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THE CURTAINS OR THE CAPTAIN? - Eileen Sutherland.

Late in Persuasion. Anne Elliot is driving out one morning with Lady Russell, when she sees Captain Wentworth in the distance, walking towards them:

"...there was no mistaking him. She looked instinctively at Lady Russell...It was not to be supposed that Lady Russell would perceive him till they were nearly opposite. She looked at her however, from time to time, anxiously; and when the moment approached which must point him out, though not daring to look again...she was yet perfectly conscious of Lady Russell's eyes being turned exactly in the direction for him, of her being in short intently observing him. She could thoroughly comprehend the sort of fascination he must possess over Lady Russell's mind, the difficulty it must be for her to withdraw her eyes, the astonishment she must be feeling that eight or nine years should have passed over him...without robbing him of one personal grace!

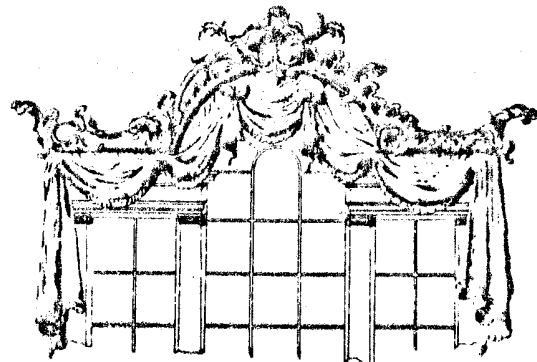
At last, Lady Russell drew back her head.- 'Now, how would she speak of him?'

'You will wonder,' said she, 'what has been fixing my eye so long; but I was looking after some window-curtains, which Lady Alicia and Mrs. Frankland were telling me of last night. They described the drawing-room window-curtains of one of the houses on this side of the way, and this part of the street, as being the handsomest and best hung of any in Bath, but could not recollect the exact number, and I have been trying to find out which it could be...'

Anne sighed and blushed and smiled, in pity and disdain, either at her friend or herself." [p.179]

Read in a straightforward way, this tells us that Anne saw Captain Wentworth, and turned to watch her companion, hoping to see by a change of expression the moment when Lady Russell recognized him. But Lady Russell was looking intently at the windows of the houses they passed, and not at the people walking along the pavement.

Critics have considered this passage as much more complicated than that. In her book, Telling Complexions, M.A.O'Farrell writes: "That Lady Russell's lengthy account of her viewing habits is a more or less smooth attempt to cover with bluff banality the mortification of being seen to look after Wentworth seems clear enough, there being no real reason to testify that one was looking at curtains...except to explain that one was not looking at a man." [p.34]



Chapman, in his notes to the edition of 1818, wrote: "I had always supposed Anne's inference to be that Lady Russell had seen and recognized Captain Wentworth, and that her story of the curtains was at the least a prevarication." [p.294]

A C Bradley, in his essay, "Jane Austen", [Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association, 1911] considers the passage to be a "touch of comic irony...Anne is extremely agitated to observe Lady Russell gazing intently from her carriage at the long-lost lover, and finds that she was really examining some curtains." [p.33]

D.W.Harding, in a footnote in his edition of Persuasion (1965) considers: "Chapman's odd suggestion that this implies Anne's belief that Lady Russell had really seen Wentworth and was prevaricating seems baseless." [p.394-5]

And what can we make of Anne's sigh and smile, "in pity and disdain, either at her friend or herself?" Is this self-mockery, for thinking Lady Russell would be as interested in watching Captain Wentworth as she was herself? Or is the disdain for Lady Russell who refuses to admit she had seen him?

Chapman thinks: "'pity and disdain' seem hardly appropriate to Lady Russell's offence, if that offence were no more than the failure to recognize a man...whom she did not know to be in Bath." [p.295] Harding writes that "the deliberately excessive phrase is a comment on the disproportionate significance that Anne, in love, has momentarily attached to the incident; it exemplifies the sympathetic irony with which Jane Austen can treat her heroine."

What did Jane Austen intend us to believe? Or did she mean to leave us wondering, to make us think, to make us come up with our own explanation?

Was Lady Russell interested in the curtains, or in the Captain?



What's in a Name? - From the Wisconsin Wire, Fall 1998.

As a fascinating aside at the end of her speech, Juliet McMaster provided an insight into the male characters in Jane Austen's novels and the message conveyed about them through their names. She identified three categories:

1. The "brother-husband": This hero is referred to in the novels by both his first and last names or by his first name alone. Examples: Henry Tilney, Edward Ferrars, Frank Churchill, and Edmund Bertram. This hero and the heroine are generally on equal footing throughout the story.
2. The "romantic" husband or suitor. This man is referred to by his last name alone, by both Jane Austen (the narrator) and the woman attracted to him. He is a rake who turns out to be different (and worse) than he first appears to be. He is never worthy of the heroine but is perhaps more dashing than the real hero of the story. Examples: Wickham and Willoughby. (In Northanger Abbey, Isabella refers to Captain Tilney as "Tilney". This signals a romantic profile but a less than admirable character.)
3. The "superior" husband: This hero is referred to by his last name and the title such as "Mr."; his first name is hardly mentioned. He is in some way superior to the heroine. Examples: Mr. Darcy, who is superior in wealth and rank to Elizabeth Bennet; Captain Wentworth who has risen in the world while Anne has lost status; and Mr. Knightley, who is older and much wiser than Emma. (One way we know that Mrs. Elton is gauche and disrespectful is that she refers to Mr. Knightley as "Knightley".)



Pride and Prejudice at Stratford 1999, A Report - by Keiko Parker -

Our first grandchild (born in New York), our first visit to Stratford, Ontario (six plays in four days), and a concert of Mozart's Concerto for Two Pianos performed by our two sons with the Toronto Symphony, added up to make this a very memorable round trip.

And so to the heart of the matter as far as the JASNA members are concerned—*Pride and Prejudice* adapted by Christina Calvit and directed by Jeannette Lambermont, which is one of the offerings at Stratford this year. The play was originally adapted from the novel for a Chicago production in 1986, but was especially rewritten for the Festival Theatre stage. Someone I met later who reads all Austen novels once a year wondered how they could put all the novel in a stage production such as this one. It is a valid question. And yet, this version included a great deal of the original novel in a three-hour production. (There were obvious cuts. For example, Darcy says, "She is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt *me*," but he does not go on to say, "I am in no humour . . . to give consequence to young ladies who are slighted by other men.") They managed the conversation, the narrative, and the action with speed and efficiency in several ways.

First of all, the characters sometimes turn into narrators on the spot. For instance, in the opening scene of Chapter 33 in which Elizabeth repeatedly encounters Mr. Darcy in Rosings Park, chance meetings take place in different parts of the stage about three times. Elizabeth makes a preemptive move by telling Mr. Darcy, "This is a favourite haunt of mine." This is done as dialogue. But after another such encounter, Elizabeth says to the audience, "How this could occur a second time, Elizabeth thought it very odd." Note how she refers to herself as "Elizabeth," not "I" in such statements. By such means a sufficient quantity of Austen's narrative was incorporated.

Secondly, I should mention the clever use of the "chorus" in the manner of Greek dramas. It represents townspeople, servants, guests at a ball, etc. Their motion was choreographed in a quick moving and fluid manner. Again, their comments came directly from Jane Austen's original narrative voice. The members of the chorus sometimes acted also as stage hands to facilitate quick changes of scene.

Thirdly, the sparse but imaginative stage setting must be mentioned. Mr. Bennet's library is represented by a side table and a chair where he sits reading; the bed where Jane Bennet lies ill at Netherfield is an elegant settee, which, placed at different parts of the stage and at different angles, also serves as seats for the guests at the assembly, the Netherfield ball, and at Rosings. Each of these balls was enacted in different parts of the Stratford's apron stage, and each dance was different from the others both in music and steps.

Several shimmering streamers rolled down to represent the grandeur of Pemberley, and when it came to the Gardiners' and Elizabeth's viewing of the Darcy family portraits, a few of Darcy's ancestors in wigs and Georgiana Darcy in contemporary attire were respectively spot-lighted. These characters held the streamers in each hand, but one hand also held the end of the other streamer horizontally at waist level, so that the actors instantly turned into "living" portraits, framed by the hand-held streamers. Here a slight concession had to be made—when the lighting switched to Wickham, he had to be of regular size, not a miniature as in the original novel. But Mrs. Reynolds' speech about Wickham turning out "very wild" was there, as were the praises she heaps on Mr. Darcy as a kind master and considerate brother. As to Mr. Darcy himself, the spotlight revealed his full stature. His was the only full-length "portrait," while other "portraits" were half-length (You will note I said "waist level" earlier). There he stood centre stage at the back—much as Hermione does in *The Winter's Tale*.

Costume changes were kept to a minimum. Elizabeth Bennet put a jacket on top of her dress to immediately facilitate her travels to Hunsford or to Pemberley. In the scene where Elizabeth recalls various shameful acts of her family members, a line or two of the previous scenes were acted out briefly. Thus Mr. Bennet's pulling Mary away from the pianoforte saying, "You have delighted us long enough," will remind the audience of the Netherfield ball, even as Elizabeth

recollects it with mortification. The reading of the letters in the novel—Caroline Bingley’s inviting Jane to Netherfield, or Darcy’s to Elizabeth explaining his actions, etc.—was always started by the recipient of the letter reading it aloud but continued by the sender. Thus, Elizabeth starts out, “Be not alarmed on receiving this letter by the apprehension of its containing any renewal of those offers, which were last night so disgusting to you,” but Mr. Darcy, standing in centre stage in darkness, continues to recite the rest of his letter (edited to about a half length), while Elizabeth stands in the spotlight in the attitude of reading it and reacting to its various passages. (I preferred this to the method used in the movie version of *Persuasion* where Anne reads Captain Wentworth’s letter. There, the two voices overlapped for a considerable length of time and, although it added to the sense of Anne’s excitement, the words could not be made out clearly.)

As to the acting quality, it varied. Brian Tree (Mr. Bennet) and Steven Sutcliffe (Mr. Collins) were good. Those who found Alison Steadman’s Mrs. Bennet in A&E television version too strident would find Lally Cadeau’s rendition more acceptable. I wish that the voice of Lucy Peacock (Elizabeth Bennet) were more uniformly heard throughout the theatre, but my complaint here is partly due to my seat at the extreme end of the theatre. Last March, having been given the choice of the centre part of the theatre, quite a number of rows back, or the extreme right section, upstairs in the front row, I chose the latter. Given another opportunity, I would take the centre section, no matter how far back. That way, at least in this production, one would be able to see the simple but elegant front facade which serves as the entrance way to all the residences in the novel. But I could not see it from my seat. Also, where I was located, I only had a side view of Mr. Darcy’s “portrait,” and the smile on his face which Elizabeth admires escaped me completely. I do assure you, though, that he looked very handsome!

Returning to the topic of acting, I found the artificially high-pitched voice of Patricia Collins (Lady Catherine) uncomfortable to listen to. But the scene where Lady Catherine questions Elizabeth, while Mr. Collins tries to put in a word edgewise without success, was handled with expert timing. Geordie Johnson (Mr. Darcy) looked and acted the part very well so that I wished he had more lines. However, the number and quantity of Mr. Darcy’s speeches is probably proportionate to the original novel. Jane Bennet, Mr. Bingley, Caroline Bingley, Charlotte Lucas, and Mr. Wickham were all adequate, as were other minor characters such as Anne de Bourgh and Denny. Georgiana Darcy did not have a speaking part, appearing only in the portrait scene described above. She was of course mentioned in Darcy’s letter to Elizabeth.

During the intermission I heard a high school student saying to her friend, “I don’t know what’s going on.” A good point, as this production aims to put into it as much of Jane Austen as possible, leaving out nothing if it possibly can. And then as we were leaving the theatre, I heard someone say she could not make out the words much of the time. True enough for some. But when I could not hear the words clearly, I heard it “in my mind’s ear” straight from Jane Austen herself. Maybe there were too many details for those who are not familiar with the book. For Jane Austen aficionados there was enough to satisfy and to charm. It is a marvel that without the benefit of movie or television cameras, this production managed to put so much of Jane Austen into it, that is, convey so much of her wit, humour, satire and irony. Perhaps it should be presented in a smaller theatre with a larger stage. In that way, the impression of several people doing and saying things with seemingly relentless speed could be avoided. Overall, however, there was more to be pleased about than to be dissatisfied with. In my opinion this production rates 8 out of 10. The play continues at the Festival Theatre, Stratford, Ontario to November 6.

P.S. In view of the sparse setting I witnessed in this production I offer my own simplified version of an illustration for *Pride and Prej.* by C. E. Brock.



LETTERS - May Meeting

We explored a great variety of letters written by contemporaries of Jane Austen at the May 8th meeting. Murray Wanamaker started off by reading an excerpt from Susan Watkin's Jane Austen's Town and Country Style, describing the letter writing and the postal system of the time. The recipient paid for delivery, and a small neat "hand" was most economical, as the cost was for each piece of paper. There were no envelopes, and the letter was folded several times, the final edge sealed with a "wafer" of sealing-wax. Then, from two Penguin editions, Introduction to Letters of the 18th Century, and ...of the 19th Century, Murray read two letters of advice: Sir Walter Scott wrote to his son who was beginning a military career, especially cautioning him to be careful of the company he kept and of the new friends he made. The other writer was unknown, a William Friend, who wrote to a daughter about to attend her first ball. His description of how not to behave reminded me of Lydia Bennet - loud laughter, too quick intimacy, "romping" around the dance floor.

Keiko and John Parker read a series of letters between the future Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the man who was to become her husband. These were love letters, but there was very little mention of "love", not even much "esteem" or "regard." Most of their discussion was about money - both families were opposed to the match, and threatened to cut off their inheritances. (In the end, they eloped and the marriage seemed to have turned out very well).

Sandy Lundy read letters from A Governess in the Time of Jane Austen, showing the great affection which existed between Agnes Porter and her pupils. Miss Porter had a vivid writing style, and Sandy had us laughing until the tears came into our eyes - and Sandy herself could hardly go on reading - at some of the descriptions of people she met. Margaret Howell read several letters from William Cowper to friends, and we delighted in the gentle irony of Jane Austen's favourite poet.

The lively discussions about each correspondent took more time than we had allowed, and we had to cut the session short. Diana Bodnar finished with Jane Austen's letter to her niece Fanny: "You are inimitable, irresistible. You are the delight of my Life..."



This has been a most agreeable piece of news indeed. (Emma)

Jon Kimura Parker - son of Keiko and John Parker - has been awarded the Order of Canada.

Brenda Jowett was the winner of a replica of Jane Austen's quilt in a raffle at Jasper.

Dianne and Ralph Kerr have moved to a new home at 4458 Arbutus Street, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 4A2. Same phone number 731-2301.



"For want of Room in the inside [of the coach] I was obliged to submit to an outside place to Ashburn. I had never ridden on the outside of a Coach before. I took the Guard's seat & we had not got more than half a mile out of Leicester before one of the hind-wheels came off & I was pitched into the ditch. The Coach lay entirely upon one side. With difficulty we got the Passengers out, none of whom were materially injured. But a young man who had taken his Seat beside the Coachman, had his leg to very much hurt that he c^d not proceed on his journey, & was obliged to be sent back to Leicester." A Lancashire Gentleman. The Letters and Journals of Richard Hodgkinson. 1763-1847. (F.& K. Wood, ed. 1992)

June Meeting -BOOKS AND BERRIES

We ended the season with discussions, comments and readings. Four members began by reporting about the recent "mini-conference" in Jasper, telling a little about the conference as a whole, and describing one or two of the sessions they had attended.

Rachele Oriente reported on Judith Fisher's "Talking About Theatre in *Mansfield Park*": Jane Austen herself did not disapprove of the theatre - her letters mention many enjoyable trips to theatres in London, family readings often included dramatic works, and theatrical productions were presented by the family at Steventon. In public theatre experiences, however, women were too exposed, in too common a view, with unrestricted familiarity, which led to a breakdown of behaviour. The Duke of Clarence and his liaison with Mrs. Jordan, long and stable as it was, gave an example of inappropriate relationships. Maria Bertram and Henry Crawford were led into their affair by too intimate companionship during the play-acting.

Jean Oriente attended the session "Asking versus Telling" presented by Bruce Stovel, who discussed questions, questioners and questioning. Asking is difficult, telling is easy. Jane Austen makes a distinction between "talk" and "conversation"; some of the "talkers" are Mrs. Allen, Mrs. Thorpe and Mrs. Ferrars. Some characters make statements, rather than ask questions. There are also examples of accusatory or announcing questions, questions of guidance, questions that attack or intrude. Stovel gave examples of each type. The inability to ask genuine questions suggests immaturity.

Virgil Oriente was disappointed with the session he attended: "Words Not Spoken". His feelings were that if Jane Austen did not think it necessary to tell us what a character said, or how a scene ended, but left it up to our imaginations to fill in the gaps, that was what he preferred to do, rather than have someone else suggest her own version of what Jane Austen might have wanted to say.

Eileen Sutherland described a lively, stimulating discussion led by Jan Fergus, a series of topics chosen by picking at random a sentence from *Emma*. Fergus pointed out how often a word or phrase would resonate backwards and forwards in the novel. Did you know, for instance, that a phrase from that famous first sentence occurs later in the novel: Emma seemed to unite some of *the best blessings of existence*; when she is afraid that Mr. Knightley is in love with Harriet, how wretched Emma would be if Harriet were to be the wife to whom he looked for all *the best blessings of existence*. We had fun finding other ideas, if not the actual words, which occurred over and over in *Emma*.

For the rest of the meeting, we followed our theme of Books, with readings and discussions of various books members had read lately and could recommend heartily. Margaret Howell read excerpts from a review of a new biography of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu by Christopher Hawtrey, and a couple of Letters from Bath by Rev. John Penrose, of 1766. Murray Wanamaker read a section "On Being Read To" from Manguel's History of Reading; Jean Brown read from Love Letters by Antonia Fraser, and Sandy Lundy discussed the Aristocrats by Stella Tillyard. Jacqueline Johnston mentioned In the Steps of Jane Austen and recalled a memorable trip to Bath in which she and a few friends were conducted around the city by the author herself, Anne-Marie Edwards. Annabel Smith led us into the next section of our meeting by teaching us the differences between the wild strawberries and their cultivated versions.

Because the theme of the meeting was Books, this seemed like a good opportunity to pay tribute to the librarians who have organized and built up our Vancouver group Library: Viviane McClelland (who unfortunately could not attend), the first librarian who got it started and carried it on for several years, and Dianne Kerr, our present librarian, who spends hours cataloguing, collecting new books, and generally keeping everything in order. Her husband, Ralph, must be given his share of the credit for carrying boxes of books back and forth for each meeting. They all deserve our sincere thanks

We had more readings than we had time for, but all enjoyed the subsequent lunch in which we "regaled" ourselves with all sorts of goodies including, of course, bowls of strawberries.



"The good or ill accidents of life are very little at our disposal; but we are pretty much masters [of] what books we shall read, what diversions we shall partake of, and what company we shall keep." Essays, Moral, Political and Literary: David Hume (d.1776).

LIBRARY CORNER - Dianne Kerr.

The Jane Austen Times (Puget Sound Newsletter) late last year printed in its entirety our Editor Eileen Sutherland's review of the two books by John Sutherland (no relation). Nice to know we're in touch.

ERRORS AND OMISSIONS (BY Me):

Nokes, David: JANE AUSTEN. A Life. 1997. It's on our Library List, but never noted in Report, at time of acquisition.

Tomalin, Claire: JANE AUSTEN. A Life. 1997. Same as above.

Scott, Peter J.M.: JANE AUSTEN. A Reassessment. 1982. This was donated by a member sometime about 1989; I read, but forgot either to report acquisition of, or to catalogue! Sorry about that. This is a "page-turner". (Snatched that term from Eileen Sutherland, who said it to me about Mr. Nokes; upon reading him, I concurred; Nokes fascinates with his imperturbable, unabashed, and unceasing fabrications, unwarranted assumptions, and personal opinions presented with as much Authority as "ex cathedra" Papal Pronouncements!)

Mr. Scott, unlike Mr. Nokes, appears to be a meticulous researcher; unfortunately, he is a Social Chauvinist (of which he has no suspicion at all), and I found him even more diverting than Mr. Nokes.

The Dust-jacket states: "Her rare acuteness in observing motives and their consequences is the source of her exhilarating humour... Such is Peter Scott's emphasis and he sees..."

Some samples of Mr. Scott to intrigue you: "The wholeness I want to talk about does disappear from EMMA, it lapses and fails us there..."(35); and: "(EMMA) ...is essentially a nasty book, and in evident demonstrable ways..."(63). He doesn't like Emma; he doesn't even like the Novel EMMA.

"If (Mr. Knightley)...is so woodenly perfect and supplied with all life's answers...why is he silent about the economics of a society where, according to his own recognition, the likes of Miss Bates (let alone poorer folk)...are to slip further and further downhill?"(74). The man is a gasp. Mr. Knightley is an "irritating" character because he is not the Social Reformer he ought to be.

"We may at first deem it simply fatuous of (Mrs. Jennings) to hope that a glass of Constantia wine will (soothe Marianne's broken heart)... but what else can the rest of society...offer the stricken girl?" (101). Mrs. Jennings is applauded for showing her sterling qualities by endorsing an alternative course in life, which is explained as being Colonel Brandon, with the offer of the glass of wine!

And: "(Perhaps to Jane Austen) ...NORTHANGER ABBEY did not seem to be the unfocused work I have argued it to be..." (110). But, NA is among the earliest of her compositions, and we must excuse her ignorance on the grounds of youth, Mr. Scott explains.

"(Edmund's letter to Fanny)...when it does come is one long soliloquy on...(his perplexity about Mary Crawford)...The real active concern in it for how Fanny may be...is effectually zero"(152). And, speaking of Sir Walter Elliot, Scott writes: "...pursuant to his plan for retrenchment and the vacation of Kellynch-hall..." the Vacation? Not the Vacating?? Really.

On the other hand: "Austen is not implying a radical change in the moral constitution of things. She is too perceptive, sees through everybody too thoroughly to indulge that species of wishful thinking." (200). Mr. Scott really admires JA very much; MP, for instance, is: A Flawless Masterpiece. This is a good love-hate read.

Lane, Maggie: THE JANE AUSTEN QUIZ AND PUZZLE BOOK. 1992. Donated by Jane Stringer, and gratefully received. Several of us already have a copy of this. A book of brain-teasers. "...a variety of puzzles and quizzes designed to test your knowledge of the novels of JA". Lots of fun.

Austen, Jane: LESLEY CASTLE. 1998. Edited by Jan Fergus; illustrated by Juliet McMaster. This was in the Delegate packet in Quebec; I think it most generous of Eileen Sutherland to have donated her copy to our Library. Infinitely superior to Chapman (no denigration - he evidently had too much to do in a tight time-frame); very careful editing and annotating here; spelling and punctuation have been regularized, and the want of words, phrases, and word-endings, (undoubtedly attributable to hasty composition), has been supplied - the latter alone enough to improve reading enjoyment overwhelmingly; but Austen's textual corrections and oddities have not been deleted; here you get everything!

PLEASE NOTE: New address for Librarian, Dianne Kerr: 4458 Arbutus Street, Vancouver, B.C. V6J 4A2. Same Telephone Number 731-2301.



NINETEENTH CENTURY ENGLISH - Richard Bailey
(Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996)

Most studies of English have concentrated on the early eras before the Norman Conquest “spoiled” the pure language; or the Middle English period when massive borrowings from other languages enriched the vocabulary; or the 16th and 17th centuries which Dr. Johnson considered “the pure sources of genuine diction.” It was customary to think of the past as endowed with a “glory” now gone.

Nineteenth century English is so like our own language that we tend to overlook the differences. In the nineteenth century, however, the language grew explosively, both in number of speakers and in vocabulary. Education, inventions, communication and travel all had an impact, and language as well as other aspects of life had to change.

Richard Bailey’s book is divided into sections to discuss these fields of change: Writing - The need for literacy and the expanded use of the written word interacted at the beginning of the century when books and newspapers became more common, the penny post made letters inexpensive, and increased commerce led to increased written advertising. Sounds - A Pronouncing Dictionary of 1800 listed as homophones the words reason and raisin, Rome and room, and satire and Satyr. By late in the century, the pronunciations were quite distinct. Words - Many new words entered English in the early years of the nineteenth century. Language followed and reflected the industrial and scientific trends: oxygen (1790), potassium (1807), legislate (1805), iodine (1814), tonsillitis (1801), working class (1813), and many more. Grammar - The insistence on good grammatical usage had admirers and detractors: was bad grammar a sign of bad character, individually and nationally? or was it a sign of vitality, vigor and independence? The disputants usually overlooked the changes that occurred during the course of the century.

In this section, Bailey uses Jane Austen as an example of good grammatical forms early in the century. He makes an interesting comparison between her usage in Sanditon, and the late 20th century phrasing used by Anne Telscombe, who “ably completed” Jane Austen’s fragment, and tried to be faithful to the original language. The phrase natural to Jane Austen: “Your fate is now mourned throughout Sanditon,” became “your fate is now being mourned throughout Sanditon.” A construction like “is being” is rare in Jane Austen: “There was no being displeased with such an encouragement” (Emma); but Telscombe uses “Sir Edward was being very eloquent” and “her sister was being a shade premature” (Sand.). Jane Austen also wrote: “She was now, on being settled at home, at leisure” (P&P), and “He was rich, and being turned on shore, fully intended...” (Pers.).

This period saw an expanded use of verbal phrases containing forms of the auxiliaries be and have, often to denote “nice logical distinctions” and “emotional value”. One philologist considers that in this usage, “Jane Austen is clearly an innovator,” but the nuances are not always evident. She wrote: “I am dying to show you my new hat” and “I die to see him,” both in N.A. In her letters, she uses phrases like “it rains again,” and “it rained almost all the way,” but never “It was raining.” Another inconsistent pair of phrases was: “Whitworth goes in their train as Lord Lieutenant” and “Tom Chute is going to settle in Norfolk.” Obviously the usage was in the process of changing, and she wrote whichever form she thought of at the moment.

Another tendency which developed rapidly was the use of general verbs like give, have, and take with nouns instead of verbs alone. Jane Austen uses such expressions regularly: “Both gentlemen had a glance at Fanny” (MP). This 19th century “fondness” for nouns was a sign of modernity. Nouns were increasingly formed from verbs without any change in the form of the word: “She had better have her cry out at once and have done with it” (S&S).

There may have been a social distinction between some synonyms which we no longer understand: In the same speech, Mrs. Norris (MP) calls her own table a “dining table” and the one at Mansfield Park, a “dinner table.”

Do you say: “the two first” or “the first two”? Jane Austen usually wrote “two first dances” but Telscombe used the phrase “first two dances” in her completion of Sanditon. This was an old difference of opinion. The traditional usage was “two first”, but as early as the 16th century “the first two” came into use also. Position was becoming more and more important in English usage, and keeping the numeral next to the noun makes the form “the first two” more acceptable today.

Throughout the 19th century a shift was taking place where verbs like come, go, become and grow could be used with forms of either be or have. Bailey considers Jane Austen’s usage conservative, but like most of her contemporaries, she used both. “She had gone home” and “she is gone home” (Emma); “I am grown wretchedly thin” (NA) and “she had just grown intimate” (MP). “He was become perfectly reconciled” (Emma) and “his penance had become severe” (Pers.). The change seems to have been an increasing preference for have over be early in the century.

Bailey has studied the language in great detail, and makes his points in a plain style with interesting examples. He ends his book: “Nineteenth century English was part of a social transformation that changed the language and changed the world.” He also gives us a fascinating insight into Jane Austen’s writing in a contemporary context. [At VPL]

■ Eileen Sutherland.



The Knight Dinner Service - From The Writing Desk, Toronto - Nancy Stokes.

“After reading the quotation in the August Writing Desk of the dinner service chosen for Edward Knight at Wedgwood’s, Joan Austen-Leigh writes:

About 1966 when my aunt Honor Austen-Leigh died in Suffolk, England, I was helping her housekeeper clean out her house. Delving under the kitchen sink, I found an old plate, covered with dirt (it had evidently been used to stand a flowerpot on). Through the grime it struck a chord. I had recently been to Chawton and seen the dinner service there. Hastily, but reverently, washing off the plate, I cried, ‘Millie, this is a very valuable plate.’ ‘Oh, it is’, she said, ‘it made a very good dish in which to bake an apple tart!’ In quite a separate part of my aunt’s house, I found an old scrap of paper in her sewing basket. ‘Plate, given by Montagu Knight to William Austen-Leigh.’ Needless to say, the scrap of paper and the plate are now united in my china cabinet and held in great esteem. Nobody ever even eats off that plate, let alone stands a pot on it, or bakes an apple tart in it. I might say, however, it looks as good as new, in spite of what it has been through. It is very light in weight, and the purple lozenge design with ‘the crest’ is comparatively fresh and not appreciably worn away.”



“Where the reading of novels prevails...it occasions in time the entire destruction of the powers of the mind; it is such an utter loss to the reader, that it is not so much pass-time as kill-time.”

- Coleridge.

Can you answer this question from Jean Scott?

In a book review in the English magazine the Spectator, I read the following sentence:

“Shakespeare mentions China twice, Jane Austen once.”

I’m willing to bet that you can name the Jane Austen novel concerned!

New Books - (from New York Newsletter, Winter, 1999)

“...Two superb new books which will provide additional background to the novels and the woman. The Gentleman’s Daughter - Women’s Lives in Georgian England by Amanda Vickery (1998), closely examines, through letters, diaries and account books, lives that would have been similar to those of Jane Austen’s female protagonists. Handsomely illustrated, this ‘lively, often humorous study offers an unprecedented insight into the intimate and everyday lives of genteel women.’ Thorough notes, appendices, tables and an excellent bibliography only add more value to a volume which should be on every Janeite’s bookshelf.

Venetia Murray’s An Elegant Madness: High Society in Regency England covers other members of Georgian society from the French Revolution to the coming Reform era, focusing ‘on the cream of the elite, the ton’, and also contains period illustrations and a good bibliography.”

Tony Tanner, ‘versatile and prolific literary critic’ and author of one of the fundamental critical works about Jane Austen, died last December. He was 63. [NYT Feb.9,1999]

Iris Murdoch, who died on February 8, 1999 at the age of 79, ‘rarely read modern writers, preferring the British and European novelists of the 19th century (Jane Austen, etc.)’ [NYT Feb.9,1999]

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