

My Dear Cassandra...

“At first sight, Jane Austen’s manner and matter may seem to be old-fashioned, stilted, unreal. But this is a delusion to which the bad reader succumbs.”

Vladimir Babokov, Russian/American novelist

“Happy birthday, dear Jane, Happy birthday to you!”

Please join us for our annual celebration of Jane Austen’s birthday! Our next meeting on Saturday, November 18 is at the regular time (2:00 – 4:00), but across the hall from our usual gathering place. We are using Meeting Room #1 this month as it is larger and we are hoping you will bring a guest along to hear our speaker Professor Aubrey McPhail from the English Department of Mount Royal College. We are all familiar with Miss Elizabeth Bennet. Jane Austen once said of her character, "I must confess . . . that I think her as delightful a creature as ever appeared in print," and readers and literary critics alike have consistently stressed that Elizabeth's education in the *Pride and Prejudice* is made possible by certain traits that she possesses: vivacity, wit, intelligence, curiosity, independence and physical vitality. These traits are said to almost guarantee Elizabeth's eventual triumph. In Aubrey McPhail's talk, "Elizabeth Bennet: Community and the Failure of Wonder," he will argue that this is not so clear, and that Elizabeth must overcome much more than her particular prejudice towards Mr. Darcy.

It promises to be an interesting afternoon, and of course there will be tea and birthday cake to follow the presentation. Please let Elvee Fenning know if you are planning to bring guests so she can arrange for sufficient cake! Her number is 281-5298.

Online Book Discussion.

The Bergen County (New Jersey) Cooperative Library System is featuring its first ever online book discussion. They have selected *Pride and Prejudice* for this event which will take place on November 8th. There will be two discussions, the first at 4:00 PM EST and the second at 7 PM EST. The library is extending a special invitation to all JASNA members to participate in either or both of the discussions. Check their website at www.bccls.org for more details.

Jane Austen and the Navy

I have just found out about a new book with reference to Jane Austen. It is called "Jane Austen and the Navy". Written by Brian Southam at £12.99 - ISBN:0948065656. Jane Austen and the Navy reveals Austen, both of whose brothers became Admirals, as an historian of Nelson's navy. However, this is not the navy of Nelson's victorious battles but the navy at home in Britain. Based upon biographies, family records and naval documents, it carefully presents the author's illustration of seamen among their family and friends. These and other publications are available by contacting the National Maritime Museum on www.nmm.ac.uk/publishing. Michelle Sharman

(How about this for a great Christmas gift) So Fine a Brush

All Things Austen: An Encyclopedia of Austen's World (2 Vols.)

By Kristin Olsen.

Greenwood Press, 2005. xxii + 804 pages.

157 B/W illustrations, incl. 12 maps.

Hardcover. \$149.95.

Reviewed by Carrie Bebris.

"Heaven forbid that I should ever offer such encouragement to explanations as to give a clear one on any occasion myself!" Jane Austen wrote to her sister, Cassandra, in 1799. And in her fiction, Austen did not need to explain much. She wrote about the world she knew to an audience who knew it equally well. When she shows John Thorpe rattling on about his gig and Henry Crawford driving a barouche, her contemporaries understood that Thorpe boasts about the Regency equivalent of a used sports car, while Crawford owns a vehicle as fair-weather as he is.

As readers two centuries removed from Austen, however, we don't realize how much of her shorthand we're missing. We might know or gather from context that gigs and barouches are types of carriages, but fail to catch the subtext. "One misses a great deal of what she says about character and fails to appreciate the truly elegant economy of her language without a full comprehension of the objects and ideas to which she refers," writes author Kristen Olsen in the introduction to *All Things Austen: An Encyclopedia of Austen's World*.

Other books, such as Daniel Pool's *What Jane Austen Ate and Charles Dickens Knew*, have attempted to fill in these gaps of knowledge for the modern reader. But while Poole's book focuses more on the Victorian period, *All Things Austen* provides an impressive amount of well-researched information specific to Austen's era, in a user-friendly format that enables readers easily to navigate not only the encyclopedia's 800+ pages but also relevant references in Austen's works themselves.

The bulk of the encyclopedia comprises alphabetized articles on more than 150 topics

from Agriculture to Zephyr. These straightforward but engagingly written discussions place their subjects in both historical and Austenian context. Enhanced by numerous illustrations, they include entries on the details of daily life (clothing, food, money, and servants), political, cultural, and social institutions (government, marriage, law, medicine, and religion), major events (French Revolution, Napoleonic Wars), and more. Olsen covers the frivolous and the far-reaching (an article on “Pocketbooks and Reticules” is followed by “Politics and Government”), the seemly and the scandalous (etiquette, illegitimacy).

Article lengths vary widely, as appropriate; two sentences define “under-hung” (as uttered by Sir Walter Elliot), while the “Navy” discussion runs forty pages. Entries on subjects of large scope offer a basic overview and enough essentials to understand Austen’s references; readers who require additional information will appreciate the extensive bibliography.

Some articles go into great depth. “Cards” (20 pages) includes not only the rules for nearly every game Austen’s characters play, but also how Austen’s choice of games in particular scenes contribute to character delineation or dynamics. We learn, for example, that the game of lottery tickets suits the flighty Lydia Bennet because it is a game of pure luck (unlike the more cerebral whist), and how games that require a set number of players (as opposed to a “round” game), might lead to the inclusion or exclusion of individuals to make up a table. When Lady Catherine summons Mr. Collins to Rosings for an evening of quadrille, it is not for his conversation.

From Catherine Morland’s solo homecoming to the Austen family’s own journeys, the logistics of travel are often a subject of concern or discourse in Austen’s fiction and letters. The extensive “Carriages and Coaches” article demystifies the details, including subsections on parts of a carriage, staff, costs, and driving. The discussion continues in separate articles on specific vehicles, horses, and travel in general—altogether, fifty-one pages with sixteen illustrations explain how one got around in Regency England (not including the entry on walking). If you want to know more about where everyone was going, “Places” offers details, maps, and textual references for nearly all the real (and some imaginary) locations mentioned in Austen’s fiction, from Antigua to York to Timbuktu. Separate entries on Bath and London cover these cities in even more depth.

A twenty-eight-page timeline juxtaposes events in the Austen family with concurrent political, military, religious, cultural, medical, technological, and scientific happenings in the larger world. The “Guide to Related Topics” and internal cross-references link associated articles for efficient fact-finding, and citations embedded in the articles refer readers to relevant passages in Austen’s fiction, including specific Juvenilia works.

For the casual Austen reader, *All Things Austen* enhances one’s appreciation of her novels by illuminating nuances otherwise missed. For writers, scholars, and other professionals who need to understand the intricacies of life in Regency England as intimately as we know our own, this encyclopedia will no doubt become a favorite and much-used reference.

Carrie Bebris (www.carriebebris.com) is the author of the critically praised Mr. & Mrs. Darcy mystery series. Her latest novel, North by Northanger (Or, The Shades of Pemberley) was released in March 2006.

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....and now a word about our very own Jane Austen “Mobile” Library

When was the last time you browsed the book boxes?
Did you know we have in excess of 80 books, two videos and documents.
Just think of finding a book you haven't read!!!! Mind boggling, isn't it!
Not only would you derive great please from reading or watching Jane's stuff you could
lighten the load for Jennifer.....and..... we are even cheaper and
easier then the Calgary Public Library.

Remember, ages ago, we had a limerick contest?

Well..... I still have some of the entries.

Both of these are from Wendy Williams.

Thank you, Wendy.

There once was a writer named Jane Whose reputation seems sure to remain The best of the best She beats all the rest And drives male writers insane.	Mrs. Bennett with daughters to marry Should never delay or tarry, To marry them off To a lord or a toff Or even to Tom Dick or Harry.
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Some dates to remember.

January 21, 2007: “Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner” Plan a ‘successful’ party or the ‘dinner party from Hell’. Groups will prepare a guest list of Austen characters along with a seating plan and menu!

March 18: Catered lunch at Fort Calgary, with music and dancing as you arrive, followed by speakers on Regency art and fashion.

May 12: TBA Keep watching this space.

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