



"I am now alone in the Library, Mistress of all I survey."

—Jane Austen, in a letter to her sister, Cassandra, written from Godmersham Park, 1813

Even if you do not have a home library to rival the one Jane Austen enjoyed at her brother Edward Austen Knight's estate at Godmersham Park—or one that is the "work of many generations," like Mr. Darcy's at Pemberley—your access today to literary works is unparalleled. Austen may not have practiced physical distancing the way COVID-19 has forced us to in 2020, but she appreciated time alone, to write and read.

Today, we can choose from among 60,000 free e-books on Project Gutenberg (gutenberg.org)—including all of Austen's novels and letters as well as her juvenilia. Museums, libraries, theaters, and other nonprofits offered new digital resources, *gratis*, for those homebound because of the pandemic.

And with countless streaming services, Austen film adaptations are also readily available.

Although one of the joys of being a JASNA member is the "happiness when good people get together"—a delight we must forgo for the time being—another is the pleasure of a great book, whether a newly discovered find or a beloved classic revisited. We hope you find inspiration in the following pages, and that you and yours remain safe and healthy.



FUN AND GAMES

As we practice physical distancing, many of us are turning to jigsaw puzzles and other games and activities to stay occupied. Here are a few Austen-related options to consider.

[Gin Austen: 50 Cocktails to Celebrate the Novels of Jane Austen](#) (2019) by Colleen Mullaney—for your quarantini hour with friends via Zoom

[Pride & Prejudice & Puzzles: Ingenious Riddles & Vexing Dilemmas Inspired by Jane Austen's Novels](#) (2019) by Richard Galland—for testing your knowledge of Austen

[Jane Austen's Card Games](#) (2018) by Jo Ann Staples—for when you want to learn Regency-era indoor pastimes (also includes recipes)

[Brain Games—Jane Austen Word Search: How Well Do You Know These Timeless Classics?](#) (2018)—for when you want to challenge your memory as well as demonstrate your Austen cred

[Tarot of Jane Austen](#) (2007) by Diane Wilkes and Lo Scarabeo—for when you want to see what's in the cards for your future, and which Austen characters align with which cards of the traditional tarot deck

LIVELY AND READABLE 'COMPLETION'

Catharine or the Bower

By Jane Austen

Completed by Leo Rockas

Brown Posey Press (2019)

xii + 137 pages

Paperback, \$12.95

Review by Juliet McMaster

A “completion” of *Catharine, or the Bower*, in which 16-year-old Jane Austen presents a heroine very like herself, is a worthy enterprise—and Leo

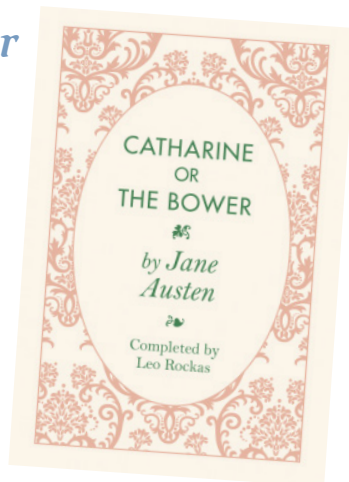
Rockas has done a devoted job. He is true to the fragment as we have it (much truer than Andrew Davies has been to *Sanditon!*), which occupies about 30 percent of his narrative.

Our heroine, Kitty, missing her friends the Wynnes—who helped her build her treasured bower (garden shelter)—is disappointed in a new friend, the airheaded Camilla, but thinks she may be in love with Camilla’s brother, the handsome but conceited Edward Stanley. So what next?

While writing, as he tells us in his preface, Rockas heard the voice of Edith Lank, saying, “I could tell *exactly* where Jane ended and *you* began” (viii). (Edith is fondly remembered by many Janeites.) And could I tell? Well, yes. But the issue is blurred here by the fact that Austen’s nephew, James Edward Austen, attempted a “completion” of his own (abandoned after a few paragraphs). Rockas not only includes that un-Jane-like piece but also takes major hints for his own completion from it—including the move to stay with the Stanleys, and the return of Cecilia Wynne from Bengal. This is a mistake, I think, because Austen probably never saw, and certainly never approved, James Edward’s addition.

So off we go to London to stay at the home of Mr. Stanley, MP, who becomes the *deus ex machina* to make all right with the Wynne world. The proposed excursion to the Lake District, which Camilla eagerly anticipates in Austen’s narrative, never happens. But London provides other exciting opportunities, such as a ball at Lady Halifax’s and an outing to Vauxhall (shades of *Evelina* and *Vanity Fair*). A refreshing new departure from the original story is having Cecilia’s husband, after returning with her from Bengal, set up a jewelry business in London. What, *trade*? Yes, and it’s very interestingly portrayed.

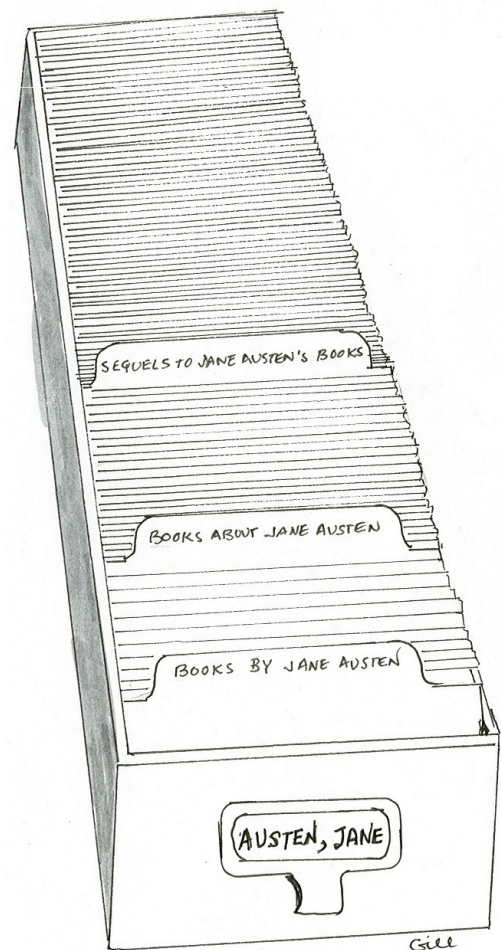
Names merely mentioned by Camilla in Austen’s text, such as Augusta Barlow and Maria Halifax (she who “draws in oils,” Camilla says), become notable characters.



And what of the bower? Rockas doesn’t neglect the possibilities for romance there and makes it the site of a declaration. (Whose declaration to whom? Ah, that would be telling!) Having two wedding ceremonies there may be going a little far—but then, why cavil at romance? And Rockas, while providing plenty of moral commentary—about being “governed by good sense and restraint,” for instance (139)—is also generous with his marriages, providing, instead of Austen’s usual three, no fewer than five matches.

Well, it’s not Jane Austen (except, of course, for the part that is). But who would expect it to be? It is a close look at Austen’s youthful work, and a lively and readable extension of it. Well done, Leo! I wish I were as brave as you.

Juliet McMaster is a founding member of JASNA and a frequent speaker at JASNA AGMs. A University Professor Emerita at the University of Alberta, she is the author of Jane Austen, the Novelist, co-editor of The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen, and founder of the Juvenilia Press.



Gene Gill, New York Metropolitan Region

WORDS FOR PHYSICAL DISTANCING

30-Day Journey with Jane Austen

By **Natasha Duquette**
Fortress Press (2020), 90 pages
Hardcover, \$16.99

Review by **Lynda Hall**

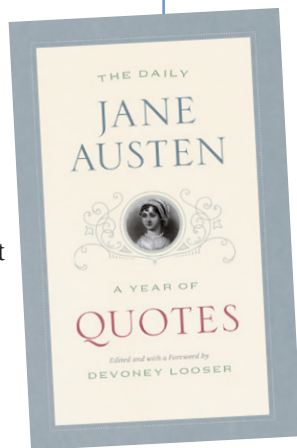
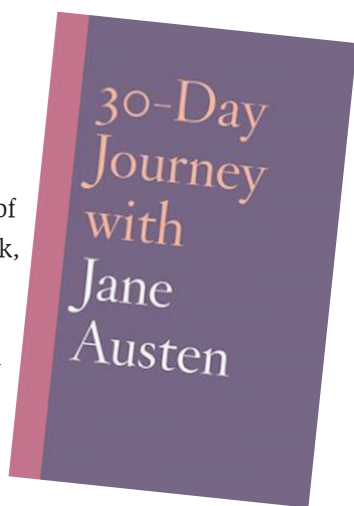
In a time of physical distancing, many of us are looking for comfort in food, drink, entertainment, and of course reading. Two recent collections of Jane Austen excerpts might be just what the literary doctor ordered.

Natasha Duquette's *30-Day Journey with Jane Austen* is part of a series of such books published by Fortress Press. Duquette's introduction contextualizes the excerpts with a succinct biography and overview of Austen's oeuvre: exposing "the vanities and follies of human existence," "pointed satire," and characters who shed "blind conceit and self-absorption to embrace clear-sighted humility and social consciousness" (x-xi).

Each of the passages included in the 30-day journey is followed by a biographical connection—linking Marianne Dashwood's piano playing with Austen's own practice, for example—and then a "reflection" that asks readers to contemplate a similar situation in their own lives.

The book is clearly intended for those familiar with Austen's works, but even those most conversant with the stories and characters will find new ways to appreciate them. Elizabeth Bennet's reaction to Darcy's letter after his horrid first proposal reminds us that walking for two hours might "ground us in reality" while letting our minds "adapt to the natural rhythms of [our] body" (15).

The book also assumes a God-centered reflection, as when Emma accepts Knightley's proposal. The reader is counseled to accept gifts graciously, since "irrational guilt can block the flow of God's grace and love toward us" (39). What better gift for yourself or a loved one than a 30-day devotional tribute to Jane Austen's writing?



The Daily Jane Austen

By **Devoney Looser**
University of Chicago Press (2019)
208 pages, paperback, \$7

Review by **Lynda Hall**

If you need more than 30 days of Austen excerpts, how about a full year? Devoney Looser's *The Daily Jane Austen: A Year of Quotes* suggests that, although it is "absolutely delightful to read Austen in short bursts" (xi), as we see marketed on coffee mugs and T-shirts, we often need more context to truly appreciate the witticisms. Are the words coming from our hero or heroine, the narrator, or one of the comic characters readers are led to distrust?

Looser says that we "can begin reading this book on any page" (xiii), and we might even consider "a satisfying binge read" (xiv) of the entire book instead of spacing the entries out over the year. Each month begins with a long quote. The inclusion of excerpts from Austen's letters and juvenilia might encourage the uninitiated to peruse those works for the first time.

Each quote is labeled with helpful context. For example, "there is nothing like staying at home for real comfort" (July 24, p. 109) is attributed to Mrs. Elton, so readers of *Emma* might assume that we are not to take this idea seriously. Other quotes might take on new meaning, depending on when they are read: Marianne Dashwood's insistent question to Willoughby, "Will you not shake hands with me?" (January 12, p. 9) might be understood differently in a time of greeting by elbow bump. This passage from a letter in 1798—"I have made myself two or three caps to wear of evenings ... and they save me a world of torment as to hairdressing" (December 1, p. 179)—might suggest a new fashion trend for those who, unlike Frank Churchill, cannot travel to London for a haircut during a stay-at-home order.

A daily dose of Jane Austen might just "restore every body ... to tolerable comfort" (December 30, p. 193).

Lynda A. Hall is associate professor of English at Chapman University in Orange, California. A JASNA member for more than 30 years, she has presented at several AGMs and has had a number of papers published in Persuasions. Her monograph, Women and "Value" in Jane Austen's Novels: Settling, Speculating and Superfluity, was published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2017.

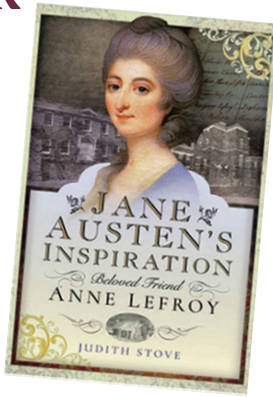
FRIEND AND MENTOR

Jane Austen's Inspiration: Beloved Friend Anne Lefroy

By Judith Stove

Pen & Sword (2019), viii + 263 pages
18 b/w illustrations, hardcover, \$39.95

Review by Peter Sabor



Jane Austen's admiration for her considerably older friend and mentor Anne Lefroy, née Brydges (1747/8–1804), is displayed in her poem "To the memory of Mrs. Lefroy, who died Decr. 16.—my birthday.—written 1808." It is, as Judith Stove observes, an exceptionally moving and reflective tribute, very different from Austen's characteristic light verse. Hitherto, the best source of information on Lefroy has been the work edited by her descendant Helen Lefroy with Gavin Turner, *The Letters of Mrs Lefroy: Jane Austen's Beloved Friend* (Jane Austen Society, 2007), which contains 140 letters by Lefroy, primarily to her son Christopher Edward (1785–1856), as well as a very useful introduction, "Anne Lefroy and her Family," and valuable biographical and topographical indexes.

Stove's task in *Jane Austen's Inspiration* is to throw new light on her subject, and in this she has certainly succeeded. Two chapters on the "Austen Connection," focusing on Austen's relationship with Lefroy, are followed by 15 others devoted to various aspects of Lefroy's life: her friends and family, her children, and her writings. Of particular interest are Stove's analyses of Lefroy's poems. Her verse was collected and published in an edition of 1812, edited by Christopher Edward, who titled the volume *Carmina Domestica* ("Domestic Songs") and noted that his mother wrote poetry primarily "in the early Part of Life." The poems of Austen and her family have been edited by David Selwyn; Lefroy's verse, most of it devoted to familial occasions, is worthy of further study, too.

Among Stove's most intriguing chapters is one on Lefroy's preoccupation with public health. Lefroy corresponded with Edward Jenner, the doctor who first undertook inoculation with cowpox matter to treat smallpox. She received vaccine material from him and began a vaccination program in her neighborhood of Ashe. Another fascinating chapter concerns Lefroy's interest in animals and plants. Here, Stove refers to an unpublished collection of watercolors by Lefroy titled "British Insects." This remains, however, in private hands, and Stove was apparently unable to examine the volume; a glimpse of it can be found in *The Letters of Mrs Lefroy*, in which an exquisite rendition of two dragonflies is taken from the manuscript.

Enjoyable and informative though it is, Stove's book could be improved in various ways. Its title is both ungrammatical and

overblown: Lefroy was more of a role model than an "inspiration" for Austen. To dismiss Lefroy's younger brother, Samuel Egerton Brydges, as "loud, overbearing, eccentric and long-winded" (vi) is unhelpful; he is a fascinating character in his own right. Too much strained speculation is placed on Lefroy's influence on Austen and her putative disapproval of Austen's friendship with Tom Lefroy (Anne's nephew). For her analysis of Austen's memorial poem on Lefroy, Stove should have consulted the relevant Cambridge edition, edited by Janet Todd and Linda Bree, which has the most filled-out account of the manuscripts. And the index is woefully inadequate: It will not, for instance, help readers locate Stove's accounts of Lefroy's writing for *The Gentleman's Magazine*. Nevertheless, much original material is here, including a discussion of an antislavery novel (freely available online), *Outalissi: A Tale of Dutch Guiana* (1826), by Christopher Edward. If only Austen had lived long enough to read and discuss it with Cassandra.

Peter Sabor holds a Canada Research Chair at McGill University in Montréal, where he is also director of the Burney Centre. He is principal investigator for the website Reading With Austen (readingwithausten.com).

MISSED OPPORTUNITY

Law and Economics in Jane Austen

By Lynne Marie Kohm and
Kathleen E. Akers

Lexington Books, Rowman & Littlefield
(2020)

xii + 153, 5 figures

Hardcover, \$90/ebook, \$85.50

Review by Susan Allen Ford

The title *Law and Economics in Jane Austen*, though not flashy, is immediately promising. Austen's fiction depends on matters legal and financial—from *Edgar and Emma's* Mr. Wilmot, possessed of "his paternal Estate, a considerable share in a Lead mine & a ticket in the Lottery" as well as 20 children, to Mr. Parker's speculations with Sanditon.

A collaboration between Lynne Marie Kohm, professor at Regent University School of Law, and

Kathleen E. Akers, associate at Epsilon Economics, should bring interesting insights into Austen's life and work. Unfortunately, the result is disappointing. Multiple times the authors assert that "much of what one could ever want to know about law and economics can be learned from Jane Austen" (e.g., 1, 5, 137). That may be true, but *Law and Economics in Jane Austen* is not an effective lesson, especially not for careful readers of Austen.



The authors promise a "light but substantive" discussion, "at least slightly entertaining while you are learning some basic law and some basic economics" (1). Chapter 1 sets up the principles of "love, law, and economics according to Jane" (7): Adam Smith's concept of the invisible hand; laws and economics related to estates and marriage proposals; family law, including spousal and child support and marital contracts; opportunity cost; and "economies of grace" (19), of which Elinor Dashwood's forgiveness of Willoughby is the example. With the exception of Smith's invisible hand, most of these concepts (at least as developed here) seem fairly straightforward. Further development of Smith's idea of the force that guides even the selfish acts of an individual to public benefit would be helpful, particularly as a concept that informs Austen's understanding of the world.

In general, the historical background is thin, and little scholarship on Austen (not even the standard biographies) seems to have been consulted. Many sections focus on current legal and economic circumstances, including online dating and changes in marriage laws, inheritance laws, and laws involving children. For me, this shift distracts from my interest in learning more about law and economics in Austen's world (though it suits the claim that we can read Austen to learn about law and economics). In fact, the discussion of Austen's characters is often hasty and sometimes even wrong: Fanny Price is not her mother's "precious eldest daughter" (19); Maria Bertram is not "impoverished" as a result of her affair with Henry Crawford (52)—her father supports her "in every comfort"; Isabella Thorpe's sexual fall is assumed (60) though there's no hard evidence (except in Andrew Davies' 2007 version), and, in economic terms, her premature jump to the better deal that Captain Tilney seems to offer might prove more interesting. In addition to these misreadings, the book includes many awkward and even ungrammatical sentence structures as well as grammatical and spelling errors.

This subject could greatly enrich our reading of Jane Austen. Unfortunately, *Law and Economics in Jane Austen* fails to do it justice.

Susan Allen Ford is editor of *Persuasions and Persuasions On-Line*.

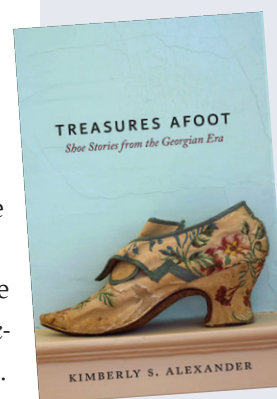
Fashionable Austen

Put your best Regency foot forward while learning more about the era's fashions.

***Dress in the Age of Jane Austen: Regency Fashion* (2019) by Hilary Davidson** Fashion historian Hilary Davidson—who was chosen by the Hampshire Museums and Archives Service to create a replica of Austen's brown silk pelisse, the only known garment associated with the author—wrote this tome after discovering the dearth of writing on the subject of Regency fashion. Beautifully illustrated and full of interesting details, the book also provides new insights into Austen's work and era.



***Treasures Afoot: Shoe Stories from the Georgian Era* (2018) by Kimberly Alexander** Explore how shoes were made, sold, and worn during the 18th century, both in England and America. Kimberly Alexander—a professor of museum studies, material culture, and American history at the University of New Hampshire—spent eight years researching footwear from 30 collections and reviewing thousands of original letters and manuscripts.



***Fashion Victims: Dress at the Court of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette* (2015) by Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell** This well-researched, lavishly illustrated book focuses on the other side of the English Channel in the late 18th century (albeit pre-Regency as well as pre-revolutionary). It chronicles the imaginative trends and colorful personalities of the era as well as fashion's surprising influence on the revolution itself. Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell is a fashion historian, curator, and journalist who has written for *The Atlantic*, *Politico*, and *The Wall Street Journal* and lectured at museums and universities around the world.



***Fashion in the Time of Jane Austen* (2010) by Sarah Jane Downing**

The highlights of this thin volume are the plentiful photographs and illustrations as well as the focus on Austen and her subtle use of fashion to distinguish her characters. Sarah Jane Downing has also written about fashion in Shakespeare's era.



A GOTHIC SEQUEL—WITH A RATIONAL BUT STILL CURIOUS HEROINE

The Bride of Northanger: A Jane Austen Variation

By Diana Birchall
White Soup Press (2019)
224 pages
Paperback, \$11.99
ebook, \$4.99

Review by Elizabeth Veisz



Northanger Abbey boasts few sequels and retellings. Luckily, we now have Diana Birchall's delightful, thought-provoking *The Bride of Northanger*.

Henry Tilney makes a confession on the eve of his wedding to Catherine Morland, a year after their engagement. According to legend, the last abbot of Northanger Abbey placed a curse on the Tilney heirs, dooming their wives to early deaths. Henry is not the direct heir, and belief in curses “would neither be rational nor right” (5). Yet the misfortunes that *have* befallen Tilney wives cause an unease that deepens when an anonymous note warns Catherine—now Mrs. Tilney—to “Depart the Abbey ... and nevermore return” (40). So begins a well-paced series of events involving poison, a grey lady, and coded warnings engraved on china teacups.

The characterization in *The Bride of Northanger* is particularly satisfying, as Birchall fleshes out characters like Eleanor Tilney's husband, a charmingly eccentric naturalist. Those we love to hate appear, too; in a moment ensuring spectacular drama to come, Isabella Thorpe enters, “beaming an artificial smile beneath her fashionable ostrich-feathered bonnet” (140).

I won't spoil any narrative twists. Suffice it to say that *The Bride of Northanger* will excite readers who wish Catherine Morland could have become enlightened without entirely abandoning her curiosity. In fact, I would have liked even more sleuthing. Still, I can give no higher praise to a book than that it kept me absorbed and entertained in the midst of a pandemic! I have no doubt that it will grab many other Austen readers and Gothic aficionados as well.

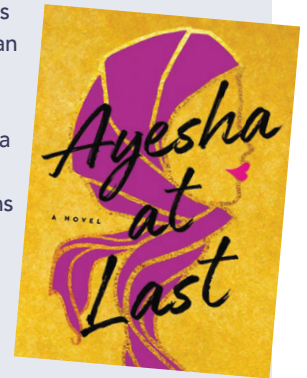
Elizabeth Veisz is an associate professor of English at Bridgewater State University in southeastern Massachusetts. She specializes in British literature of the Restoration and 18th century.

Multicultural Austen

One of the universal truths about *Pride and Prejudice* is how relevant the story remains today—for 21st century audiences of all backgrounds and in settings around the globe. Here are a few recent retellings set in different cultures.

***Ayesha at Last* (2019) by Uzma Jalaluddin**

“Come for Darcy reimagined as a hyper-conservative young man and Elizabeth Bennet as a wannabe poet frustrated by family obligation; stay for Uzma Jalaluddin's warm portrait of life for twentysomething Muslims in suburban Toronto struggling to honor their heritage while pursuing their dreams,” according to the review from *The Globe and Mail*.



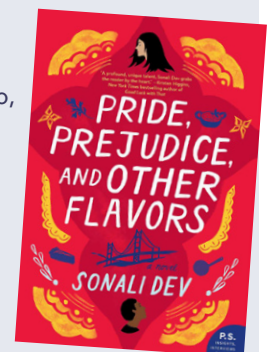
***Pride* (2018) by Ibi Zoboi**

This Afro-Latinx take on Austen's classic is set in a rapidly gentrifying Brooklyn neighborhood. Poet Zuri Benitez (Elizabeth) is applying to college when the rich Darcy family moves to her diverse community, raising her socially conscious ire. Her romantic tension with Darius Darcy is compounded by the gulf between their socioeconomic status and life experiences.



***Pride, Prejudice, and Other Flavors* (2019) by Sonali Dev**

This version, set in San Francisco, centers on an Indian American family. It also flips the Bennet/Darcy social status: Trisha Raje (Elizabeth) is a brilliant neurosurgeon and DJ Caine (Darcy) is a less affluent, up-and-coming chef.



***Unmarriageable* (2019) by Soniah Kamal**

The NPR review calls this novel “a deliciously readable romantic comedy and a commentary on class in post-colonial, post-partition Pakistan.” JASNA member Kamal says she fell in love at 16 with “Austen's ability to capture the characters' hypocrisies and double standards.”



FINDING AUSTEN AMONG THE MIDLING FOLK

The Lost Books of Jane Austen

By Janine Barchas

Johns Hopkins University Press (2019), xv + 284 pages
Illustrated throughout in color and b/w, hardcover, \$35

Review by Deborah Barnum

Janine Barchas was born to write this book. Her insights, emphasis on the visual, ability to connect seemingly disparate concepts, and, best of all, (often wicked) wit make her the perfect author to give us *The Lost Books of Jane Austen*. Her website What Jane Saw (through which we can experience the 1813 Reynolds Retrospective and the 1796 Shakespeare Gallery), writings and talks on book history, and study of the covers of Austen novels have all led her down a book-adventure rabbit hole for the ages.

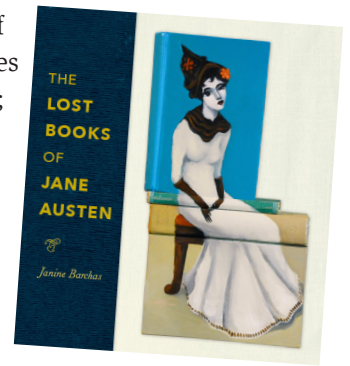
Her search for earlier unrecorded editions, which yielded all manner of covers and human stories connected to the books, has given the science of bibliography a whole new life. For the past decade, she has been researching, finding, and collecting all that is now inside the pages of this gorgeously illustrated book, where, as Barchas says, “hardcore bibliography meets *Antiques Roadshow*” (xi).

I’m a bookseller, a collector, and a bibliographer, so this book seems to be written just for me! I laughed, I cried, I learned—I was wowed! But even if your interests are not so aligned, any interest in Austen or book history will keep you thrillingly engaged.

Those of us who read and reread Jane Austen are often collectors of the varieties of books and objects that have any connection to her. Serious collectors (most unable to afford higher-end first editions) must content themselves with the many other possibilities—and the bible in this endeavor has long been David Gilson’s *A Bibliography of Jane Austen* (rev. ed. 1997). Yet, only if you read Gilson straight through do you get a true sense of Austen’s changing popularity through 200 years of first editions, illustrated editions, scholarly editions, foreign editions, and adapted editions for plays, schools, and young readers. Gilson of course is incomplete, as he avows himself in telling of a friend who has spent his collecting efforts and monies on “works not in Gilson.” Bibliography and scholarly collections are by their nature exclusive, focusing on the best and giving little credence to anything of lesser quality.

But as Barchas now so eloquently and entertainingly presents, the true understanding of an author’s historical readership and cultural standing must depend on knowledge of any and all works published and marketed to various levels of a reading public. The problem is the lack of sources—as these works, most often printed on poor paper with cheap bindings and little chance of surviving time or the rigors of multiple readings, have largely disappeared.

Barchas shares stories of the publishing companies (Jane the moneymaker); their continual reuse of the same plates to make cheaper “dodgy reprints” for ordinary people (27); their efforts to package Austen for the lower working classes



(no leather bindings for them), travelers (books at railway kiosks), students (the valued prize books), and religious groups (Jane the virtuous); advertising (*Sense and Sensibility* sells soap); the cheapest of paperbacks (beginnings of pulp); directed marketing to ladies (pink-laden chick lit); selling the scholarly Jane (covers with classic paintings); and Jane for soldiers (armed services editions). All of these gave their intended audience a certain piece of Austen. Add them all together to find an author far removed from that of the Oxford scholars who embraced her as their own “Dear Jane.” How delightful it is to see how much she was enjoyed by *all* classes. As Barchas writes, “before she was great, she was popular” (xv).

Many of us love a used book that offers personal names, dates, and marginalia of previous owners, all of which relate a story beyond the author’s narrative. In the seven “vignettes” of found books, Barchas—researching census, birth, and marriage records—tells the tales of lives lived or cut short, and how their beloved copy of an Austen novel may have come into their hands. Each of these stories personalizes the reader and is a delightful add-on to the fascinating history of Austen printed for everyone.

Lost Books ends with a call to action. With all her brilliant finds, Barchas knows this historical record of Austen in print remains “gobsmackingly incomplete” (241). Who knows how many of you in the wide world have such old and tattered Austen books on your shelves, in your attics? If you do, please contact Barchas. Her hope is to create a digital visual bibliography of these very fascinating Austens through the ages—Austens for all.

Deborah Barnum is a bookseller, authors the Jane Austen in Vermont and Reading With Austen blogs, compiles the annual Jane Austen and Frances Burney bibliographies, is a JASNA Life Member, and is a board member of the North American Friends of Chawton House.

IMAGINATIVE TRUTH

Midnight: Three Women at the Hour of Reckoning

By Victoria Shorr

W. W. Norton & Company (2019)

299 pages, hardcover, \$29.95

Review by Nora Nachumi

Biography is an odd creature. Its mandate—to portray individuals by depicting their lives—requires imagination and art, but also allegiance to facts. In *Midnight: Three Women at the Hour of Reckoning*, Victoria Shorr embraces the challenge, elucidating life-altering moments for Jane Austen, Mary Shelley, and Joan of Arc.

The book is constructed as three vignettes, each grounded in research; the major events Shorr recounts really occurred. The three pieces, however, are not biographies but recreations. Shorr takes readers into the minds of her protagonists and in doing so conveys an imaginative truth that exists beyond—or alongside—the realm of verifiable fact.

The first piece in the volume, “Jane Austen at Midnight,” concerns Austen’s decision not to marry Harris Bigg-Wither, whose proposal she had accepted a few hours before. It begins with Austen’s arrival at the Bigg-Wither family’s estate. The story—which includes flashbacks—primarily alternates between third-person narration and free indirect discourse; occasional first-person snippets from Austen’s letters are included as well. Yet Austen’s actual voice—which is brisk and ironic—remains somewhat elusive. Instead, Shorr’s Austen seems rather depressed. And why wouldn’t she be? Shorr does an excellent job of conveying the dreary lot of impoverished spinsters.

Under the circumstances, Austen’s initial acceptance of the proposal from Bigg-Wither—whom she didn’t love—made a great deal of sense. “She saw her life ... flip from black to white. ... She was poor; she would be rich. She was last at the table; she would be first” (26). Shorr’s use of free indirect discourse in this moment is the move of a novelist, one that places the reader inside her heroine’s head. Her description of Austen’s reversal is fiction as well, for Austen left no account of her own experience of that night. We have information, however, about what transpired on subsequent days. Shorr’s accounts of Austen’s hasty departure, the difficult time that followed, and her eventual success as an author are grounded in fact. The contrast raises a question: In depicting real people, how much creative freedom should a writer take?

The second vignette, “Mary Shelley on the Beach,” occurs in 1802, shortly before Shelley learns that her husband, poet Percy Shelley, has drowned while sailing in the Bay of Spezia, Italy. Like “Jane Austen at Midnight,” it includes vivid flashbacks. This time, however, everything is filtered through Shelley’s consciousness. The result is

an arresting portrait of a woman barely aware of her genius, and whose love for her husband requires an almost superhuman ability to withstand, deny, and survive betrayal and loss.

“Joan of Arc in Chains” is arguably the most accomplished piece in the collection. Spanning six days, it illustrates the Maid of Orléans’ experience from the moment she temporarily recants having received divine guidance through her death while being burned alive at the stake. As in the other two sections, Shorr uses flashbacks to reconstruct the events leading up to Joan of Arc’s death. The information is conveyed almost exclusively through the protagonist’s memories. These are much less vivid, however, than her thoughts and emotions as she grapples with her terror and faith.

Considered together, the vignettes in *Midnight* call attention to the challenges that each woman faced, particularly because of limitations imposed on their gender. Shorr’s recreations of Austen, Shelley, and Saint Joan at their moments of reckoning are striking representations of three memorable women. As such, they invite us to think about the characters and choices of the originals.

Nora Nachumi is an associate professor in the Department of English at Stern College for Women/Yeshiva University.



READING WITH AUSTEN

Take a virtual tour of the Godmersham Park library—as seen through the eyes of Jane Austen on a visit to the home of her brother Edward Austen Knight.

The Reading With Austen project digitally recreates the library based on an extant handwritten catalog that lists all the books in the collection and their exact locations on the shelves.

Visit readingwithausten.com.

A MOVING PORTRAYAL OF CASSANDRA

Miss Austen

By Gill Hornby
Flatiron Books (2020), 268 pages
Hardcover, \$26.99

Review by Diana Birchall

What could be more welcome to anyone who loves reading about Jane Austen's life and family than a credible, sensitively written novel with her sister Cassandra as heroine, portraying her as a fully fleshed out and plausible being?

Author Gill Hornby has recreated Cassandra's life so knowledgeably that we lose ourselves in her 1840s world, when, as an old woman, she visits a family of longtime friends, the Fowles. Through her memories, we see her long-ago engagement to Tom Fowle, who died tragically young, leaving Cassandra to another fate: becoming a lifelong spinster and devoted companion to her gifted sister, Jane. Now, Cassandra has an urgent mission: to find letters written by her sister and, if they might imperil her literary legacy, burn them.

In Hornby's hands, the natural and sympathetic Cassandra provides insights into the condition of an unmarried older woman in her era. Her family and friends are deftly handled—and, if the minutiae of the relationships may be a bit too dry and prosaic for the non-Austen geek, the riveting promise of a major mystery remains: What was in those letters that Cassandra burned?

Unfortunately the answer is a letdown, with little enlightenment beyond hints at Jane's depression. Also disappointing are the attempts to imitate Jane Austen's own letters, using rather limp modern phraseology. Scenes where the author appears show her in two modes—as Cassandra puts it, “sullen and silent, or brittle and wicked”—seem not much like the Austen we know. But despite ultimately running out of steam, this remains an impressively accomplished piece of historical fiction with a moving portrayal of Cassandra that is sufficient reward in itself.



LITERARY SLEUTHING

In Search of Jane Austen: An Investigation of a Life

By Ken Method, AIA Publishing (2019)
220 pages, paperback, \$12.99

Review by Diana Birchall

Sarah Kedron is an accomplished heroine—a former actress, successful playwright, and literary sleuth. She is approached by James Stanier Clarke, librarian to the Prince Regent, who wishes her to undertake an investigation into the career of the recently deceased author Jane Austen.



The prince was disturbed by Austen's unenthusiastic response to his patronage and entertains a theory that she may not have been the author of all her works. Sarah, who admires Austen and wants to know the truth, recruits her artist friend, Elizabeth, to accompany her as she interviews Austen's publishers, examines her Winchester grave bearing her brother Henry Austen's anodyne inscription, and meets the polite but guarded man himself. Henry's former partner, Tilson, tells Sarah about his colleague's glamorous late wife, the Comtesse Eliza de Feuillide, who he hints was Austen's mentor and inspiration—an opinion reinforced by Jane's hostile sister-in-law, Mary.

Views on Jane Austen vary, from her niece Fanny's looking down on her as a poor relation to her friend Anne Sharp's characterizing Austen as having been restrained by the controlling Cassandra. Cassandra herself is not forthcoming and abruptly closes the door on Sarah. The adventure ends, but much is still hidden.

The device of a sprightly female detective conducting a Cook's tour of Austen's associates, friends, and family successfully creates the feeling of looking over Sarah's shoulder during some intriguing interviews. The conclusions are less satisfying, as Austen is glimpsed as a rather sour, rude creature, while the plagiarism implications are unworthy. Still, the investigation itself has the pleasing immediacy of a brisk romp into literary history that is fresh and fun.

Diana Birchall, recently retired from her career as a story analyst at Warner Bros., is the author of numerous Austenesque stories, novels, and plays, as well as a biography of her own grandmother, the first Asian American novelist.

Flatiron Books is giving away a copy of *Miss Austen* to a JASNA News reader. We will randomly draw a winner from among the first 100 members to write to jasnanews@gmail.com with the subject line “Miss Austen giveaway.”

THE BRONTË BACKSTORY

The Mother of the Brontës: When Maria Met Patrick

By Sharon Wright

Pen and Sword Books (2019), xi + 182 pages

32 b/w illustrations, hardcover, \$39.95

Review by Marsha Huff

Sharon Wright, author of *The Mother of the Brontës*, calls her biography the “Brontë backstory ... the prequel.” While a great deal has been written about the father of the famous siblings—Charlotte, Emily, Anne, and Branwell—little is known about their mother. Wright’s book fills that gap in the family history. Even those not interested in the Brontës, however, may appreciate the quiet drama of the life of a woman who was a near-contemporary of Jane Austen.

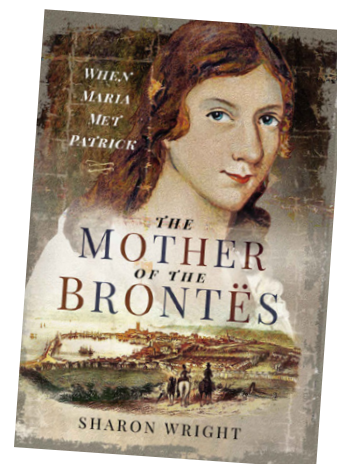
Maria Branwell was born April 15, 1783, in Penzance, a busy seaport and market town in southwest Cornwall. Her family, one of the most important in Penzance, lived in a handsome Georgian house in the center of the city.

The Branwells were followers of John Wesley, the charismatic evangelical Anglican minister. Piety was thus a theme of Maria’s youth, but she also enjoyed the life of a well-heeled young lady in Penzance, which had its own theater and assembly rooms. She was an avid reader and belonged to the Penzance Ladies Book Club, whose eclectic reading lists included gothic novels and Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility*. Maria subscribed to *The Lady’s Magazine*, a London monthly that included serialized novels; her daughter Charlotte later treasured the bound volumes inherited from her mother.

On the death of their father, Maria and her sisters each received £50 a year, allowing them to establish a comfortable home after their brother inherited the family property. Maria said about that period that she was “perfectly [her] own mistress.”

When in 1812 her aunt and uncle in distant Yorkshire requested that she assist at their new school for the sons of evangelical ministers, Maria decided to go, always assuming she would return to her

contented life in Cornwall. But soon after arriving in Yorkshire, 29-year-old Maria met Patrick Brontë, a 35-year-old evangelical Anglican minister, originally from Ireland, and, in the course of two months, they were engaged.



Her daughters must have later enjoyed the story of Patrick’s proposal, staged in the picturesque ruins of medieval Kirkstall Abbey. Within six months of the wedding, Mrs. Brontë was pregnant, establishing the pattern of her married life—a baby each year. Little Maria was born in 1814, followed by Elizabeth, Charlotte, Patrick Branwell, Emily, and Anne.

The Brontë family had been happily settled less than a year in their new parish in Haworth when Maria collapsed, probably suffering from cervical cancer. She died eight months later, at the age of 39. During her painful illness, she would often cry, “Oh, my poor children!” Maria was only 7 years old and Anne 20 months. Mrs. Brontë did not live to see the early death of her two oldest children or the remarkable achievements of her surviving daughters.

Wright, a journalist and playwright, is adept at evoking Maria’s life through details of her family and friends and the distinctive atmosphere of her homes in Cornwall and Yorkshire. The biography would benefit from the scholarly citation of all quoted sources.

Marsha Huff was president of JASNA from 2006 to 2010.

CHAWTON HOUSE READING SELECTIONS

For further inspiration—aren’t you always looking for the next thing to read?—consider some of these titles that the reading group at Chawton House discussed at its monthly gatherings in 2019–20.

- *Adeline Mowbray* by Amelia Opie
- *Anecdotes of the Late Samuel Johnson* by Hester Lynch Piozzi (aka Hester Thrale)
- *The Busie Body* by Susanna Centlivre
- *Fanny Hill: Or Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* by John Cleland
- *The Innocent Mistress* by Mary Pix
- *Mansfield Park* by Jane Austen
- *Millenium Hall* by Sarah Scott
- *Original Stories from Real Life* by Mary Wollstonecraft
- *Thaddeus of Warsaw* by Jane Porter
- *The Witlings* by Frances Burney

SECRETS AND LIES

Undeceived: Pride & Prejudice in the Spy Game

By Karen M. Cox, Adalia Street Press (2019)
334 pages, paperback, \$11.99/ebook, \$4.99

Review by Nora Foster Stovel

In *Undeceived*, subtitled *Pride & Prejudice in the Spy Game*, the late Karen M. Cox dramatically translates Austen's classic into a spy novel set during the Cold War.

Darcy, aka Darby Kent, known as the "London Fog," is an entrenched member of the CIA. Elizabeth Bennet, known as Beth or Liz—but thought of simply as "She" by Darcy—is the daughter of a CIA agent who died in the Bay of Pigs debacle. She is determined to follow in her father's footsteps, despite her mother's protests.

"It is a truth, universally acknowledged that, when a young woman decides to follow her late father's career path—especially when her father died in pursuit of said career—her mother will be vehemently opposed to that plan of action" (7). Elizabeth is assigned to investigate the "mole" or double agent responsible for a fiasco involving Darcy that happened in Prague the previous year. Wickham is her "handler" and she his "asset."

In her acknowledgments, Cox calls *Undeceived* "a major undertaking: over two years of research, reading, postulating, writing and editing that was by turns exhilarating and challenging" (323). She even includes a glossary of espionage terms (321–22).

Her translation of Austen's Regency tale into a spy novel is ingenious. Darcy's famous letter to Elizabeth is in the form of a package labeled "Top Secret: Sensitive Compartmentalized Information"

that contains a cassette tape and files on Wickham.

Cox is inventive in fitting Austen's characters into a Cold War mold, with Mr. Hurst as American ambassador to Hungary and Charlotte Lucas as an FBI agent, although Elizabeth and Darcy are definitely modern people.

He is an accomplished pilot and she is not only a linguist but a dancer to boot. Wickham is even more wicked than Austen could possibly conceive, while "Bill" Collins will surprise Cox's readers. A kind of Lucifer figure, he harbors "a devastating little secret" (13). We don't discover his identity or his secret until the end of the novel. When I finished reading Cox's book, armed with this new information, I went back to reread the monologues that had puzzled me.

Janeites can be in no doubt about how Darcy and Elizabeth's relationship ends—although Cox has some surprises in store for other characters—but she does give us something Austen denies us: steamy sex scenes.

Nora Foster Stovel is a professor emerita of English and film studies at the University of Alberta, and author of Divining Margaret Laurence: A Study of Her Complete Writings.



ANIMAL INSTINCTS

While Jane Austen wrote that Lydia Bennet had "high animal spirits," it seems unlikely that Austen could have envisioned the plethora of mashups of her characters with actual cats, dogs, and other creatures.

Classic Tails: Pugs & Prejudice The illustrations are quite lovely and often hilarious (e.g., the Bennets at dinner at "Longbone," with a fine family of pugs and one cat, named Kitty). Lady Bertram would most certainly approve.

A Guinea Pig Pride & Prejudice Austen scholar Devoney Looser admits to having a copy of this classic—"strictly for research purposes."

Pride and Prejudice and Kitties *The Wall Street Journal* says this book is "for those who like their Regency romances with funny pictures of cats."

Mister Darcy's Dogs Lizzie Bennet is a dog psychologist in this "comedic mystery" series in which Mr. Darcy is training his basset hounds for "an important foxhunt." There's even an audiobook version, so you can listen with your pets.

