. Not serious and certainly not relevant to the big issues facing us today. How did I come to have this impression? What great disservice have we done to Austen that leads people to dismiss her work so quickly as just fluff?

Join us this February as Bridget Draxler and Danielle Spratt share their thoughts on how Austen is not only relevant today, but also how she can help us reshape our thoughts on race, class, and gender. We will look at how Austen can guide us to be more engaged, empathetic, and thoughtful in our lives.

I was lucky during that impressionable time. I had an amazing English teacher who saw a shy girl who was not quite confident enough to follow her heart without a little encouragement. Anne Godin was a member of JASNA-GCR in 1998. She went to a JASNA
event and brought back a coffee cup. She gave that cup to me. I don’t know to this day if she has any idea how much that meant to me, but it was the world. I learned that day that there was a whole community of people out there that had a passion like mine and weren’t afraid to celebrate it! That cup is still one of my most prized possessions.

Now as an adult myself, I try to model that gentle and supporting hand for others in my life. I am honored to be a part of this community with all of you. Let us all keep our eye out for that young person that we can give a book recommendation to, invite to a meeting, or just give an encouraging smile and wink. This is how our next generation of Janeites will grow and thrive!

As always, we are happy to hear new ideas from each of you! Please feel free to contact me using this email address, programming@jasnachicago.org.

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Birthday Tea Program Review

_Debra Ann Miller_

On an unseasonably warm December 2nd, members and friends of JASNA-Greater Chicago Region gathered at the historic Fortnightly to celebrate the 243rd birthday of Jane Austen. All were welcomed by our Membership Secretary, Becky Dolin, and upon entering were dazzled by the holiday décor and sparkling lights that never fail to put me in the holiday mood.

The festivities began with a warm welcome from Jennifer Swensen, our new Program Director, and a report on our upcoming AGM by the Co-Chairs Diane Capitani and Georgia Cibul. This started as a comedy routine that brought laughter from the crowd and ended with delight and applause as Sue Forgue revealed our newly designed logo for the 2021 AGM “Jane and the Arts”
As Sue revealed the design, she pointed out the elements of the logo that include dancers, an artist's pallet, paint brushes, music and the Comedy and Tragedy masks, as well as Jane herself in silhouette and our own beloved skyline. Our AGM will be held October 15-17, 2021, and as GCR members are part of the hosting body, they are all encouraged to volunteer their time and talents as they feel they are able. The AGM will be held at the Chicago Marriott on the Magnificent Mile. Save the dates and contact Becky Dolin, our volunteer coordinator, to add your name to the list.

All this excitement and information was only the beginning. Mary Kravenas, our Publicity/New Media Director introduced our speakers for the day: Seebany Datta-Barua & Jonathan S. Masur, who concluded our year of *Persuasion* with their presentation "Wealth and Warfare in the Novels of Jane Austen." Their informative presentation revealed the intricacies of the Navy as an engine for social mobility. This held true not only for the characters in Jane Austen's novels such as William Price and Frederick Wentworth, but for her brothers Frank and Charles, and the more famous Captain James Cook who started life as the son of an agricultural day labourer.

Ms. Datta-Barua enriched our understanding of the hazards of sailing the world in the 18th and early 19th centuries, and gave us a brief overview of the story of John Harrison and his chronometer, which revolutionized navigation. Their presentation was richly supported by projections of paintings and maps, and in the end we sailed the world via Google maps.

After this feast for the eyes and the imagination, we all enjoyed the delicious tea and refreshments served before the splendid holiday tree. Carl Johnson, GCR Board Member-at-large, gave our annual toast to Jane as we all raised a glass of champagne in her honor.
Such elegant surroundings, and stimulating conversation seemed to make the time fly; but before we went our separate ways, there were Jane Austen-themed table gifts generously provided and wrapped by Char Uney.

Birthday Tea Highlights
Carl Johnson’s Jane Austen Birthday Tea Toast

In the biography of Jane Austen called, *Becoming Jane Austen*, author Jon Spence writes that Austen grew up in an intellectually competitive household. He writes: “By the time she was eleven, she was a formidable rationalist. From...conversation(s) (she had with her family), she learned logic, a keen sense of cause and effect, a firm grasp of probability, and a quick penetration into human motivation.” I thought about this “intellectually lively household” that she grew up in as I watched the final episode of the PBS series, *The Great American Read*. As many of you know, the *Great American Read* involved a list of America’s one hundred best loved books and *Pride and Prejudice* was one of them. For a certain span of time, readers could go online and vote for their favorite book on a daily basis. Out of this process, *Pride and Prejudice* placed a very respectable fourth among the hundred books. In spite of this excellent showing, I was disappointed with this outcome, and I imagined that the Austen family would have been disappointed, too. I wondered how the Austens, that group of “lively conversationalists” and “formidable rationalists” would have used those skills to understand how any book could finish ahead of dear Jane’s darling
child.

Let’s take a look at the three books that finished ahead of *P&P* and what I imagine the Austens might have said about them.

In third place was J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series. The Austens may have said, "Ah, Ms. Rowling is in 3rd place but with seven books to Jane’s one. And how much skill is involved in writing about sorcerers and magic versus describing, in riveting detail, scenes of everyday life."

In second place was The *Outlander* series of books by Diana Gabaldon. Again, the Austens' attention may have been caught by the fact that it was a *series* of books that captured the number two spot. They would probably also have noted how Ms. Gabaldon uses a variety of literary genres, from historical fiction to science fiction and time travel, to tell her stories compared to Jane’s use of free indirect discourse.

And in first place, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee. Now, the Austens may have struggled a bit here. After all, it makes sense that America’s best-loved book would be written by an American author telling a quintessential American story. That being said, the Austens may have pointed out that Harper Lee did say she wanted to be known as “the Jane Austen of South Alabama.” Ms. Lee, no doubt, took inspiration from Jane Austen in writing her novel. Remember the scene in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, where Scout wears a dress and assists her Aunt Alexandra and the maid Calpurnia in serving tea to the ladies of the Missionary Society? It reads a lot like the scene in *P&P* where Mrs. Gardiner and Elizabeth Bennet call upon Georgiana Darcy at Pemberly.

Alas, we will not belabor the point nor engage in uncivil discourse. Let PBS and *The Great American Read* have its way. Everyone here knows that *Pride and Prejudice* deserved the number one spot. Nevertheless, how a novel written over 200 years ago by a British spinster residing in the English countryside could even finish fourth is an astonishing achievement!

Please join me in raising a glass as we toast the author of the novel that will always be
number one with us. Happy Birthday, Jane Austen!

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**A Back-and-Firth Review of Kate Hamill’s Mansfield Park**

*Program Director, Jennifer Swenson and Director of New Media, Mary Kravenas share their thoughts, asides, and nonsense as they review the recent adaptation of Mansfield Park.*

Kayla Carter, *Mansfield Park*, Northlight Theatre

**Jennifer:** I LOVE *Mansfield Park*.

**Mary:** Jenny, no one says that.

**Jennifer:** Perhaps it isn’t the most popular answer to the “Which is your favorite?” question... So, let me explain. What draws me in? Here is the strange and honest answer: what I love about *Mansfield Park* is how everything about it makes me uneasy. Not a single thing in that book is straightforward. Every note beckons me to look a little closer. Think a little harder. Question just a bit more. Trust every character just a bit less - especially that narrator.

This is also why it is incredibly hard to find a satisfying adaptation of *Mansfield Park* either on stage or screen. It isn’t light, bright, and sparkling like *Pride and Prejudice*. It isn’t deeply romantic like *Persuasion*. It is just plain unsettling.
Mary: Especially, Jennifer will tell you, if Fanny is running around with unkempt hair.

Screenshot of Billie Piper as Fanny Price, from the 2007 ITV adaptation of *Mansfield Park*.

Jennifer: Someone get that woman a hairbrush. But as I was saying... The challenge adapting this story is how do you translate that into a period drama romance without it seeming wooden and awkward? Well, for the most part, you don’t. Consequently, I don’t get the opportunity to see Fanny Price outside the page very often. Kate Hamill’s adaptation of *Mansfield Park* at the Northlight Theatre has been one that has set fingers to keys with divergent opinions to say the least.

Mary: It’s an adaptation/collaboration that either “loses Jane Austen’s richness” (*Chicago Tribune*) or “finds the radicalism” according to *The Chicago Reader*, or, as WTTW posits, provides “a sparkling reminder of why Jane Austen endures.”

Jennifer: Hamill’s approach to the text is to draw out the nuanced, almost secret story about slavery and put it very much on display. It’s a bit shocking to a lot of readers that either don’t share that interpretation or never even knew that it might be there in the first place.

Mary: I know the first time, or times, even, I read *Mansfield Park*, the mention of Sir Thomas’s trip to Antigua and the plantation didn’t really register. I read it, and on the surface, I understood. But it didn’t really sink in. Once it did, and once I started to read novels with an eye towards the various texts (context, subtext, and text) the novel became a richer story for me. I appreciate an adaptation that swings for the rafters -- maybe not everything lands perfectly, but adaptations can provide great discussion -- what was changed, why it was changed, whether or not Lady Bertram’s precious Puggles is really a dog or a muff that everyone around her plays along is a dog...

Jennifer: Puggles was my favorite character. And completely in Lady Bertram’s head.

Mary: One thing I appreciated in this adaptation was the uncommented on, but visually diverse casting. This choice (very common in UK productions) gave hints towards British
entanglement with slavery and imperialism whether the audience realized it or not. Additionally, it was nice to see several pop culture references that, for me, brought *Mansfield Park* a bit of modern relatability. The Crawfords were dripping with vibes from *Cruel Intentions*. Henry’s leather pants screamed 80’s bad boy. For me, it filled in some back story.

**Jennifer:** All great points. Mary, are you ready? We need to talk about the ending. Prepare yourselves readers – it has been changed. Edmund and Fanny throw off the yoke of slavery and make their own way in the world relying on each other alone. You might be wondering why in the world would someone do this? I think in this adaptation, it makes sense. What it does is give a modern viewer a satisfactory ending. If Edmund marries Fanny and they retire to live in quiet seclusion still under the auspices of Mansfield Park and all that implies, do we feel good about that after watching a play telling us over and over how corrupt Mansfield Park is? Probably not. The play’s message of subjugation of another people and living off the profits is bad and we should reject it is driven home with this new ending.

**Mary:** Changing the ending is hard for a lot of fans to swallow. Even if this change doesn’t land for you, though it is an interesting discussion point. There were some very clever ways the slavery storyline was brought to the forefront. For example, during the *Lover’s Vows* scene, we see some luxurious green velvety curtains hung up. They might as well have just put up a poster of Vivian Leigh from *Gone with the Wind*.

(Screenshot of Vivian Leigh and Hattie McDaniel as Scarlett O’Hara and Mammy in a scene from *Gone With the Wind*. 1940. Dir. Victor Fleming.)

**Jennifer:** Yes! Which led to a very interesting discussion in our talkback about why Americans might be more interested in reenacting and reveling in the 1800’s of England versus the 1800’s of America. Whether you loved it or hated it, one thing is certain. We are talking about *Mansfield Park*. We might not all be agreeing, but we ARE talking. We are talking about things that are important in society today.
Serious issues like race, poverty, and education are front and center in this adaptation. Is changing the ending to give Fanny and Edmund a more acceptable modern position on slavery okay? Does making Fanny illiterate when she arrives with the Bertrams change her character too much? Or does it drive home the starkly terrifying financial situation Fanny is in? What does this mean for us today? Is our society guilty of ignoring where all our fine clothes come from? Do the wealthy hold an unacceptable amount of power over the poor? How complicit am I?

In the end, we are not talking about whether that spencer was period correct or if this actor’s British accent was on point. I love that we didn’t get just another uncomfortable attempt at fitting *Mansfield Park* into a romantic period drama. Whether or not you agreed with the changes and modifications, let’s agree that Austen is alive here and I suspect loving all the dust she’s stirred up.

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**Upcoming Events**

**Jane Austen at Cook Memorial Library**  
March 5, 2019 6:30 PM  
413 North Milwaukee Avenue, Libertyville, IL 60048  
[http://www.cooklib.org/events/](http://www.cooklib.org/events/)

**Jane Austen at South Whitley Community Public Library**  
Thursday, May 2, 2019 6–6:30 PM  
201 E Front St, South Whitley, IN 46787

**Jane Austen at the Bartlett Public Library**  
Emma  
May 24 – July 14, 2019  
A world premiere based on the novel by Jane Austen
March 12, 2019 7-8 PM
800 S. Bartlett Rd., Bartlett, IL 60103
http://www.bartlett.lib.il.us/

Jane Austen at JASNA Pittsburgh Region
Saturday, March 30 6:30-7:30 PM
Twentieth Century Club, 4201 Bigelow Blvd, Pittsburgh, PA 15213

Adapted by Phil Timberlake
Directed by Elise Kauzlaric
Lifeline Theatre
6912 N Glenwood Ave, Chicago

Making his Lifeline playwriting debut, ensemble member Phil Timberlake joins ensemble member Elise Kauzlaric, director of 2012’s Pride and Prejudice and 2016’s Northanger Abbey for a fresh, intimate look at this beloved Austen romp.
http://www.lifelinetheatre.com/

In Memoriam
JASNA-GCR is deeply saddened to learn of the death of William James. William is the husband of author Syrie James, who has spoken at GCR and other JASNA events.

Syrie states, ”My beloved husband, William A. James, passed away peacefully in his sleep on January 7, 2019, after a valiant 22 month battle with pancreatic cancer. He was only 65 years old. A bright, cheerful, and endearingly affectionate man, Bill was dedicated to his family and to his 36 year career at Boeing. He was the love of my life, and I know he will be missed by a great many people.”

Syrie has set up a page to raise funds toward the purchase of a bonsai in Bill’s memory for the Huntington Library and Botanical Gardens. For more information or to make a donation, please visit https://www.gofundme.com/bill-james-memorial-bonsai-at-huntington-library

Join JASNA: Membership is open to everyone interested in the life and works of Jane Austen.

Benefits of membership include:

- A subscription to JASNA News, the Society’s newsletter, which is published three times a year and includes news, feature articles, and book reviews
- Our annual journal, Persuasions, a leading source for Austen studies
- Membership in one or more of our regional groups
- An opt-in email subscription to JASNA’s monthly e-bulletin and other timely announcements

• An invitation to attend the Annual General Meeting, our "members-only" three-day conference
• Advance notice of tours to England tailored for JASNA members

To register, or for further information, please click on the image below.

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