



# The Austen Scribbler

August 2010



## THREE "SENSIBLE" EVENTS

While reading Jane Austen's books will always be the essential way to appreciate her work, other approaches can provide additional insights into her genius. This fall and winter, we are presenting three events that invite us to use our senses as well as our close reading skills.

In September, JASNA President Marsha Huff adds a visual element to our appreciation of Austen, comparing the ways in which Austen and Jan Vermeer portrayed female domesticity and conveyed the interior life of their subjects. In October, British actor Angela Barlow engages our listening and observational skills as well as our emotions, providing portrayals of favorite Austen characters. Finally, in December, we'll experience the sounds, sights, and activity of the ballroom to understand why dances were such a high point in the lives of Austen's characters.

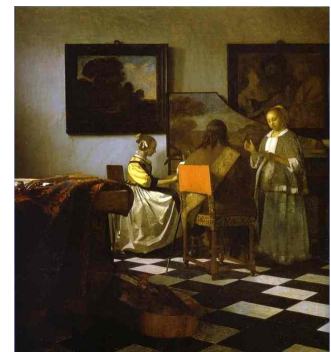
**Please read this newsletter carefully** -- It contains the registration forms for the September, October, and December events and offers the opportunity to get a "Season Ticket" for all three meetings at a special reduced rate. We look forward to seeing you this fall and winter, and hope you will find (to borrow a phrase from *Emma*) your senses bewitched and your judgment satisfied.

## SEPTEMBER 20: JANE AUSTEN AND JAN VERMEER



What do Jane Austen and Dutch artist Jan Vermeer have in common? Find out on Monday, September 20, at 7 pm, when JASNA President Marsha Huff visits Washington to deliver her illustrated talk "Viewing Austen through Vermeer's Camera Obscura." Although Jan (or Johannes) Vermeer lived in the 17th century and Austen in the 18th, both used their talents to depict female domestic life with fine precision. Huff's Austen/Vermeer talk is a wonderful exploration of several of Vermeer's paintings, building on what Sir Walter Scott wrote in his review of *Emma*, in which he likened Austen's talents to the Flemish School of painting: "The subjects are not often elegant, and certainly never grand; but they are finished up to nature, and with a precision which delights the reader."

Our JASNA President will pair Vermeer paintings with scenes from Austen's novels. She will offer, among others, a visual comparison of Vermeer's "The Concert" (at right) to the party at the Coles' in *Emma*; "The Music Lesson" to Elizabeth performing at Rosings for Colonel Fitzwilliam and Mr. Darcy; and "Lady Reading a Letter" to the various scenes in Austen of heroines reading letters: Elinor Dashwood, Fanny Price, Emma Woodhouse, Anne Elliot, and Elizabeth Bennet. These are just a few examples, and you must see and hear this talk in order to understand the connections fully.



We are very pleased to sponsor this event in cooperation with The Royal Netherlands Embassy. The Ambassador has graciously allowed us to hold the presentation in her Residence, which, with its many fine examples of Dutch art, will be the ideal venue for Marsha's talk. There will be time afterwards for questions and refreshments. (Wait until you see the splendid library! Enough books to please Mr. Darcy, and a chimney-piece Mr. Collins would appreciate!)

**Registration Deadline:** Space is limited, so please send in your form as soon as possible, but *no later than August 31*. This is a firm deadline, so that we can comply with the planning needs of our hosts at the Embassy.

**Location and Travel Details:** The Royal Netherlands Embassy Residence is located at 2347 S Street, N.W., just off Massachusetts Avenue in Washington, DC. Members who are familiar with the Embassy Row area will know that parking is extremely limited. You may be lucky enough to find a spot, but you may prefer to take Metro to Dupont Circle and make the half-mile walk or take a taxi. The Residence has some handicapped access. There is a ramp from the sidewalk to the hallway, but there are three stairs from the hall down to the elevator area. There may be a ramp by the time our meeting is scheduled; if this is a concern, please call Debra Roush at 301-927-1496 and she will find out whether the new ramp is available.

## OCTOBER 16: ANGELA BARLOW'S "JANE AUSTEN & CHARACTER"

On October 16, please join us at noon for a presentation by British actor and writer Angela Barlow entitled "Jane Austen & Character: An Actor's View." Ms. Barlow will examine the methods Austen might have used to create her inspired range of complex characters, drawing intriguing parallels with the actor's process of building a role. Using lively characterizations from Austen's novels to illustrate her points, Ms. Barlow brings you Catherine Morland, Isabella Thorpe, Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, Emma, and many other favorites. Ms. Barlow, who has three decades of experience in theater, film, and television, will also present this program at the AGM, so if you can't make it to Portland, come and see her close to home -- and if you are going to the AGM, why not get a preview?



Before Ms. Barlow's presentation, we will enjoy a catered three-course lunch buffet:

Mesclun with balsamic vinaigrette  
Vegetable lasagna  
Rosemary chicken  
Roasted potatoes and broccoli  
Apple pie  
Rolls, tea, and coffee

*Good apple pies are a considerable part of our domestic happiness* (letter to Cassandra)

**Registration Deadline:** Register by October 8. We will *not* be sending another *Scribbles* before this event, so please use the form included in this issue.

**Location and Travel Details:** The event will take place in the elegant Social Hall at Trinity University at 125 Michigan Avenue, N.E. Free parking will be available. Trinity is near the Catholic University-Brookland Metro station, and runs a free shuttle bus every 20 minutes. Trinity is completely accessible. There is handicapped parking just outside the main building (where the event will be held), and ramps and wide doorways inside.

## DECEMBER 4: AFTERNOON TEA AND DANCE PROGRAM

*There were twenty dances, and I danced them all, and without any fatigue... I fancy I could just as well dance for a week together as for half an hour.*

On December 4, from 2:00-5:00 pm, we will celebrate Jane Austen's 235th birthday in a way she would have thoroughly enjoyed: with dancing and live music. The Leesburg Assembly, a friendly group that honors the traditions of English Country Dance and has performed at festivals in the area, will entertain us with a demonstration of Georgian and Regency dances. Then those who are so inclined will be invited to participate in a set of simpler period dances. A caller will give instructions and call the steps. You do not need to bring a partner; period or modern clothing is equally welcome; and mistakes are both inevitable and pardoned (wrong way, Mr. Collins!). There will be plenty of seating for those who prefer just to watch or visit with friends.



Tea, coffee, and punch will be provided. We are keeping ticket prices low by self-catering: Attendees are requested to bring a small plate of something sweet for the refreshment table.

**Registration Deadline:** Register by November 30. A separate mailing about this event will come out in November, but you are encouraged to register early using the form provided in this issue.

**Location and Travel Details:** Our "assembly room" is the social hall of the Lawton Community Recreation Center at 4301 Willow Lane in Chevy Chase, Maryland 20815, close to Wisconsin Avenue. It is within walking distance of Bethesda Metro, and there is parking on-site. A volunteer will run a limited shuttle service from the Metro.

### HOW TO REGISTER

**Instructions:** You may register for one, two, or all three of the events described above. Be aware that each event has a different cost and registration deadline. Complete the appropriate form(s) on the last page of this newsletter -- or, to keep your *Scribbles* intact, copy the page first -- and send it with your check, made out to JASNA-DC, to Susan Dill, 12756 Alder Woods Drive, Fairfax, VA 22033.

**"Season Ticket" Plan:** Buy tickets *now* to all three of JASNA-DC's fall and winter events and save! Your advance commitment facilitates our planning, so we're offering you an incentive: \$15 off the combined ticket price for "Season Tickets" purchased by August 31. If you buy a Season Ticket and then find you cannot attend one of the events, you are welcome to pass your ticket on to someone else. Because of the many tasks being handled by our few volunteers, please understand that *we cannot issue refunds or help you transfer unused tickets.*



**Who is the subject of this photo?**

What is his connection to Jane Austen and to some of the information in this newsletter? Can you guess? If not, look at the last page to find the answer.

## BOX HILL PICNIC

*Where small parties are select, they are perhaps the most agreeable of any.*



Our Box Hill Picnic, held at the Carderock Pavilion in the C&O Canal Historic Park on May 23, was a rather small party, but those who came out enjoyed a relaxing afternoon of good conversation and excellent food. Elizabeth Fry wrote: "Such a pleasant outing... Weren't we lucky in the weather. I believe everyone there had a wonderful time -- and a lot to eat." The participants did indeed display very un-Woodhousean tendencies in bringing generous contributions to the buffet table!

Our picnic site near the Potomac River did not offer the stirring views available from the real Box Hill in Surrey, but neither did we have the divisions and dullness that marred Emma Woodhouse's day out. Conversation was the primary business of the day, only temporarily interrupted by games. Attendees divided into teams to compete in a trivia quiz, which challenged them to list all the animals mentioned in *Emma* ("turkies"! Harriet's Welch cow! a shark! and so on), and to confess how far they had ever traveled to get a haircut (bonus points for purchasing a pianoforte on the same day). Some participants then accepted a challenge to emulate Lydia Bennet by pulling a bonnet to pieces and making it up better with the aid of various millinery supplies, creating picnic headwear that ranged from quirky to beautiful.

## JANE AUSTEN IN THE NEWS

*Jat* Unlike *The New York Times*, which found Romola Garai's performance as Emma "irresistible," British reviews were decidedly negative. Charles Moore, writing in *The Daily Telegraph*, notes that "her gait would have been unknown in the polite society" of the day, and "her accent is south-London flat." Tom Sutcliffe in *The Independent* finds that she fails to "capture the sense of frustrated intelligence that makes Emma bearable on the page" and dislikes her "minxish self-regard." Professor Judith Hawley warns that "[t]o represent girls in sprigged muslin frocks who are mentally wearing leggings risks distorting the novel beyond all recognition."

*Jat* The Bank of England, which recently withdrew the £20 note bearing the likeness of Sir Edward Elgar and replaced him with Scottish economist Adam Smith, has published a list of individuals suggested by the public for use on banknotes. These include luminaries such as Jane Austen and Geoffrey Chaucer, but they must compete with the Beatles, Robbie Williams, Mick Jagger, Terry Wogan, John Cleese and David Beckham, who also made the list.

*Jat* How is a young woman who is "handsome, clever and rich" going to fill her need for a sister? For psychologist Terri Apter, author of *The Sister Knot*, which explores love/hate relationships between sisters, this is the crucial question in *Emma*. Apter sees the book as Emma's search for a sister figure to replace her real sister and her governess. Harriet Smith appears to be an ideal sister, but when she seems about to steal Mr. Knightley, the relationship turns sour, and much more sibling-like than before.

*Jat* An article in the Munich daily *Süddeutsche Zeitung* likens Bella and Edward, protagonists of the film *Eclipse*, the third episode of the *Twilight Saga*, based on Stephenie Meyer's books, to Elizabeth and Darcy, noting that the scene in which vampire Edward proposes marriage to mortal Bella is more reminiscent of Jane Austen's novels than of a modern vampire film aimed at teens. Whereas in Austen's novels social status is often seen as an obstacle to marriage, in *Eclipse* the problem is one of species.

## *Murder at Mansfield Park*

Yet another novel derived from Austen's work, *Murder at Mansfield Park* by Lynn Shepherd is neither prequel nor sequel, but more like an inversion of the original. Shepherd has cast Fanny Price, transformed into a spiteful and hypocritical heiress, as the villain, and Mary Crawford as the heroine. The novel covers roughly the same span of time as the original. The difference lies in the conception of plot and characters, both of which develop along very different lines, though some details echo the original closely enough for the effect to be disconcerting. According to Simon Petherick, managing director of Beautiful Books, which published the novel, *Murder at Mansfield Park* is "not so much a 'mash-up'...but more a literary game, almost of the kind that Austen herself might have played of a quiet evening at home."

Lynn Shepherd spoke on July 20 at the Buxton Festival, Derbyshire. Following is a report by Dr. Florence Rayner, exclusive English correspondent for the *Scribbles*:

I heard Lynn Shepherd's talk about her book today. She's a very witty speaker, with solid academic credentials (Oxford degree in English, followed by a PhD on the novels of Richardson). As well as loving Austen, she enjoys detective fiction as a genre, and thought *Mansfield Park* was very much like the setting for the conventional country house murder: a claustrophobic group of people with various tensions between them. She said she'd taken considerable pains in trying for authenticity in the language, to the extent of downloading the text of all Austen's novels onto her computer so that she could look up any words she was doubtful about. In doing this, she found that "atmosphere" could only refer to the air in a room, not the emotional tone, and that "intriguing" could refer only to plotting, not to something being interesting. She was irritated that in the film *The Duchess* Georgiana talks to her husband about "making a deal" with him; "arrangement" yes, but deal, no. And incidentally she very much disliked the Patricia Rozema version of *Mansfield Park*, partly because of the way it handled the slavery issue -- not true to Austen or to the nature of the debate at that time. She also commented that she didn't think there had ever been a good dramatisation of *Mansfield Park*, perhaps another reflection of its difference from other Austen novels. Lynn clearly regarded her novel as a bit of fun, but also respectful fun, pointing out that Jane Austen and one of her nieces (I think) had written a 10-minute dramatisation of *Sir Charles Grandison* -- seemingly a miraculous compression of a 1,000,000-word book, but apparently nothing much happens in it. I suggested that Austen would have enjoyed [Shepherd's] book more than most of the sequels, partly because of her own interest in parodying and subverting literary genres, then went on to wonder whether she had herself ignored one of the literary "rules" that Austen laid down in *Northanger Abbey*, namely that "the laws of composition forbid the introduction of a character not connected to my fable," as it was hard to see what contribution William Bertram made. She was clearly amused at having Austen fired at her, but didn't really produce a satisfactory answer, saying that having moved Edmund, as Mrs Norris's stepson, to another household (as I'd suspected, to avoid the 21st-century discomfort at the idea of the first cousins Fanny and Edmund marrying) there needed to be a second Bertram brother, also she wanted Fanny to be an only child. I didn't have the heart to ask what the point was of having a second brother only for him to disappear on about page 9 and never be mentioned again. Nor did I feel able to raise what really irritated me -- the transition into Charlotte Brontë "lite" in the last chapters.

Ms Shepherd commented that she'd tried to include quotations from Austen's other work, including her letters. One, I think, was something on the lines of several things being wrong with balls: there were never enough chairs, or enough men, and the men who were there weren't up to much (paraphrase, not quotation!). I wondered whether your JASNA group might enjoy the challenge of "spot the original bits"? There is also the rather subtler challenge presented by some inversions of the original, which provoke thought about why (or sometimes even whether) they are totally preposterous.

## CHAPTER CONTACTS

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The mystery photo is of Colin Firth playing Jan Vermeer in the film *Girl with a Pearl Earring*.

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**September 20: Marsha Huff: Viewing Austen through Vermeer's Camera Obscura (registration deadline: August 31)** Member and guest tickets cost \$25 each.

Name of member \_\_\_\_\_ Name of guest \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ tickets at \$25 per person Total \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Due to space limitations at the Embassy, there is a limit of one guest ticket per member at this event.

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**October 16: Angela Barlow: Jane Austen and Character; An Actor's View (registration deadline: October 8)** Member and guest tickets cost \$35 each.

Name of member \_\_\_\_\_ Name of guest \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ tickets at \$35 per person Total \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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**December 4: Afternoon Tea and Dance Program (registration deadline: November 30)** Member and guest tickets cost \$20 each.

Name of member \_\_\_\_\_ Name of guest \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ tickets at \$20 per person Total \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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### SEASON TICKET

If you wish to purchase tickets for all three events, pay only **\$65 per person** (combined price for three events) -- you save \$15! This offer ends August 31.

Name of member \_\_\_\_\_ Name of guest \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ Season Tickets at \$65 per person Total \$ \_\_\_\_\_