

MRS. GARDINER'S AGE - Kathleen Glancy

Mrs. Gardiner, who was several years younger than Mrs. Bennet...

Yes, indeed - several years younger, and Mrs. Bennet herself is not all that old. We are talking of a time when most women married in the late teens and early twenties, and had their first child within a year. Mrs. Bennet was most likely still in her teens - to her the age of 20 would have been a horrific barrier which, if she reached it unengaged, would have started her fretting about being an old maid and robbed her of the appearance of good humour that snared Mr. Bennet. Jane is 22; Mrs. Bennet is probably only in the early 40s. Mrs. Gardiner's eldest child is only 8, and Jane, when she imagines her uncle to have paid the costs of restoring Lydia to respectability, comments that he cannot have a great deal of money to spare since "He has children of his own, and may have more". Mrs. Gardiner is a young woman, in the early 30s at most.

Why then is she so often illustrated as middle aged (even Hugh Thomson sticks an inappropriate pair of glasses on her) and portrayed on screen by mature actresses? Perhaps the illustrators and casting directors are influenced by her not being a great walker which hits a note of debility in some people's minds. Actually the likeliest reason is that she didn't get much practice, Gracechurch Street being located in an area which would make it undesirable to go for a stroll (it's very near the docks) and from which the London parks are not easily reached. Perhaps they don't want to make Mr. Gardiner appear a great deal older than her, though in fact there is no evidence that he is. Just because he is more mature than his sisters is not to say he is older than them. He could be barely 40. Perhaps they felt that youth and good sense were not compatible qualities, in which case it's as well they weren't handling the casting of Elinor Dashwood.

And in fact Mrs. Gardiner, wise as she is and happily married as she is (I would contend that the Gardiners have the happiest marriage in all of JA's works,

that we see much of at any rate. Theirs is a true and equal partnership where problems and pleasures are shared and discussed. Even the happy unions of the Westons and the Crofts cannot quite compare - in both cases there is a certain degree of childishness in the male halves of the partnership which means their wives must mother them a little, too) is not devoid of a little touch of human, female, youthful folly. She is just a little bit susceptible to masculine good looks. Under the influence of the plausible Wickham she convinces herself that she has heard ill reports of the young Darcy. Exposed to the grown-up Darcy himself, however, she begins to doubt that he could have behaved so badly to Wickham, on the not too logical grounds that Darcy has not an ill-natured look and that there is something pleasing about his mouth when he speaks.

On the other hand, perhaps this is a trait that no woman ever quite outgrows.



* The first part of Mrs. Gardiner's business was to distribute her presents

FROM ITALY

(Some time ago, an Italian student in Venice, Tiziana Saccoman, asked for information about obtaining books and articles about Emma to use in preparing her dissertation. I sent her excerpts from several copies of Persuasions, and other articles.) She wrote back last summer:

Thank you very much for...the precious material on Jane Austen you were so kind as to send me...

As far as my thesis on Emma is concerned, I have written two chapters of it: it will offer an examination of the female characters and world of Emma because I found that this novel - as well as Jane Austen's other works - has a feminine point of view: the writer seems to have a deeper interest in the female rather than in the male world. Moreover Austen's interest in the woman question, her attitude to the female characters and concerns, together with the way they are portrayed, often show a transcendence of limitations imposed on her by her sex: this is her co-called "original response to convention" which has also been defined by some critics as Jane Austen's "feminism", a feminism of the content as well as of the form. Instances of this "feminism" are found also in Emma: the heroine herself in a sense is the embodiment of disregard for the normal observances of society. My aim is firstly to prove the centrality of the figure of the woman in the novel; secondly to detect the above-mentioned instances of "feminism" (or transgression) and see to what extent it may be considered so. The dissertation is divided into three parts, each devoted to the analysis of the feminine world from a different point of view: social, psychological, and linguistic.

Jane Austen is one of the novelists whose works every Italian student of English literature has to know. I took an interest in Jane Austen as a writer and as a woman when I read Pride and Prejudice for one of my examinations on English literature, and therefore decided to do my thesis on one of her novels.

I am enclosing the Italian version of Emma, which I am pleased to offer you as a present for your kindness towards me and which, together with Pride and Prejudice and Mansfield Park, is one of the novels by Jane Austen one can find in every Italian bookshop. The edition I chose is that translated by Mario Praz, one of the Italian authorities on English literature...

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Obituary: Mrs. Kathleen Rankin

It was with regret that we learned of the sudden passing of Kathleen Rankin on December 24th. Mrs. Rankin had not been active in the Vancouver group for some time, but she was an avid reader of Jane Austen, and was always interested in discussing the quotations and references she came across. A Memorial Service was held at Brock House on January 25, 1991.

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PUBLICITY

...However bare of news the country in general might be...

We have been receiving very good publicity in newspapers and magazines lately, thanks to the excellent press releases prepared by Shannon Rupp and her helpers. Many of you sent in clippings that I would otherwise not have seen - they are part of our "archives" - thank you very much indeed.

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MR. COLLINS CONSIDERED: Ivor Morris (London & NY, Routledge & Kegan Paul)

Reviewed by Keiko Parker.

This is an interesting book containing much insight into Jane Austen's characters. In fact this insightful aspect of the work takes up so much of the text, that one wonders if Mr. Collins was used as an excuse by the author to give vent to his opinions on other Austen characters. I found most of what the author stated about the doings of various characters valid. Morris raises an especially interesting point concerning Elizabeth Bennet whose unwitting encouragement of Mr. Darcy by her "archness" and "impertinence" leads Darcy to conclude that her acceptance of his offer of marriage is a matter of course - something I had not thought of before in quite that light.

Throughout the book Morris' method is to compare and contrast Mr. Collins' character with that of other Austen characters and to establish that his conduct is not at all out of the ordinary. Some elements of his defense of Mr. Collins are reasonable enough. But when he refers to a "modicum of purity" (p.52) that Mr. Collins is supposed to evince in wishing to marry a Bennet girl to make up for the entail, I could not agree. This is a thoroughly Collins piece of action: he is only easing his conscience for being next in line to inherit Mr. Bennet's property and at the same time securing a wife without the effort to "attach" a girl to himself.

I also found nothing "curiously engaging" (p.83) in the freedom with which he writes to Mr. Bennet after Lydia's elopement regarding how he, Mr. Collins, narrowly escaped becoming a member of the disgraced family. The tone of his letter is patently obnoxious and self-congratulatory.

Morris' intention is to establish that Mr. Collins is "by no means so bad as the worst" (p.83). But it is cold comfort to think that he is not as mean-spirited as Mrs. Norris, not as wicked as Willoughby or Mr. Elliot, and not as openly mercenary as John Dashwood. After reading the book Mr. Collins remains for me just as conceited, pompous, narrow-minded, silly, and as overly obsequious as ever. How Morris can say "the fellow has style" I find difficult to grasp. And surely Mr. Collins is not "one of the best-loved characters" of Austen's novels as the dust jacket suggests, but one of the most laughed-at.

Insofar as Morris' intention was to "send the reader back to the author's work with renewed interest" and to "offer...perceptions...[that] will make possible a better understanding of the writer's intention and art", he succeeded. But his evaluation of Mr. Collins himself left me unconvinced.

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MEANING TO HAVE SPRING AGAIN

Our Garden is putting in order...

A favourite pastime for these dreary winter days is looking through seed catalogues. An interesting note in one of them tells about Suttons Seeds, the firm having been established in 1806. "John Sutton began his seed business in England just short of 200 years ago..."

The company also sells roses - some of their special ones are called "William Shakespeare", "Gertrude Jekyll" and "Jayne Austin".

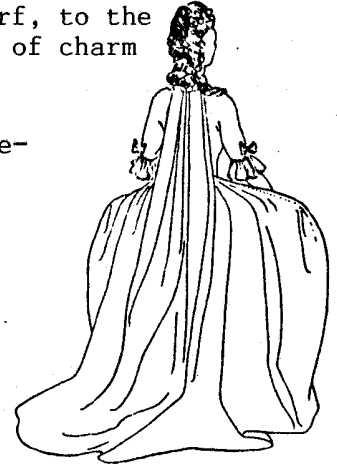
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A FRIVOLOUS DISTINCTION : PANACHE - Vancouver Museum, through Sept, 2, 1991

What gown and what head-dress she should wear...became her chief concern (NA)

She was dressed in a lace-trimmed white cotton muslin gown with a low round neckline and tiny puffed sleeves. The high waist was encircled with ribbon and a long tartan shawl was casually draped over one shoulder. She looked up with a mixture of pertness and innocence. From the delicate drapery of her white silk turban and scarf, to the bottom of her tucked and ruffled skirt she was the epitome of charm and simplicity.

She could have been Catherine Morland, gazing up wide-eyed and adoringly at Henry Tilney. In reality, she was a mannequin in the exhibit Panache at the Vancouver Museum, and she was wearing a gown from Scotland, one of the oldest in the display.



Panache: 200 Years of the Fashionable Woman, begins at a generation before Catherine Morland and Jane Austen, gowns that their mothers might have worn. Two concepts in the fashions of the centuries from then until today have been stressed: conspicuous waste and beauty by impairment. Fashionable gowns were delicate fragile garments, lavish costumes on which large sums of money had been expended, a statement of the wealth and social status of the owner. They were entirely unsuitable for labour or effort of any kind; they put their wearers into a weakened and helpless position, to emphasize the strength and protectiveness of men.



In the generation before Jane Austen, gowns were made of silk taffetas and brocades. They were designed with loose flowing panels at the back - the Watteau panel - which required less cutting of the exquisite valuable fabrics. Another design, the robe à l'Anglaise, had a bodice fitted at front and back, and a full skirt open at the front to display a contrasting petticoat. Side width was obtained by light-weight basket panniers over the hips. These wide billowing skirts emphasized the tiny waist.



This stress on width gradually changed to emphasis on the vertical - stripes became popular in the last part of the 18th century. The influence of politics on fashion is shown in the polonnaise: a skirt draped up into three sections recalling Poland divided among Russia, Prussia and Austria in 1772. A scarf around the throat reminded one of the necessity to "protect one's throat" during the period of the beheadings in France. The turban headdress was derived from the recently "discovered" Persian empire, and the inspiration of the ostrich plumes on top was from the wall paintings of the tombs in Egypt, just revealed by Napoleon's armies.

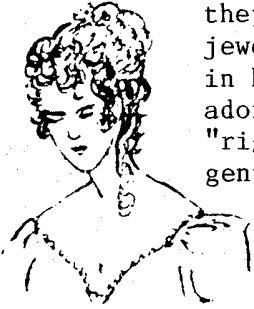
During the French Revolution, fashionable costume was adapted from ancient Greece (democratic, republican). Cottons replaced rich



silks; white and pale pastels took the place of the vibrant colours and patterns of the previous era; panniers and corsets were abandoned, as were elaborately powdered wigs - the natural hair was worn in loose curls.

The inventions of the Spinning Jenny (1767) and the Cotton Gin (1793) made possible the cheaper production of cotton, and the expansion of Britain and France into trade in India, and the large cotton plantations of southern America, produced high-grade inexpensive cotton fabrics.

Shoes also became simpler and less costly. In the 18th century they had high shapely "Pompadour" heels. The front closures were jewelled buckles. By 1795, the fashionable lady's foot was shod in heelless slippers or sandals of coloured kid with pointed toes adorned with pompoms. Until the mid-19th century, shoes had no "right" or "left"; the narrower the sole, the more elegant and genteel.



These early neo-classical fashions were most suitable for young women, with figures capable of wearing the revealing styles. By the time of the First Empire in France (and fashions were closely imitated in England), the leaders of society were the mature wives of Napoleon's generals. Their garments covered the body more modestly, in a dignified architectural manner. The dress became more important than the body inside it. Shoulders were broader, with conspicuously puffed sleeves. The A-line silhouette with gores and panels in the skirt expanded the hems, which in turn emphasized the tiny waist again - corsets returned.



Day dresses were made of heavier materials and darker or brighter colours, crisp fabrics which built up the shoulders with puffs and trimmings. The dress was worn covered by a short embroidered, frogged and buttoned jacket called a Spencer, or a long pelisse, a coat with skirt fullness tightly gathered at the back waist. Skirts were now clear of the ground and were designed for function - walking costumes, for example, which consisted of skirt, blouse, jacket, hat and boots.



In the fashions of the generations later than Jane Austen we see styles changing - hems longer or shorter, sleeves with exaggerated puffs at the shoulders or elbows, the silhouette slender or full - expensive fabrics, lavish use of materials - but still the emphasis on "femininity" and weakness. Designs changed but the restrictions remained: corsets boned or with wooden "busks" down the front that prevented slumping or bending; sheaths, hobble skirts and bustles that made a full stride impossible; tight shoulders that curtailed arm movements.



PANACHE gives a delightful and informative look at women's fashions through the ages. The elegant models are accessorized with the appropriate hats, gloves and shoes, and are accompanied by graceful swans, baskets of flowers, pheasants and peacocks in colourful splendour. A walking dress is shown beside a wrought iron park bench; a white cotton wedding dress in front of a gilded Empire mirror. It is a magnificent display of fashion.

They had great pleasure in praising it. (MP)

David Cecil, in his biography of Jane Austen, places the novelist in her historic period, in her geographical setting, in her extended family and among her novels.

He sees her as an 18th century novelist, although all her books were written in the 19th century. She was a contemporary of Coleridge and Wordsworth, in thought and style. The 18th century had moved from the delight in subjects of coarse bawdy humour as evinced in Congreve's Love for Love (1695), later described by Fanny Burney as "indelicate", to a society which combined "good sense, good manners and cultivated intelligence, rational piety and a spirited sense of fun."

Cecil places Jane Austen in her geographical setting in the southern counties of England, between London and Bath, where her travel was restricted to the distance that a horse-drawn coach could go. She was at ease in the countryside she grew up in, a comfortable, organized, civilized society. When she received the news in 1801 that her family was to move from Steventon in Hampshire, to Bath, she fainted; she was later to concede that she enjoyed life in Bath, but was glad to move again in 1806.

Jane Austen was at home among her family of well-connected squires and clergymen. In a chapter, detailed but not over-complicated, David Cecil describes her relationship with her six brothers and one sister. Two of her brothers were clergymen, two in the Royal Navy. Cecil marks 1786 as an important date in Jane Austen's development; it marks the beginning of her correspondence with her elder sister Cassandra, in which Jane, putting away the formality and restraint that 18th century convention dictated, writes in a style "blythely and formidably outspoken, frank and flippan't".

Although Jane Austen's novels were not autobiographical as were those of Proust or Charlotte Bronte, she used her personal knowledge and personal experience throughout. She wrote what she knew about, in her feeling for the navy, particularly in Persuasion. She described what she had herself felt, for instance, in Fanny's joy in returning from Portsmouth to Mansfield Park.

David Cecil warns his readers that because so little is known about Jane Austen he will make certain conjectures about her life, but that readers will be forewarned when he does this. One of the conjectures I liked very much was that the character of Henry Tilney was based on the very real clergyman, the irreverent Reverend Sidney Smith (1771-1845), whom Jane Austen did meet in Bath. Sidney Smith, a conversationalist and essayist still quoted, must have delighted Jane Austen with such remarks as, "Among the smaller duties of life I hardly know one more important than that of not giving praise where praise is not due." I think he would have revelled in the company of a woman who could write in one of her letters, "Miss Blackford is agreeable enough. I don't want people to be very agreeable, it saves me the trouble of liking them a good deal."

Margaret Drabble, in The Oxford Companion to English Literature, describes the writings of David Cecil as having scholarly attention to detail with accessibility to the general reader. This book ripples along, it is charmingly illustrated in colour and monochrome, certainly loving and praising Jane Austen, but never too much so for me.

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Some courses are offered at universities in Britain which may be of interest to members. For further information, and a brochure, please contact the appropriate organisation.

Summer Academy, School of Continuing Education, The University, Canterbury, Kent, CT2 7NX:

THE LANDSCAPE IN LITERATURE

17 August, 1991

Norwich

Fee: £240

The landscape of England has changed over the centuries, but so have ideas about and attitudes to it. In the medieval period the countryside was primarily regarded as a place of work, and a source of subsistence. But as society became more urban, the rural environment was increasingly regarded as a retreat, and land began to be adapted for primarily aesthetic purposes. Gardens and landscape parks proliferated, and the countryside was frequently identified with innocence, health and happiness. This course will trace the development of literary representation of the English landscape. Amongst the writers covered will be Chaucer, Milton, Pope, Goldsmith, Austen and Hardy, enlivened by visits to the varied landscapes of Norfolk.

Tutor: Liz Bellamy, MA, PhD

JANE AUSTEN

20 July, 1991

Southampton at Sparsholt

Fee: £275

The supreme novelist of exquisite and sharply-observed social detail, Jane Austen is also a shrewd observer of the truths and foibles of human nature. This course, set in her own Hampshire countryside, offers a chance to study a selection of her novels, with excursions to help our appreciation. There will also be lectures and seminars on Jane Austen's life, the world she inhabited, and the other influential writers of her time.

Tutor: William R. Jones, BA, PhD

Accommodation in university residences with excellent facilities comprises comfortable single bedrooms or for those who wish to share, twin bedrooms. Whether you choose an old, traditional or modern university, you will receive the same warm welcome and be able to enjoy good food, lounges and licensed bars, as well as the excellent on site facilities.

From 15 June - 14 September 1991, Summer Academy courses cost from: £225.

Full board accommodation for 7 days, Saturday to Saturday. All tuition. Course related excursions.

Some non course activities.

Accommodation is available at a reduced rate for a friend or spouse, who does not wish to attend a course.

...and many other courses.

The Cambridge/UCLA Program, Department of the Arts, UCLA Extension, PO Box 24901, Dept.K, Los Angeles, CA 90024-0901:

First Session: July 7-27, 1991

Second Session: July 28-Aug.17, 1991

The English Country House, 1550-1800
The Romantics: Blake, Wordsworth, Keats, etc.
The Evolution of the English Town

Art and the English Landscape
Landscapes and Gardens, the history
The Age of Reason: The Enlightenment

Fees: \$2,850 per session, includes tuition, field trips, lodging, meals and lectures.

...and many others.

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NEW MEMBERS

We extend a very warm welcome to new members:

John Anderson, Surrey
Judith Anderson, Burnaby
Susanne Ebeling, Vancouver
Ellnore Franks, West Vancouver

Sandra Hajdu, Burnaby
Jaqueline Johnson, Vancouver
Ruth Nesbitt, Vancouver

This brings the Vancouver membership up to 78 members.

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DONATION TO LIBRARY FUND

...the pleasures of so benevolent a scheme...

We have received a very generous donation to the Library Fund from Donna Prince, in memory of her cousin Beverley Renton Cross, to be used to purchase more books and tapes for our regional library. Mr. Cross was interested in all branches of the Arts, and would be pleased to have this memorial gift providing such pleasure to our members. Our grateful thanks to Donna.

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BATH NOISES

Amidst the dash of other carriages, the heavy rumble of carts and drays, the howling of newsmen, muffin-men & milkmen, and the ceaseless clink of patters...

When Anne Elliot drove into Bath with Lady Russell, she felt her spirits and her senses assaulted by the bustle and the noise. But at least nobody turned a hose on her.

The present-day residents of Bath evidently agree with Anne that the noise-level of the city is very high. When tour buses last summer began rolling up and down the streets with loudspeakers blaring information about the places of interest along the way, it was TOO MUCH.

Irate citizens, who just happened to be watering their gardens when the open buses passed, turned their hoses on offending loudspeakers and innocent tourists alike.

The Transport Ministry is considering the problem.

What would Lady Russell have said about such goings-on!

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POSTAGE

As your uncle will frank it, it will cost William nothing. (MP)

We may deplore the recent increase in the cost of postage, but consider the rise in 1805: the cost of mailing a letter doubled that year, and seven years later doubled again.

However, we must also consider that the increase was from one penny to twopence, and then to fourpence, during those years!

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This Newsletter, the publication of the Vancouver Region of the Jane Austen Society of North America, comes out four times a year: February, May, August and November. All submissions on the subject of Jane Austen, her life, her works and her times, are welcome. Mail to the Editor: Eileen Sutherland, 4169 Lions Ave., North Vancouver, B.C. V7R 3S2.