Fall Program

Saturday, September 13 2014
2:00 pm to 4:00 pm

Jane Austen and the Art of Debate

Sara Okey, JASNA GCR’s Publications Director, will discuss debate and argument techniques in Jane Austen’s novels followed by a lively Austen debate with Rockford East High School and Wheaton North students.

Harold Washington Library Center
400 S. State Street, Chicago

Free and Open to the Public
Public transportation and nearby parking garages available
Disagreeing (Politely) About Austen

Every Jane Austen lover has had the experience of getting into a discussion with someone who just doesn’t like Austen. “What’s the big deal about her?” “I tried reading Pride and Prejudice once and I just couldn’t get into it.” “Nothing ever happens in her books.” Such is the common cant. You may have felt the need to rise to the defense of Jane, passionately but politely. Of course, everyone is entitled to like or dislike whatever they wish to, and we should always keep in mind that we all have literary aversions. Some Austenites are also lovers of the Brontës or Dickens, others not so much. Readers of Undressing Mr. Darcy by JASNA-GCR’s own Karen Doornebos will remember a hilarious rumble between Austenites and Brontë fans that would do the Jets and the Sharks proud.

Besides, Austen lovers can disagree with each other, too. Earlier this year, I had the great pleasure of teaching a seminar on Mansfield Park at the Newberry Library, which I’m happy to say I will be repeating this fall. The participants were a great group of people that included some GCR members, and discussions were lively, which didn’t surprise me. Of all the Austen novels, Mansfield Park is the most likely to provoke disagreement, particularly in regard to the novel’s characters. The seminar participants were almost a microcosm of Austen readers in general. Fanny Price had her passionate defenders, while others found her tiresomely passive-aggressive. There were those for whom Henry Crawford could do nothing right, and those who felt that he had enough redeemable qualities to make an acceptable husband. There was also a bit of consensus: nobody liked Aunt Norris, although some people found her more amusing than others did.

On the last day of class, I complimented the participants on their ability to disagree with one another with a commendable degree of—use a favorite Austen word and concept—civility. As Austen knew, civility doesn’t necessarily mean that we all have to agree, but we can disagree without being disrespectful.
Another aspect of civility is the willingness to listen to opposing arguments, absorb them and even (sometimes) be persuaded by them. I confess that I have never been much of what I call a Fanny Fan, but re-reading and studying *Mansfield Park* in its bicentenary year has made me more sympathetic to Austen’s most controversial heroine (or to her situation, at least) than I had been before. To cite just one example: a conversation with one of our 2014 Gala speakers, Sheryl Craig, made me appreciate the precariousness of Fanny’s position. If Fanny were to step out of line, she could be (pardon the pun) shipped back to Portsmouth without a penny—which in fact does happen, albeit temporarily.

We all enjoy Elizabeth Bennet’s standing up to Lady Catherine de Burgh in *Pride and Prejudice*, but it’s not really a fair fight: Elizabeth is by far the more skilled (and more polite) antagonist, while the impertinent Lady Catherine deserves what she gets. By contrast, it takes considerable and commendable courage for Fanny to stand up to her uncle Sir Thomas, even though she isn’t being completely honest with him about her reasons for not wanting to marry Henry Crawford. Even more so than in the Elizabeth vs. Lady Catherine contretemps, the scene in *Mansfield Park* in which Fanny defies Sir Thomas demonstrates Austen’s artistry and understanding of human beings. Austen knows that conflict does not destroy love and respect: Fanny feels her own “ingratitude” (a crucial word in the novel) and, despite her disobedience, her uncle still sees to it that she (finally) has a fire in her room.

The pattern of polite and respectful disagreement will no doubt continue at the 2014 AGM, aptly titled “*Mansfield Park* in Montréal: Contexts, Conventions and Controversies”. As a lot of you probably know, the AGM sold out within 24 hours after online registration opened (that’s the internet for you). Even if you can’t make it to the AGM, however, you will be more than welcome at the JASNA-GCR Fall Meeting on Saturday, September 13, “Jane Austen and the Art of Debate”. Anyone who was in attendance when GCR hosted a *Pride and Prejudice* vs. *Sense and Sensibility* matchup a few years back knows how enlightening—and how much fun—these kinds of discussions can be. See the cover page of this newsletter or go to our website for more information. As always, our Fall Meeting is free and open to the public, so bring your friends, and prepare for an afternoon of delightful disagreement.

During June and July, the local news and social media have been clogged with stories about the “Super Moon”, or as it has been called for centuries the “perigee full moon”, in July and August. Of course my first thought when I heard about these very close full moons was “oh, for Jane Austen and her neighbors, this would have been an excellent time for a ball.” Balls and dances were held on or close to the full moon so that the horses could safely travel by moonlight.

All this “lunacy” has sparked interest in the old names for the moons. On the North American continent, July’s moon has been called the Thunder Moon for the frequent storms, the Full Buck Moon to mark the growing of the antlers on the deer, and the Herb or Wort moon to celebrate the growth and harvesting of medicinal herbs. To these I would add my own name: The Impatience Moon.

I am impatient. Our Summer Meeting was held in June this year at flavour Cooking School in Forest Park and while I have heard that it was very informative and loads of fun, I am impatient to read the account of the event in this newsletter. By the waning moon many of you traveled to Louisville, Kentucky for the 7th Annual Jane Austen Festival and I am impatient to hear your stories, see your pictures and to learn that the 491 Jane Austen...
fans assembled was in fact a new world record. I am impatient for our September meeting, which will, as always, be free and open to the public.

While July and August are as full for me as the super moons with work and gardening and summer activities, I have missed my JASNA-GCR friends and I enjoy seeing some of your names and faces when you visit and comment on our Facebook page. I long to give you details of our September meeting which will be led by our own Sara Okey and based on a proposal for an upcoming AGM, but I can tell you no more than it will be our last presentation devoted to the bicentenary year of Mansfield Park, and will feature students from Wheaton North High School students engaging in the many forms of debate utilized by Jane Austen in her novels.

I am impatient to share the details of our Annual Birthday Tea in December which will be both a valedictory to the “Year of Mansfield Park” and a kick-off for our 2015 theme of “Living in Jane Austen’s World” and our plans for the February meeting and beyond. But that must wait, for as Jane wrote to her sister Cassandra, “Some wish, some prevailing Wish is necessary to the animation of everybody’s Mind.”

I hope your summer has been relaxing and enjoyable and I look forward to seeing you all on September 13th at the Harold Washington Library under the Barley (September) Moon.

GCR Elections

By William Phillips

As I compose this item for the August Letter from Chicago, it is July, and we are having beautiful early October weather. I am writing to provide information to all GCR Members about our Annual Business Meeting, held each September just prior to the “free and open” GCR program that we present on the same day. This year that day is Saturday, September 13th, and the meeting/program will be held at the Harold Washington Library from 2:00 to 4:00 pm. Who knows, we may all be arriving on cross-country skis. There is information about the intriguing program elsewhere in this number of Letter from Chicago. I’m sure you’ll find that the program is well worth attending, by whatever means of transportation required.

Since the adoption of our current GCR By-laws in 2010, we now elect part of the GCR Board each September. This year, as in all even numbered years, we have five (5) of the eleven (11) board positions up for election. Matters have been a bit confusing since 2012 as board membership has shifted around a bit due to a combination of resignations (for family and geographical reasons) and subsequent appointments. Last September (2013) we elected the following six board members to serve until September next year (2015):

William Phillips, Deputy Regional Coordinator
Linda Reinert Recording Secretary
Elia Rivera Publicity Director
Sara Okey Publications Director
Diane Capitanni Education Outreach Director
Georgia Cibul Member at Large (for odd numbered years).

In this even numbered year, we have five Board positions to elect. Two of our current Board Members, Cathy Feldman, Treasurer and Patricia Wieber, Membership Secretary have decided not to stand for re-election to the board. Pat and Cathy have both given remarkably efficient and reliable service as Board Members. Perhaps more importantly, they have also been very cooperative and extremely pleasant to work with. I know I don’t have adequate words to thank them, so please allow me to say this—in the spirit of Jane Austen, Pat and Cathy each served on the GCR Board with both Sense and
**Sensibility**, without either *Pride (or) Prejudice*, and when the occasion called for it, each of them engaged in very gentle but unquestionably deft *Persuasion*.

The work of the Nominating Committee was made much simpler because three of those whose positions are up for re-election have agreed to serve another term. By the way, I’d like to express my thanks to Board Member **Georgia Cibul** and GCR member **Judith Williamson** for joining me on the Nominating Committee.

1. **Laura Whitlock** was appointed to fill the At Large position vacated when Debra Ann Miller accepted appointment to be Program Director after Elisabeth Lenckos left to spend most of her time in her native Germany. We all know Laura for her remarkable millinery. She has been a productive member of the board with program ideas and help to get the GCR Facebook page going.

2. **Debra Ann Miller** has already done an excellent job of creating and organizing our major program events for the last year. Those who have attended the programs all of this year are well aware of how fortunate we were to have Debra Ann step into the position. Most recently we had a full house at flavour Cooking School in Forest Park. All of us enjoyed learning how to make delicious “rout cakes” that even the critical Mrs Elton would have praised. I’m privy to the fact that Debra Ann has still more intriguing program ideas for us.

3. Finally, we all know what a remarkable job **Jeff Nigro** has done as our Regional Coordinator for the last four years. I know I’m delighted that he’s willing to stay in the position for a third term. I’m afraid, however, that the word “finally” was all too aptly chosen, since our by-laws only permit one more term for him. However, we on the nominating committee don’t want to pass up this chance to hang on to Jeff’s devoted efforts for GCR as long as we can.

Turning to the two Board Positions which must be filled, we are very fortunate to have two loyal members agree to take on those positions. (1) As Membership Secretary, the committee proposes **Becky Dolin**. Becky is a long-time member of GCR. Many of you will have met her at one of our events—she attends regularly. Some of you will recall that Becky gave an excellent “toast” to Jane Austen at the December Birthday Tea several years ago. (2) As Treasurer, we propose **Russell Clark**. Russell is particularly interested in the theater in relation to Jane Austen. He has presented on theater related topics for GCR programs, at the Brooklyn AGM in 2012 and we can catch his take on the plays NOT chosen for the Mansfield theatricals at the Montreal AGM in October. Russell is no stranger to leadership positions in volunteer organizations. For purposes of this office, he was Treasurer of Illinois TESOL, Bilingual Education (ITBE), the state-wide professional organization for teachers of English to non-native speakers. He was subsequently Vice-President and President of ITBE, an organization with several thousand members.

Although no additional names were submitted prior to the requested date, it is still possible to place names in nomination. However, we would request that a written statement accompany any nomination, certifying that the nominee agrees to serve in the position for which she/he is nominated. We certainly need to remind everyone that no election is the last one—we’ll be looking for new Board members again in less than a year, and must choose a new Regional Coordinator in only two. Please keep thinking about offering your own talents and/or encouraging gifted and energetic friends to put themselves forward. In the meantime, feel free to approach any of the current Board members to see if there is committee work to be done, help with organizing that may be needed, or other GCR matters for which your assistance will be more than welcome.
“Mansfield Park: Money, Medicine and Moral Mayhem”: Enlightening Day in a Fresh Venue

JASNA-GCR members enjoyed the June 2014 Gala: “Mansfield Park: Money, Medicine and Moral Mayhem” at a venue new to the occasion—the Woman’s Athletic Club on Michigan Avenue in Chicago. Attendees ate a light continental breakfast in the ballroom while visiting with each other as well as the vendors in the south ante-room, featuring Jeanne Steen’s selections of tea and stationary, Jane Austen Books, Laura Whitlock’s original millinery creations, and the annual used books sale.

The first of three presentations for the day began with Sheryl Craig speaking about “The Economics of Mansfield Park.” She emphasized Austen’s adherence to historical economic realism in the novels, noting that Austen lived through three recessions devoid of economic bailouts and that the novels are permeated with characters such as Charlotte Lucas, Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, Mrs. and Miss Bates, and most dramatically, Fanny Price, who face harsh Regency period financial realities when there were high unemployment rates, as well as dire alternatives such as the poor house, work house, and debtor’s prison. Fanny, who is so often criticized for her apparent inability to confront others, is trapped in a world without money and at the mercy of Sir Thomas’s good will, is perhaps powerless because she is penniless. This realistic incorporation of economic background featured in Austen’s novels was comically contrasted with the “magic money” method by which Huck Finn procures random watercraft such as a canoe and a houseboat, which then offer provision.

In illustration of the mercurial aspects of Regency economics, Sheryl pointed out that coins were debased in 1807, thereby raising distrust that a purchaser may not get the true worth for his/her money. 1797 pennies and debased coins were passed around the ballroom, some containing metals commensurate with their value at the time and others, debased to two-thirds of former intrinsic value. This debasement raised widespread questions about the true worth of money in paper or coin form. Amidst this period concern about getting one’s true value in exchanges, the point was strongly made that Austen criticizes misjudgment made on appearances alone. A primary example given is Sir Thomas’ poor judgment in allowing Maria to marry Mr. Rushworth, Sir Thomas’ travel to the West Indies in pursuit of financial gain at the risk of moral abandonment back at Mansfield Park, and his insistence that Fanny, who carries intrinsic moral worth, accept the marriage proposal to the apparently financially worthy Henry Crawford.

Though Mansfield Park is so often compared with the Cinderella fairy tale, Sheryl points out that the three sisters’ respective “purchases” of husbands fit the parable of the three little pigs: each sister is equally attractive and bestowed with a similar dowry, yet the future Lady Bertram luckily builds a house of bricks via her highly advantageous marriage to Sir Thomas, the future Mrs. Norris builds one of sticks in her conservative acceptance of Mr. Norris and his moderate income, and the future Mrs. Price builds one of straw in her marriage to Mr. Price, as they end up living mostly upon her meager income.

Sheryl also points out that the monetary value of a character is augmented or lessened by their willingness to share his/her money. Thus Mrs. Jennings of Sense and Sensibility is loved for her generosity to the Dashwood sisters, while Fanny Dashwood is vilified for her parsimonious manipulations of her husband’s inheritance intended for the Dashwood sisters and their mother. Ultimately, in Mansfield Park, Fanny’s intrinsic value as a spouse far outweighs her lack of capital.

Diane Capitani then presented “Saving Henry Crawford,” in which she noted that Mansfield Park is about many things: not only the continued on page 8
Clockwise from top left: Laura Whitlock in her summer topper sipping a cuppa; Gala speakers: Dr. Sheryl Craig, Dr. Cheryl Kinney showing off the JA bandages (see close-up above) that Sheryl gifted her with and Dr. Diane Capitani with a slide from her presentation above her; Governor Russell Clark; eager shoppers in the emporium; Another spring bonnet; Mr. Knightley (Ben Muller and Emma (Heather Chrisler) in the proposal scene; An array of wares in the emporium (and if you look closely you can see photographer Margo Malos); Introducers William Phillips and Debra Ann Miller (sporting another spring bonnet); Gala attendees Jean Lewis, Eileen Hoffmann, Carol Stocking, and Michaela Mancuso; Hook and stone pessary two items from Dr. Kinney’s talk that made everyone happy that medicine has advanced; three copper pennies that Dr. Craig shared; a spring bonnet display with Debra Ann Miller modeling another bonnet; the gala room.
defense of Henry Crawford over Edmund Bertram, but such weighty matters as The Legacy Project in Britain, focusing on British slave ownership. In assessing the lives and worthiness of the Crawfords, in contrast with George Wickham and Willoughby, the Crawfords’ lack of moral example in their upbringings is cited in their defense, whereas Wickham and Willoughby seem to be merely handsome, as well as personable, and use these assets to take advantage of others. It is pointed out that Mary Crawford does not do anything dastardly to Fanny Price. Diane went on to question why Henry is so vilified for causing Maria to leave Mr. Rushworth, yet he may be viewed as simply an uncontrolled flirt. Edmund, in contrast, exhibits inconsistent moral behaviors and seems to be in pathetic and constant pursuit of positive reinforcement from others. Edmund admits that he, “...was playing the fool with my eyes open,” whereas Henry, once he has arrived in pursuit of Fanny at Portsmouth, is improved, realizing that he “was and must ever be completely unsuited to her, and ought not to think of her” (405). Diane went ahead to pose the notion that Fanny Price could have been the salvation of Henry Crawford.

After a beautiful lunch, Dr. Cheryl Kinney, M.D., presented “What is the Matter with Lady Bertram?” Lady Bertram was probably in her late 40s or early 50s, once a young, beautiful woman, who came to a close understanding with her husband “in consequence of a little ill health,” which Dr. Kinney projects is a result of childbirth, more specifically due to a fistula, a hole between the vagina and bladder caused after long labor. Effects of the fistula could be back pain, incontinence, fatigue, and difficulty walking. Dr. Kinney noted that menopause would set in around the age of 40 for many women of the Regency period and that listlessness at night, accompanied by other symptoms, sometimes led to placement of menopausal women in insane asylums.

From the variety of conversation, presentations, food, and venue, this was a Gala to be remembered. Attendees’ opinions about the Gala were also solicited through a survey in hopes of continuing the success of the day into 2015.
Review

**Orgueil et Préjugés, de Joe Wright**

*Adaptation du roman de Jane Austen*

Après avoir lu (et adoré) *Orgueil et Préjugés* de Jane Austen, je ne pouvais pas passer à côté du chef d’œuvre cinématographique de Joe Wright.

Ce qui ressort le plus de ce film est sans aucun doute cette capacité incroyable à plonger son public dans un monde si différent de celui du XXIe siècle. Ce film dépeint à merveille la société anglaise du fin XVIIIe, rigide et euphorique, cruelle et pleine de vie. Joe Wright nous offre un univers plein de contrastes, dans les décors et la musique comme dans les personnages.

On observe une forte opposition entre les paysages paisibles de la campagne anglaise et les décors intérieurs complexes voire surchargés.

La première scène décrit parfaitement cette idée de douceur que l’on retrouve tout au long du film. Dario Marianelli a accompli un travail formidable sur la musique d’*Orgueil et Préjugés* : on est véritablement bercés dans ces grandes plaines brumeuses et sereines.

Cette facette du décor se perd totalement dans les intérieurs de l’époque. La maison des Bennet, par exemple, nous offre une grande richesse de couleurs et d’ameublement : abondance des meubles, des étoffes, des ornements … Les lieux de bals ou encore les échoppes de la ville offrent cette même complexité dans leur décoration.

Outre les décors, les personnages absolument géniaux. On s’attache à certaines, on déteste d’autres, mais une chose est sûre, on n’y reste pas indifférent.

Lizzie, par sa joie de vivre et son espièglerie, fait de ce film une bouffée d’air fraîche. Même dans des situations plus que dures à vivre (la peur du déshonneur, le poids de sa classe sociale), elle garde sa franchise et sa fierté. Elle vit pleinement qui elle est sans se soucier du jugement d’une Lady Catherine ou d’une Caroline Bingley.

J’ai beaucoup aimé les fortes différences de caractères des personnages. On a d’un côté des modèles des tendresses comme Mr Bennet à l’égard de ses filles, mais aussi de pures manipulateurs comme Mr Wickham, en perpétuelle quête de richesse et d’ascension sociale. On trouve également des personnages plus réservés comme Mary, ou encore des incarnations d’hystérie et de naïveté comme Lydia et Kitty.

Ce film m’a permis de réaliser une chose : les gens ne changent pas, seules les règles changent. Je me suis tout d’abord sentie dépayisée dans ce monde qui est clairement différent du nôtre, mais je me suis rendue compte après un certain temps que malgré le changement de coutumes (la manière de s’habiller, de parler et même de danser) la société reste la même. L’unité au sein d’une famille (celle de la famille Bennet par exemple), le vœu d’une situation confortable pour un de ses enfants, l’hautaineté d’une personne haut placée (ce point concerne autant Lady Catherine que beaucoup de nobles de l’époque) … tout cela se retrouve encore dans notre société d’aujourd’hui.

Ma scène préférée est la discussion qu’ont Lizzie et Jane sous les draps. La lumière de la bougie sur leur visage est magnifique, à la fois douce et chaleureuse, et il y a quelque chose de très « privé » dans cette scène, comme si on avait le privilège de rentrer dans l’intimité des personnages. La complicité entre les deux sœurs est particulièrement perceptible et c’est ça qui rend ce moment si unique.

A vrai dire l’œuvre entière est incroyable, je conseille réellement de le voir, et cela à n’importe quel âge. A travers des décors fantastiques, des personnages superbe-ment bien interprétés et des musiques tantôt festives tantôt langoureuses, Joe Wright nous plonge dans l’univers d’*Orgueil et Préjugés* avec brio.
The culminating portion of the meeting was a fascinating presentation about Regency period cooking methods and recipes, deliciously punctuated by tastings of rout-cakes (both original and re-interpreted, modern versions recipes provided), and summer pease soup. flavour School Cooking School owner Denise Norton shared an excerpt from Maggie Black and Dierdre Le Faye’s *Jane Austen Cookbook* to illustrate the frustratingly vague directions common among most recipes of the period (spelling and grammar retained from the original):

> Take five or six Cucumbers pared and sliced the white part of as many Coss Lettuce a sprig or two of Mint, two or three Onions, some pepper, a little salt a full pint of young Pease a little Parsley half a pound of butter put them altogether in a sauce pan to stew in their own liquor for an hour and half or till they are quite tender; then boil as many old Pease pulp them through a cullender and mix them in a quart of the liquor or more as yo like for thickness when the herbs are stewed enough put them in and serve it up.

Denise experimented and extrapolated from this recipe to create her own, updated version which serves 12–16. Visit the website jasnachicago.org for Denise’s version.

Excerpted from *Cooking with Jane Austen*, by Kirstin Olsen, the following Regency period recipe was shared:

> Mix two pounds of flour, one ditto butter, one ditto sugar, one ditto currants, clean and dry; then wet into a stiff paste, with two eggs, a large spoonful of orange-flower water, ditto rose-water, ditto sweet wind, ditto brandy; drop on a tin plat floured a very short time bakes them.

Denise Norton’s adaptation of this recipe is also on jasnachicago.org and makes about 4 dozen.
Summer Photos

Clockwise from top left: Presenter Dawn Devries; View of one corner of The flavour Cooking School's tempting wares; Owner Denise Norton in the kitchen with the cookies (oval inset shows a close-up of the pease soup and rout cake [otherwise known as cookies]); A full house listens attentively; Presenter William Phillips and Russell Clark check out the displays; Gail Murphy chats with RC Jeff Nigro; Two arrangements of the different types of salt available.
Capital and Income

Jane Austen and Honoré de Balzac make quite a pair in the best-selling non-fiction book *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* by Thomas Piketty. He writes that in their novels, the fact that land (like government bonds) yields roughly 5 percent of the amount of capital invested (or, equivalently, that the value of capital corresponds to roughly twenty years of annual rent) is so taken for granted that it often goes unmentioned.

She knew that to live comfortably and elegantly, secure proper transportation and clothing, eat well, and find amusement and have a necessary minimum of domestic servants, one needed—by her lights—at least twenty to thirty times [the average income in the early 1800s of 30 pounds a year]. The characters in her novels consider themselves free from need only if they dispose of incomes of 500 to 1,000 pounds a year... As in Balzac’s novels, so too in Jane Austen’s, only a very modest life is possible with just 5 or 10 times the average.

“For Jane Austen’s heroes, the question of work did not arise: all that mattered was the size of one’s fortune, whether acquired through inheritance or marriage... [A] Balzacian or Austenian character would have used the services of dozens of servants with no embarrassment. For the most part we are not even told their names... The threshold chosen by Balzac and Austen, twenty to thirty times the average income, corresponds to the top 0.5 percent of the inheritance hierarchy [those who inherited their fortunes].” This, Piketty tells us, would have amounted to 50,000 people out of a population of 10 million British adults in 1800–1810. (One can see in what direction he might be pointing: toward the current-day “1%.”)

In Memoriam

Obituaries of Adrianne Wadewitz, who died at 37 of head injuries sustained rock climbing in Joshua Tree National Park, CA, noted that she was a scholar of 18th-century British literature and was “one of the most prolific and influential editors of the online encyclopedia Wikipedia.” “An early contribution, or ‘edit,’ was in 2006, when she ‘punched up the intro’ to the article about Jane Austen, to note Austen’s ‘masterful use of both indirect speech and irony,’” said The NY Times.

The NY Times also reported the death of British novelist Elizabeth Jane Howard, age 90. She wrote a dozen novels. “Though some critics damned the novels as ‘readable,’ others praised their mordant social observations and vivid depiction of the minutiae of daily lives—especially women’s lives— likening [her] to Jane Austen and Nancy Mitford.” She was also known for “her amorous entanglements with some of the 20th century’s foremost literary men,” including critics Cyril Connolly and Kenneth Tynan, journalist Arthur Koestler, and poet Cecil Day-Lewis. She was married to novelist Kingsley Amis for 18 years. “Though Ms. Howard and Amis were divorced in 1983, she had a lasting, salubrious effect on one member of the family: his son Martin, who has credited her with securing his own future as a novelist by replacing his comic books with ‘Pride and Prejudice’ when he was a teenager.”
I was never much of a reader. When I was a child, my parents worked and I was mostly raised by my Polish-German grandmother. The only thing I remember my grandmother reading was the Dziennik Chicagoski, the Chicago Polish-language newspaper. What she did do was to feed me quite well, so much so that today I go to Weight Watchers.

In my grammar school there were a few books on the classroom windowsill. We could not touch them because the nuns liked to keep everything tidy. They sat there in the afternoon sun, waiting to be read, but they never were. What a pity!

Ah, but in high school there was a room with a sign on the door that said LIBRARY. Oh, there were books there, like The Lives of the Saints or How To Meet Your Husband at the Altar Rail...just what a teenage girl wants to read...

Hooray, I finally get to go out into the working world! Just in time for the arrival of television. Who has time to read, when you have I Love Lucy and The Ed Sullivan Show? I married a man who was an avid reader. His favorite phrase was “Just one more page”. If I told Johnny that dinner was ready, or I asked him to mow the lawn, I would hear “Just one more page”. He didn’t necessarily read what you would call “great literature”, but he was always reading something. I did crafts. I was doing needlepoint before it was fashionable. But reading? Not so much.

Along came my two sons, John and Jeff. I was determined that they should love to read. My husband set a good example by making reading seem “normal”. We started the boys with classic fairy tales like Snow White and the Seven Dwarves or Jack and the Beanstalk. Nowadays we’re told that raising children on those kinds of stories isn’t good for them, because it encourages them to think that life is a fantasy. As if things like Conan the Destroyer are any better for kids’ psyches.

Either my husband or I read to our sons every night before bedtime. Actually, they preferred having their Dad read to them because, as they put it, he “read funny”. That is, he cracked lots of jokes and made them laugh. Their favorite was inspired by a line from a version of The Sleeping Beauty: “Joy filled the palace,” prompting their Dad to say, “Gee, she must have been pretty large.” That one had the boys in stitches, no matter how many times they heard it. Let me tell you, there’s nothing like being the Second Choice to turn you off reading.

But guess what? Now I’m reading. How did I get interested? Because my son Jeff reads Jane Austen! After I attended a couple of JASNA-GCR events, I told Jeff I wanted to join the group. “OK” he said, “that means you have to read the novels, and you have to watch the movies based on them so that you know what everyone is talking about.” So I read Pride and Prejudice, followed by the others. A whole new world! I especially love the comic characters. Mrs. Allen in Northanger Abbey, with her muslin obsession, makes me laugh. It isn’t always for laughs, though. I love dipping into the novels for comfort, because it feels like chatting with an old friend. I’m a true Janeite! I’ve discovered that I love Austen-inspired fiction, too, and Georgette Heyer and Candace Hern are my favorite Christmas stocking stuffers. Somewhere, Johnny is looking down and having a good laugh.

Just goes to show you it’s never too late. Thank you, Jeff. You and Jane Austen taught me how to read.
On Mansfield Park

In *Imagining Characters: Six Conversations About Women Writers*, novelist A. S. Byatt says, “*Mansfield Park* has been described as one of the great works of Western European literature, and has also been described as a novel in which nobody can manage to like the heroine... Fanny is unattractive because she always judges and she always presents the very highest possible line of conduct for anybody as the way they should behave.” Yet, she says, “Mansfield improves with the presence of Fanny; in her passivity she is capable of transforming the home where she lives. Whereas in fact the innovators, supposedly the improvers, who are Henry and Mary, cause havoc.”

Literary critic Lionel Trilling, in his essay *In Mansfield Park*, investigates “the question of character as against personality, of principle as against style, and grace of ease as against grace of difficulty.” To him, “Fanny is one of the poor in spirit. It is not a condition of soul to which we are nowadays sympathetic.” Yet, it is the principled Fanny, at the cost of “debility,” who has the genuine character to attain “virtue and happiness,” unlike Mary, who is all personality. He writes, “That although on a first reading... Mary Crawford’s speeches are all delightful, they diminish in charm as we read the novel a second time. We begin to hear something disagreeable in the intonation: it is the peculiarly modern bad quality which Jane Austen was the first to represent – insincerity. This is a trait very different from the hypocrisy of the earlier novelists. Mary Crawford’s intention is not to deceive the world but to comfort herself; she impersonates the woman she thinks she ought to be... In Mary Crawford we have the first brilliant example of a distinctively modern type, the person who cultivates the style of sensitivity, virtue, and intelligence.”

On March 2, 1814 Austen wrote to Cassandra that their brother Henry, who had just started reading *Mansfield Park*, “admires H. Crawford—I mean properly—as a clever, pleasant Man.” In Trilling’s opinion, “Henry Crawford has more sincerity than his sister, and the adverse judgment which the novel makes on him is therefore arrived at with greater difficulty. He is conscious of his charm, of the winningness of his personal style, which has in it – as he knows – a large element of natural goodness and generosity. He is no less conscious of his lack of weight and solidity; his intense courtship of Fanny is, we may say, his effort to add the gravity of principle to his merely natural goodness. He becomes, however, prey to his own charm, and in his cold flirtation with Maria Bertram he is trapped by his impersonation of passion – his role requires that he carry Maria off from a dull marriage to a life of boring concupiscence. It is his sister’s refusal to attach any moral importance to this event that is the final proof of her deficiency in seriousness.” But, Trilling adds, “[I]t is not sexuality that is being condemned, but precisely that form of a-sexuality that incurred D.H. Lawrence’s greatest scorn – that is, sexuality as an expression of mere will or mere personality, as a sign of power, or prestige, or autonomy; as, in short, an impersonation and an insincerity.”

Perhaps Vladimir Nabokov missed this point when he described Madame Bovary and Anna Karenina in his *Lectures on Literature* as “delightful explosions admirably controlled,” comparing them to *Mansfield Park*, which “is the work of a lady and the game of a child. But from that workbasket comes exquisite needlework art and there is a streak of marvelous genius in that child.” Genius there is, and ever-greater art found in every re-reading.

Elsie Holzwarth
Jane Austen Society of North America—Greater Chicago Region (JASNA-GCR)

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Fall Meeting
Saturday, September 13

Calendar

September 13  Free Public Program. Jane Austen and the Art of Debate. Led by Sara Okey, JASNA-GCR Publications Director. 2:00 pm–4:00 pm. Harold Washington Library Center, 400 S. State Street, Chicago.

October 10–12 JASNA Annual General Meeting. Mansfield Park in Montréal: Contexts, Conventions and Controversies.

December 6 Birthday Tea. “Favourable to Tenderness and Sentiment: The Many Meanings of Mary Crawford’s Harp”. Talk by Jeff Nigro. 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm. The Fortnightly of Chicago, 120 E. Bellevue Place, Chicago.

For more events and programs that will be of interest, visit our website at jasnachicago.org, and click on Events>Austen-Related Events.