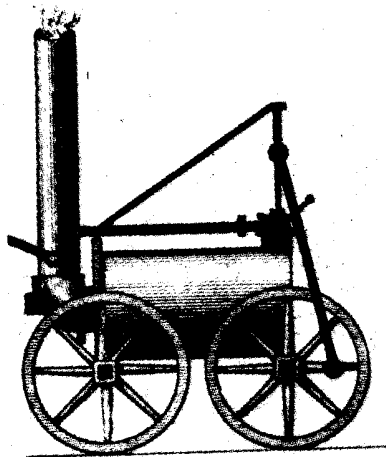


JANE AUSTEN SOCIETY OF NORTH AMERICA

Vancouver Region

NEWSLETTER NO. 101 FEBRUARY 2008



Georgian Inventions - Eileen Sutherland.

"Bliss it was in that dawn to be alive..." *The Prelude*. William Wordsworth (1799-1802).

Jane Austen's lifetime was a period of vibrant, exciting, wondrous change. Here are some of the ideas and inventions of those few years:

- 1775 Flushing toilet. Alexander Cummings patented a toilet flushing system; in 1778 Joseph Brahma invented the ball-valve and U-bend method still in use today.
- 1775 Self-winding watch. Invented by a French clockmaker, A.L.Perrelet.
- 1779 Mule jenny. Samuel Crompton invented a spinning machine which combined the best features (and eliminated the drawbacks) of two earlier machines, overcoming technical difficulties of the spinning industry.
- 1782 Floating batteries. Marine gun batteries were invented by the French General Darcon for use at the siege of Gibraltar.
- 1783 Steam engine. James Watt and Matthew Boulton manufactured approximately 500 different machines, each improving on the one before, between 1776 and 1800.
- 1784 Bramah lock. The Englishman, Joseph Bramah, invented a "burglar-proof" lock (the type is still in use today), offering £200 to anyone who could break it open. In 1851, an American, Alfred Hobbs, after 51 hours, succeeded in opening the door.
- 1785 Mechanical looms. The first mechanical weaving loom was invented by Edmund Cartwright. In 1804, a Frenchman, Joseph-Marie Jacquard invented a loom for making brocaded fabric.
- 1785 Propeller. Joseph Bramah patented a 16-bladed propeller to drive boats.

- 1789 Javel water. The French chemist, Claude-Louis Berthollet, discovered the bleaching properties of hypochlorites, which he called Javel water after the name of the locality near Paris, on the banks of the Seine, where women went to do their washing.
- 1792 Ambulance. Napoleon's private surgeon, Baron Dominique Jean Larrey, used horse-drawn caissons to transport surgeons and stretcher-bearers and equipment for the initial treatment of wounded on battlefields, in the Italian campaign of 1796-7.
- 1795 Preserving jars. Nicolas Appert first sterilized food in glass jars, covered by 5 layers of cork. He won a French government prize of 12,000 francs.
- 1796 Music box. Invented in Geneva by watchmaker A. Favre, using a pin-studded cylinder.
- 1797 Propeller-driven submarine. Invented by Robert Fulton; no interest could be aroused in France, America or Britain at the time.
- 1797 Screw-cutting lathe. Henry Maudsley invented a threading lathe, which could cut a spiral groove in a cylindrical surface.
- 1797 Top hat. A Strand haberdasher left his shop wearing his new hat, according to *The Times*, and immediately attracted a crowd whose curiosity resulted in a shoving match. He was summoned to appear in court and was charged with disturbing the peace.
- 1798 Circular loom. The Frenchman Decroix patented a circular machine which made seamless tube stockings.
- 1799 Clothes drier. A cylinder pierced with holes and driven by a crank, which was called at the time a "ventilator for drying clothes," was invented by a Frenchman Pochon.
- 1800 Electric current. The first electric battery was invented by the Italian Alessandro Volta. This led to the discovery that electricity is not necessarily static but can also be dynamic - involving moving charges that give rise to an electric current.
- 1801 Mechanical log. Edward Massey invented a machine for calculating the speed of a ship.
- 1802 Coffeepot. A pharmacist in Rouen, France, M.Descroisilles, invented the coffeepot. It was then called a caféolette, and consisted of two superimposed containers separated by a filter.
- 1804 Morphine. An alkaloid was isolated from opium by two Frenchmen, Derosne and Seguin, and a German, Frederic Sertuner. They named their potent narcotic "Morphine" after the Greek god of sleep, "Morpheus."
- 1805 Powdered Milk. Parmentier first produced this product in France.
- 1805 Refrigerating machine. Oliver Evans designed a compressed ether refrigerating machine which pumped vapor, compressed it, and finally condensed it, all in a closed cycle.
- 1806 Beaufort scale. Sir Francis Beaufort developed the scale used to note wind intensity.
- 1806 Carbon paper. R.Wedgewood made a thin paper saturated with ink and dried between sheets of blotting paper.
- 1806 Eau de Cologne. The Italian Farina family created a lemon spirit blended with bitter orange and bergamot oils. Jean-Antoine Farina moved from Cologne to Paris in 1806 and eau de cologne became a tremendous success.
- 1808 Typewriter. Italian Pelligrini Turri made a machine for use by his blind friend.
- 1809 Glider. Sir George Cayley developed the first airplane - an engineless aircraft.
- 1815 Pruning shears. Invented by the French Marquis Bertrand de Moleville, exiled during the French Revolution.
- 1815 Macadam. The Scot John McAdam invented the method of resurfacing roads with "macadam" or blacktop - crushed stone and sand, compacted by steam rollers.
- 1816 Metronome. The Austrian physician and friend of Beethoven, J.N.Maelzel, made possible the exact determination of tempo.

November Meeting.

About thirty members were present at the rather informal meeting in November. No specific topic was on the agenda - it was a time to look back at the Conference, and mainly enjoy the success and the pleasure of those days. Phyllis Bottomer began with a few "housekeeping" items, pointing out the books in our "library", and explaining a bit about the Society and our branch, especially for the nine new members and visitors present, who were asked to stand up in turn, give their name, and a sentence or two about themselves. A form was circulated to specify what to donate for the more elaborate lunch in December. Phyllis mentioned what a pleasant and friendly group we are - "very few *nasty* people join JASNA".

Joan Reynolds and Marg Savery - co-chairs of the Programme Committee - spoke of plans for the December meeting - a limerick contest will be one of the "fun and games". A vote of thanks was given to all those who worked on the planning and organizing of the AGM, and those most closely involved were asked to come to the front and be introduced. The total of members and guests amounted to over 550, from Canada, the United States, Britain, Australia, New Zealand and Japan. The financial situation is still slightly in flux, due to the Canadian/U.S. dollar situation, but there will be an overall profit of about \$20,000, of which 40/60% will come to the Vancouver group. This gives us a much-appreciated nest-egg to be used for bringing in outside speakers, and for other projects. (Incidentally, we still have tote bags for sale).

Keiko Parker and Laureen McMahon both described the concert - Michael Jarvis, organist at Christ Church Cathedral - as one of the best they had heard. Joan Reynolds circulated her album of photos and mementos of the Conference. Susan Olsen had volunteered to make the centerpieces for the banquet tables, and with the help of her willing and handy husband, provided 66 delightful symbols of the West Coast: each a bowl of sand and pebbles, with upright "log" pilings, on top of which sat a seagull. (Susan announced that her husband said he will **not** be available for any more projects!)

Adele Shaak was given great praise for her insightful talk on book binding, and someone who attended Ivan Sayers' talk on Regency dress mentioned that at the end there was not merely applause, the whole group stood up and cheered!

Irene Howard gave a short talk on dancing, and Almack's. In the Regency period, both dress and social rules of behaviour had become slightly less rigorous - hoop skirts were no more, gowns were loose and light, and the dances more free and unconfined. Grace is not innate: good dancing and even good walking needed to be taught. Irene contrasted Frank Churchill and Mr. Knightley as to youthful vigor and moral nature: Frank has a surface of impetuous charm (he is described in the novel as leaving with 'a graceful bow', 'a gallant bow', etc.); gentility, not merely the polish of fine manners, is in the core of Mr. Knightley's being. Our 'dancing mistress', Marie Disiewicz, demonstrated the perfect bow.

Almack's was the epitome of London dance halls - 1770-1860; the building is still there. It was strictly run by four or five Lady Patronesses, arbiters of who would be allowed in and who would be restricted, their word was final. Keiko pointed out that when Mrs. Elton declared she would be the Lady Patroness of the strawberry-picking invitation to Donwell Abbey, it is obvious this is the kind of power she was aspiring to.

Marg Savery suggested that those who had ball gowns for the Conference banquet and dance should wear them to the Birthday/Christmas festivities at our December meeting, and also to Jane Austen Day - that should look lovely, and be another chance to wear the gowns!

We adjourned to savour the "goodies" of the pot-luck lunch, and indulge in more reminiscences of the Conference, and plans for the future.

December Meeting.

The last meeting of the year was a double celebration - of Jane Austen's birthday, and the Christmas season. Phyllis Bottomer opened the meeting with an account of what has been going on this year, and what will be on the programme for the future. Four new members were asked to stand and be introduced. We met our new Treasurer, Jennifer Bettiol, who has taken over the financial accounts from Viviane McClelland (who deserves a vote of thanks for her devoted years of service). Upcoming movies, activities, etc., were announced. Then we were encouraged to sit back, relax, and enjoy the day's celebration.

Birthday celebrations through the ages.

Special birthday celebrations have a long history, going back to realms of magic and religion. The custom of offering congratulations and gifts and celebrating with candles in ancient times were meant to protect the celebrant from demons, and ensure safety in the coming year. As early as the 4th century AD, Christianity rejected birthday celebrations as pagan customs. The Bible mentions a birthday only in connection with royalty - Pharaoh, Herod, etc.

The early Greeks and Romans believed that everyone had a protective spirit or demon who attended his birth, and watched over him all his lifetime. This spirit had a mystic relation with the god or goddess on whose birthday the individual was born. This idea has been carried down through the centuries to today's belief in a guardian angel, a fairy godmother, and patron saints.

Lighted candles on cakes began with the early Greeks. Honey cakes, round as the moon, and lit with candles, were placed on temple altars (in memory of Artemis, the goddess of the moon). In folk belief, birthday candles are endowed with special magic for granting wishes. Lighted candles and sacrificial fires have had a mystic significance ever since man first set up altars to the gods. Birthday candles thus are an honour and a tribute to the birthday child, and bring good fortune.

Traditional greetings of "Happy Birthday", and wishes of happiness are an intrinsic part of this holiday - originally rooted in magic. The working of spells for good or evil is the chief magic of witchcraft. You are specially susceptible to such on your birthday, as your personal spirits are around at this time. Birthday greetings have power for good or ill because you are closer to the spirit world on this day.

Jane Austen did not mention a birthday in any of her surviving letters to Cassandra. In the novels, there is only one reference. That is Harriet babbling to Emma about 'Robert Martin's birthday was the 8th of June, and my birthday is the 23rd - just a fortnight and a day's difference! Which is very odd!'

The only exception to this historical lack of any birthday celebrations was in the *coming of age* of an eldest son, which was a special event among people of wealth and estates, and in the case of the reigning monarch, whose birthday was an important event remembered and celebrated every year. Queen Victoria reigned so long that her birthday, the 24th of May, is still a national holiday.

And now, with the sort of irony that Jane Austen herself would have delighted in, here we are celebrating Jane Austen's birthday - something she probably never did in her own lifetime.

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The meeting was well-attended, the group being neither "too numerous for intimacy" nor "too small for variety." (*Pers.* p. 245)

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The Limerick Challenge.

This contest brought forth a dozen fine examples, original and humorous, some of which are printed here, and the rest will appear at intervals in later Newsletters.

“There once was a writer named Jane,
Through her words of wit it is plain
Charlotte Lucas will soon repent
With Mr. Collins a lifetime spent
On a marriage of monetary gain.”
- Jennifer Bettiol

“Emma wrote a script for young Harriet.
But Mr. Elton decided to vary it.
He made an offer to Emma
Which gave her dilemma:
How to hear his proposal and parry it.”
- Elspeth Flood

A Musical Interlude.

Sue Edwards accompanied on the piano her student Kendra Coleman, who sang two delightful solos, one an oratorio from Handel, to our great delight.

A Christmas Eve Visit to the Westons.

Phyllis Bottomer devised a short skit depicting the dinner visit of the Woodhouses, and other friends, to Mr. and Mrs. Weston. [While the cast was assembling for a brief but vital rehearsal, the audience was entertained with a brisk “Twenty Questions” kind of game, guessing the names of characters from Jane Austen’s novels].

When all was ready, the guests were driven in two imaginary carriages, to the sound of clip-clopping hoofs provided by new member, Michelle Siu, hitting two sticks together - it was surprisingly effective! They drove on the imaginary road to Randalls - at the front of the room - where they were warmly welcomed by Mr. and Mrs. Weston (Ron and Eileen Sutherland). Mr. Woodhouse, (Phyllis Bottomer), well bundled up against the cold, was unwrapped and tenderly installed in a chair in front of the fire. Refreshments were offered, and all are having a pleasant visit. Emma (Jennifer Bettiol) and Isabella (Roslyn Hansen) chat to Mrs. Weston. (A sign indicates that several hours pass). John Knightley (Lindsay Bottomer) goes out of the room, and comes back in with the dreadful announcement that “the ground is covered with snow, and it is still snowing fast”. Consternation and great lamentations from Mr. Woodhouse! Emma and Isabella make helpful suggestions. All bustle around getting him soothed and re-wrapped! The group of guests make their way outside into the carriages to the sound of farewells from all, and the horses clip-clop their way around the room and away home. A good time was had by cast and audience alike!

The “Groaning Board”.

A lavish buffet luncheon had been set up on tables in the gym, arranged by Barbara Phillips, and we wasted no time in filling our plates and taking our places at the tables. It was a delicious meal, and there was no lack of conversation, about what we had just enjoyed, and about our personal plans for Christmas and the days to follow. At last, we made our various ways home, in real cars, not imaginary carriages and horses! And it was not snowing!

Black Sunday, January 13. - A typical response.

"All I can say for the recent *Persuasion* is Ugh! Ugh! Ugh!

What were they thinking? Anne Elliot running after Captain Wentworth? I don't think so! And Mrs. Smith getting out of her sick bed to run after Anne Elliot? Please!

I watched the Amanda Root version afterwards and liked it - for the first time!

I'm sorry - but let the "young" watch Britney and her ilk, and give me the genuine Jane with as much narrative as can be squeezed in. Leave out running up and down interminable staircases and over grassy bits - just give me the **incomparable words - the narrative, the authorial comment, the dialogue - the words!**

All the best for 2008 - and with fading hope for improvement next Sunday".

Mary Atkins.

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Religious Virtue.

Jane Austen characters (usually the less genteel ones, John Thorpe, Robert Ferrars, Mrs. Jennings, Mrs. Price, and others) often intensify their remarks with exclamations of "upon my soul", "poor dear soul", or "dear little soul", and similar phrases.

However, in *The Pleasures of Virtue*, Anne Ruderman points out that very occasionally Jane Austen uses the word "soul" with "moral significance." In *Sense and Sensibility*, Edward Ferrars speaks of Marianne, "I know her greatness of soul" (p.92), and in *Mansfield Park*, Edmund recalls Mary Crawford's playfulness, saying, "It grieves me to the soul" (p.269). Ruderman writes that "religious faith is particularly important in [*Persuasion*]. Here, for example, Austen explicitly shows us someone in prayer: when Louisa has survived the fall . . . we are told of [Wentworth's] 'deep and silent' rejoicing 'after a few fervent ejaculations of gratitude to Heaven had been offered'." Then Anne's feelings are described: 'The tone, the look, with which "Thank God" was uttered by Captain Wentworth, . . . overpowered by the various feelings of his soul, and trying by prayer and reflection to calm them' (p.123)." Ruderman then goes on to give other instances in *Persuasion* where "the word 'soul' is used with moral or religious significance":

When Charles Musgrove told Captain Benwick (who wanted to see Anne again) that the church at Kellynch was well worth seeing, "he listened with all his understanding and soul" (p.131); when Charles speaks disparagingly of Mr. Elliot, Captain Wentworth "was all attention, looking and listening with his whole soul" (p.224); Captain Harville describes to Anne "the glow of his soul" when he sees his wife and family again after a long voyage (p.235); and, finally, in Captain Wentworth's last letter to Anne when he was listening to her conversation with Captain Harville, in "half agony, half hope", he writes "you pierce my soul" (p.237).

Ruderman concludes that "Austen - in a very unmodern way - believes that there is some source of truth outside oneself toward which one ought to conform . . . The general idea (and one held by classical thinkers) - that humans have a soul that calms and orders (bodily) desires - is one that underlies the actions of all the heroines (p.123)."

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"Emma vowed she'd stay single for life
And avoid, if she could, married strife;
But discovered quite rightly
She loved Mr. Knightley,
And so she became his wife!"

Doris MacKenzie.

"Sir Walter of Kellynch Hall
Thought himself a cut above all;
But his profligate spending
Foretold a sad ending:
Now his status is in a free-fall."

Pam Ottridge.

Imagination is Everything.

What did Elizabeth wear at the ball at Netherfield? What was the colour of Lady Bertram's sofa? How was the vicarage decorated after Mrs. Elton became its mistress? Jane Austen does not give us answers to any such questions.

I have been reading a comparison of Jane Austen's writing with that of current novelists', with reference to the amount of description given (or lack of it, in her case). It is a rare 18th century instance where a character is described in any detail whatsoever, unlike the minute, sustained descriptions which became routine with later writers. Jane Austen expects more from her readers. "I do not write for such dull as have not a great deal of ingenuity themselves", she wrote of her own work. Today almost nothing is left to our imagination.

A little boy was quoted recently as preferring radio to TV - "It lets me make my own pictures". We have all had the experience of seeing a movie or video of a favourite book, and been bitterly disappointed at the appearance of the characters or setting - not at all the way we had pictured it in our minds.

The early editions of Jane Austen's novels were not illustrated, and no matter how much we admire aspects of the Brock or Thomson or other illustrations, they are not quite "right".

Mr. Collins was a "tall heavy-looking young man of five-and-twenty" with a "grave and stately" air; Mr. Elliot, "though not handsome had an agreeable person"; Henry Crawford, "though not handsome, had air and countenance"; Frank Churchill was "a very good-looking young man - height, air, address, all were unexceptionable". This is all the description Jane Austen gives us of these young men. No doubt each of us has a quite different idea of the appearance of these characters, but we know what they look like, and would never mistake one for the other.

Are readers today forgetting how to use their imaginations? Do modern novels and TV shows make it too easy to sit back, enjoy, and not think? If we are losing this ability to make our own pictures, we are losing a precious gift indeed. - Eileen Sutherland.

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Jane Austen's Georgian Life.

"Her world was narrow, and it would have taken a great philosopher and a great rebel, as well as a great writer, to deny the precepts by which she was reared. Though there were a few free-thinking female eccentrics breaking out among artists and the nobility, rebel philosophers did not abound amid the middle-class ladies of rural Regency England. So all Jane's heroines marry reasonably well, in a material as in a spiritual sense. It would be strange if they did not. Any fiction of the time with romance as its mainspring required gentlemen like those Jane created, able to support brides in the style to which they hoped to become accustomed. Romantic fiction usually supplies this even now.

Money is undoubtedly on everyone's mind in Jane's books, . . . stories with their elegant characters, whose inherited cash is never sullied by the tiniest whiff of skulduggery and whose good manners are never spoiled by the slightest show of temper. The worst that Jane produces is constant discussion, usually among amusingly silly matrons, about how much capital - and resulting income - prospective spouses of either sex may be worth or how far individual charms might go towards enabling one to be traded for the other. We don't take too seriously most of her characters' preoccupation with rich matches, even though to throw oneself away without a thought for finances was represented as disobliging the family, as poor Mrs. Price did before the opening of *Mansfield Park*. David Cecil comments, regarding Jane's thesis, that it was wrong to marry for money but silly to marry without it." *Jane and Her Gentlemen*: Audrey Hawkrige.

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Self-Assertion Replaces Domestic Industry.

“Tho’ Parents tell us, that our genius lies
 In mending linnen and in making pies,
 I set such formal precepts at defiance
 That preach up prudence, neatness, and compliance;
 Leap these old bounds, and boldly set the pattern,
 To be a Wit, Philosopher, and Slattern -

O! did all maids and wives my spirit feel,
 We’d make this topsy-turvy world to reel:
 Let us to arms! - Our fathers, Husbands, dare!
 NOVELS will teach us all the Art of War:
 Our Tongues will serve for Trumpet and for Drum;
 I’ll be your Leader - General HONEYCOMBE!

Too long has human nature gone astray,
 Daughters should govern, Parents should obey;
 Man shou’d submit, the moment that he weds,
 And hearts of oak shou’d yield to wiser heads:
 I see you smile, bold Britons! - But ‘tis true -
 Beat You the French; - But let your Wives beat You.”

“Polly Honeycombe: A Dramatic Novel in One Act”
 George Colman (1761)

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“*Northanger Abbey* advocates ‘social reading’ modeled on proper novel reading. Episodic plots, repeated points of plot, and passages of non-narrative pleasure were also features in many of the eighteenth-century novels Austen had read by Fielding, Richardson, and Radcliffe. These features helped contemporary readers remember and follow stories that took hundreds of pages to conclude, but novels that were read at the rate of a volume a day had little need of such devices. New novels by women, especially Burney’s *Cecilia*, were paying more attention to developmental, sequential plotting, requiring readers to give concentrated attention to plot, character and language. Designed for lending a volume at a time, three-deckers, however, demanded a plot that climaxed at the end of each volume, yet preserved a continuing, mounting excitement to propel the reader through the third tome. This was reading geared to induce excitement, but also reading that presupposed some exercise of memory on the part of readers, and enough time at a stretch to finish a volume. Such format became more than later readers could afford: in 1833, the editor Leitch Ritchie reports already that ‘It has been suggested to the proprietors by the Circulating Libraries, that the volumes of the Library of Romance are inconveniently long, and should be rendered capable of being divided into two, so as to enable them to supply their subscribers with the usual quantum of reading at a time.’ Austen’s publisher John Murray anticipates this move by printing her final novels, *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, in a four-volume compact to make a set that could be borrowed for four days - a format highly profitable to a circulating library.”

Jane Austen and the Culture of Circulating Libraries: Barbara M. Benedict

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The Pleasures of the Imagination. English Culture in the Eighteenth Century.

John Brewer (1997). Report by E. Sutherland.

If you have good strong wrists - the book weighs in at 4½ lbs. - and lots of time - 721 pages - you will find this a compelling study of the relationship between a growing commercial economy and what we now call "fine art." Brewer asks - and answers - all the appropriate questions: Why? Brewer traces the rise of a public audience for the arts in an increasingly industrial and urban society. What? Literature, music, painting and the theatre. Where? Almost entirely in London, but with brief side trips to look at conditions in the provinces, and experiences on the Grand Tour. When? Brewer sticks to the 18th century, but discusses briefly the Civil War and the Restoration which led up to his chosen period, and carries on a bit, to show what were the results of 18th century conditions and policies in the next century. Who? All the major figures in the arts, and many of the ordinary supporters, everybody from an enthusiastic but untutored general public, to the elite cultivated and snobbish connoisseurs who deplored the absence of "taste" in others.

The title comes from an 18th century essay by a Scottish cleric, Archibald Alison: "The fine arts are considered as the arts which are addressed to the imagination, and the pleasures they afford . . . their object is to produce the emotions of taste."

Brewer, in his Preface, writes: "My aim has been to build a bridge between the general reader and academic scholarship, to write an accessible account of the fine arts and literature in 18th century England that would draw on the scholarly research and speculation of historians, art historians and literary critics that have made the field so exciting in the last twenty years. The *Pleasures of the Imagination* is the story of how English 18th century men and women came to see themselves and their society in a new way, one that distinguished the realm of 'fine arts and literature', or what we might call 'High Culture' from other forms of human endeavour."

I think Brewer has been successful in his endeavour. The book is a vivid and detailed description of 18th century life and the arts, full of fascinating detail, written with clarity and a pleasing absence of "hard words." I enjoyed it very much.

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"Men - save for the lower orders, of course - were assumed to have their passions firmly in submission to reason at all times, and moreover, to have their view of the world in submission to reason as well - the universe a fine-tuned and in process of becoming a fully comprehensible machine. Women, on the other hand, were *not* in control and were intentionally humored and cosseted when demonstrating their irrationality to the satisfaction of their superiors. Their little terrors, their shrieks, their fainting fits were indulgently approved and encouraged; their romantic (dependent) friendships were sanctioned; it was actually all a demonstration of inadequacy and was rewarded with condescending approbation that, of course, elicited further performance. Moral strength from women, though of course often enough demonstrated, was not officially sanctioned. For male onlookers the display of women in prolonged states of disorientation and fright may have satisfied sadistic longings but, even more importantly, ratified theories of gender difference. Theories of gender difference resulted in theories of the gendering of genre, and the gothic became officially the medium of the irrational and hysterical, women and homosexual males."

- "Renegotiating the Gothic", Betty Rizzo, in *Revising Women*, Paula Backscheider, ed.

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Dictionary of National Biography.

One of my favourite reference books is the *Dictionary of National Biography* - the famous "DNB". Over many years I have consulted it whenever I came across a name I didn't know well. In alphabetical order, in a set of many volumes, it sets out all the relevant information I needed, as factual background for someone I was writing about.

In September, 2006, the DNB was up-dated, but this is proving to be not an entirely happy occasion. A review in the *Observer* reports: "Errors in the biographies of significant historical figures such as Florence Nightingale, Jane Austen, and George V are more than just minor details, say the detractors". An Oxford professor and constitutional specialist believes the DNB has failed to come up to Oxford's standards: "I can only comment on the areas of my own expertise, but these entries seem to have been written by the constitutionally illiterate."

The DNB editors argue that "the mistakes are rare, with complaints provoked by only 2% of the entries." These are not necessarily errors in "interpretations of history" that have changed over time. They suggest that entries can be improved by referring to the Internet.

Surely this is not good enough! We should be able to absolutely rely on the factual information in a prestigious reference source.

- Eileen Sutherland.

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Mastering the Novels of Jane Austen: Richard Gill & Susan Gregory.

"Many people read Jane Austen's work because they find her entertaining and invigorating . . . Jane Austen's tone is laconic, engaged, detached, amused, askance and angry by turns . . . Jane Austen's story lines are strong. Her style is witty, direct, elegant, above all supple. Her writing is robust and rigorous and it makes demands. It engages - and it defies - the reader. Jane Austen is strenuous in her moral awareness . . . Sometimes Jane Austen is uncomfortably exacting: *MP* is a novel that divides opinion, perhaps because readers feel the standards required - and not just the moral standards - make *too* many demands. Exacting also are the claims upon the attention of the reader . . . We are required to follow the implications of the texts. Readers have to look back, to make connections, to exercise their aesthetic, social and moral sense and to supply what is not there. Jane Austen invites us to collaborate with her. She makes novelists of us all. (*Preface* p. xiv)."

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