

VANCOUVER REGION NEWSLETTER No. 46 May 1994

A SAILOR'S WIFE - Eileen Sutherland

Mrs. Croft has a comparatively small part in Persuasion, but she is a credible, well-rounded character who enlivens the story whenever she appears. Shortly after Persuasion was finished, a real naval wife, Maria Graham, published her Journals of voyages to South America. Recently these journals were published as The Captain's Wife, edited by Elizabeth Mavor. In opinions, actions and adventures, this real captain's wife reminds one constantly of Mrs. Croft.

Maria, on a voyage to India (where her father hoped she would marry a rich merchant as Jane Austen's aunt Philadelphia did), met and married a young navy lieutenant, Thomas Graham. They lived together, on ship and ashore, in India, London, Italy, Scotland, and back in England again. Then Tom got a command, of the frigate Doris, with orders to proceed to Brazil. The South American colonies, inspired by the ideals of the French Revolution and the example of the American War of Independence, were rebelling against Spain and Portugal. To protect English merchants in the ports of Brazil and Chile, the British Navy patrolled the coasts, remaining neutral in the local battles but ready to protect or take on board any endangered English citizens.

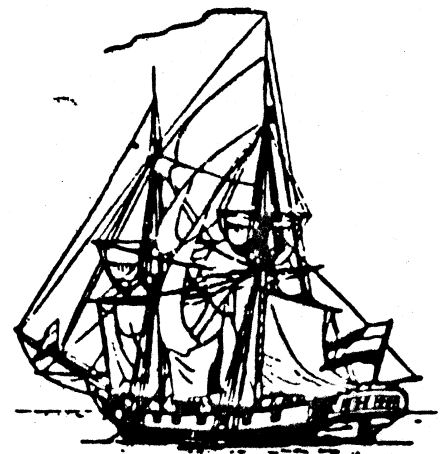
Captain Graham and the Doris set sail for the coast of Brazil, and like Mrs. Croft (*While we were together, you know, there was nothing to be feared*), Maria travelled with him, as a matter of course.

Mrs. Croft felt *as comfortable on board as in the best house in England... I have not a comfort or an indulgence about me... beyond what I always had in most of the ships I have lived in.* Maria Graham would have agreed with her. She described one ship she was on, *Her cabins are beautifully fitted up with handsome wood and green morocco cushions, etc. and another, I feel as if lodging in a quiet English family, all is so decent, orderly, and above all, clean. I am under no restraint, but walk, read, write, and draw, as if at home.* Another Journal entry reads: *We are not idle. As the cabin has always a good fire in it, it is the general rendez-vous for invalids, and the midshipmen come in and out as they please, as it is the school-room. One evening, I sat a long time on the deck, listening to the sea songs with which the crew beguile the evening watch. Though the humorous songs were applauded sufficiently, yet the plaintive and pathetic seemed the favourites; and the chorus to The Death of Wolfe was swelled by many voices.*

The ship remained in South American waters - off the coasts of Brazil, around Cape Horn, and to ports in Chile, and back again to Brazil - for over two years. Maria often lived ashore, making friends and getting to know the countries and the people well.

When the Crofts moved to Kellynch, Anne felt that *the poor [could be sure] of the best attention and relief.* Probably the young midshipmen on Admiral Croft's ships were treated with the same loving kindness as Maria Graham gave to her "boys". *We took a large party of midshipmen on shore to enjoy the young pleasure of walking on a foreign land... The boys, with no small delight, gathered fine ripe black-berries. When one was sick, she took a house on shore in Rio. To this house I have brought my poor suffering midshipman Langford, and trust that free air, moderate exercise, and a milk diet, will restore him. She nursed the ill herself: I have not been in bed for three nights. My invalids are in that state, that night watching is necessary for them. Like the Crofts, the Grahams were childless, and the midshipmen were treated like their own sons.*

Maria found much to remind her of life in England: in



a-house in Chile she found *Good mirrors, handsome carpets, a piano by Broadwood, and a reasonable collection of chairs, tables, and beds, not just of the forms of modern Paris or London, but such, I dare say, as were fashionable there little more than a century ago, [which] look exceedingly well on this side of the Horn.*

Like Mrs. Croft, who was *as intelligent and keen as any of the officers around her*, Maria Graham knew all about ships, navigation, and nautical terms. She describes one of the new Brazilian ships as *a fine two-decker, without a poop. She has a most beautiful gun-deck, but I could not see her to advantage, as she was still taking in stores, and receiving men.*

And like the Crofts, *interesting themselves in their new possessions, their grass, and their sheep*, and exploring in their gig the countryside around Kellynch, Maria was intensely curious about every new thing around her. On the voyage south, *an iceberg was reported on the lee-bow. As I had never seen one, I went on deck...It appeared like a moderately high conical hill, and looked very white upon the bleak grey sky. Some of the midshipmen skinned and dissected birds they had caught at sea, and Maria was just as interested and they. These huge sea-birds, that we find so far from any land, have on each side large air-vessels adapted for floating them in the air, or on the water, they are placed below the wings, and the liver, gizzard and entrails rest on them. In each gizzard of those we have yet opened, there have been two small pebbles, of unequal size, and the gizzard is very rough within. We have found more vegetable than animal food in their stomachs.*

Ashore, Maria visited homes, looked into cottages, inspected vineyards, tasted the local wines, and even tried her hand at making the local pottery: *As the shortest way of learning is to mix at once with those we wish to learn from, I seated myself on the sheep-skin and began to work too, imitating as I could a little girl who was making a simple saucer. Her friendly nature and interest made her accepted wherever she went.*

Maria was fascinated with an apothecary's shop in Chile: *I fancy it must resemble an apothecary's of the fourteenth century, for it is even more antique looking than those I have seen in Italy or France...jars of old-fashioned medicines, inscribed all over with the celestial signs, oddly intermixed with packets of patent medicines from London, dried herbs, and filthy gallipots.*

In emergencies, however, she used the remedy of her English contemporaries: *over-exertion by an ill midshipman brought on severe hemorrhage, which I stopped with laudanum. When she herself was suffering exceedingly but was resolved to go out, I was obliged to take a quantity of opium, to enable me to do so.*

Maria was less than complimentary about the English merchant families she met. It frustrated her when they couldn't tell her the name of common plants or trees, or what the country was like beyond the distant hills, or where the local potters got their fine red clay. On one occasion she wrote: *As to the English, what can I say? They are very like all one sees at home, in their rank of life, and the ladies, very good persons doubtless, would require Miss Austen's pen to make them interesting...It is curious, at this distance from home, to see specimens of such people as one meets nowhere else but among the Brangtons, in Madame D'Arblay's Cecilia, or the Mrs. Eltons of Miss Austen's admirable novels, and yet these are, after all, the people most likely to be here.*

Maria took her Journal-writing seriously, but every so often her sense of humour cannot be denied. Visiting a convent, she noticed that the fountain was being repaired by several masons, *with half a dozen soldiers to guard them or the nuns. After a severe earthquake, her house was left almost intact, and the priests, to make a miracle of it, placed a holy image in the main room, which received numerous offerings for having protected the premises, and I suppose carried off a silver pocket-compass and a smelling bottle, the only two things I missed!*

Occasionally, Maria's Journal recalls passages in Jane Austen's novels. Speaking of the local wine, she wrote: *It is a rich, strong, and sweetish white wine, capable, with good management, of great improvement, and infinitely preferable to any of the Cape*

wines, excepting Constantia, that I ever drank. [It was Constantia, you will remember, that Mrs. Jennings offered to Marianne as a cure for a broken heart]. Anne Elliot says, *My idea of good company...is the company of clever, well-informed people, who have a great deal of conversation.* Compare Maria's remarks: *I sometimes sigh for what I enjoyed this evening - a little rational conversation on more general topics.* Mr. Elliot is described as *rational, discreet, polished, - but he was not open,* and Maria describes San Martin, the Chilean general: *His countenance is decidedly handsome, sparkling, and intelligent, but not open.*

With her typical love of the picturesque and the sublime, Maria often described the beauties of the countryside. Her first sight of Rio delighted her: *Lofty mountains, rocks of clustered columns, luxuriant wood, bright flowery islands, green banks, all mixed with white buildings; each little eminence crowned with its church or fort; ships at anchor or in motion; and innumerable boats flitting about in such a delicious climate, - combine to render Rio de Janeiro the most enchanting scene that imagination can conceive.*

Arriving in Chile, *I can conceive nothing more glorious than the sight of the Andes this morning on approaching the land at day-break. Starting, as it were, from the ocean itself, their summits of eternal snow shone in all the majesty of light long before the lower earth was illuminated. Suddenly the sun appeared from behind them and they were lost, and we sailed on for hours before we descried the land.*

As she could think of an earthquake as sublime, she had similar feelings of a storm at sea: *A sudden shift of wind had taken place. We saw it before it came up, driving the sea along furiously before it, and the meeting of the two winds broke the sea as high as any ship's mast-head in a long line, like the breakers on a reef of rocks. It was the most beautiful yet fearful sight I ever beheld, and the sea was surging over our little vessel so as to threaten to fill her.*

Maria was nursing a sick midshipman at the home of friends in Chile when a devastating earthquake occurred. She remained calm, tending her patient, and making journal notes of the times and severity of each tremor. *Never shall I forget the horrible sensation of that night, she wrote after the first shock. In all other convulsions of nature we feel or fancy that some exertion may be made to evert or mitigate the danger, but from an earthquake there is neither shelter nor escape. The "mad disquietude" that agitates every heart, and looks out in every eye, seems to me as awful as the last judgment can be, and I regret that my anxiety for my patient overcoming other feelings, I had not my due portion of that sublime terror.* She also regretted the lack of a barometer for further observations. In the evenings they walked along the beach, *chiefly for the purpose of tracing the effects of the earthquake along the rocks.*

The Grahams, like the Crofts, did almost everything together, but whereas the Crofts lived - we hope - to a contented old age, Maria was not so fortunate. Captain Graham fell ill, and in spite of all that Maria and the doctor could do, died in her arms. Near despair, Maria watched from her window as his body was taken ashore for a military burial. [Women did not go to funerals - Cassandra, too, watched from the window of their lodgings in Winchester, as the men of the family escorted Jane's coffin to the Cathedral]. Maria's health failed and her spirits were depressed, but her determination carried her through. She removed her belongings from the ship in preparation for the arrival of a new captain, *(I believe, what must be done is better done at once)*, and found a temporary home on shore. It was not her nature to give up. She kept herself busy, found new things to raise her spirits, and studied Brazilian history, until another ship took her back to England again.

There is nothing in the way that Jane Austen presented Mrs. Croft to suggest that she would not have had interests very much like those of Maria Graham. Somehow - from her sailor brothers, their friends and connections - Jane Austen learned enough about naval families to draw the vivid and realistic picture of Mrs. Croft, so similar in so many ways to a real navy wife like Maria Graham.

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FROM THE LIBRARIAN - A FIND! Dianne Kerr

Craik, W.A., Jane Austen: The Six Novels (Methuen & Co., first published 1965).

An engrossing critical study of our favourite six novels. W.A.Craik is not identified on the dustcover, but there is a short blurb there which indicates that she is a female person.

She deals with the six novels in order of composition, her purpose being to show the development of Austen as Artist and Craftsman. She puts NA chronologically first, explaining her reasons; and places the other five in order of publication, carefully delineating each time the treatments and methods of composition which show development of competence and technique.

The longest chapter by many pages is chapter 5, on Emma, which Craik believes to be Austen's masterpiece. Here she shows how Austen manages as nearly as possible to exclude the Narrator, as omniscient outside character. And Craik considers this accomplishment, (dove-tailed into other signposts of her genius here), to be Austen's *tour de force*.

Those who find Persuasion their favourite may not be completely happy, because Craik believes that it is too short; that Austen would almost certainly have expanded and fleshed it out had she lived. And that the form, in many places, shows clear evidence of being merely a first rough draft outline only. But she does justify her opinions by critical comparison with the other novels, particularly the mastery shown in Emma.

Craik deals with many of the topics which we have currently encountered in Conferences (e.g. Anne's sublimating in Pers.), although she does not use the terms currently in fashion to describe such processes.

If you like reading about Austen as a most superior artist, justified with ineluctable evidence, this is for you.

[There is a copy of Jane Austen: The Six Novels in the Vancouver Public Library: Dunbar Branch - Call number 823 A9 Z cr.]

Also, for Listeners: "Jane Austen Songs". A CD (Compact Disc), donated by Eileen Willis.

Fortepiano with soprano. The jacket reads in part: "Biographers have long acknowledged the importance of music in Jane Austen's life and now...her admirers will be able to enjoy a selection from the more than 200 songs which survive in her collections...the selection gives priority to those works with personal connections with Jane...they will also help to revive interest in the unjustifiably neglected repertoire of the late Georgian period".

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DICKENS AND JANE AUSTEN

From Edgar Johnson's excellent biography, Charles Dickens (p.907): Dickens is telling Miss Coutts how inadequate his wife is: 'Kate was like Jane Austen's Lady Bertram, reclining indolently day after day upon a sofa'. It is well to remember that Dickens had a malevolent side; his wife had given birth to ten children in 15 years and suffered a number of miscarriages.

From Dickens, by Peter Ackroyd, (p.151): 'In the summer of 1833 Dickens began to write light sketches. There are flashes of acid if high-spirited wit in all these sketches (in some respects like Jane Austen's juvenilia)...'

(p.285): 'Dickens was always attracted by the more theatrical writers of the previous century; he talks often of Smollett but hardly mentions Jane Austen, a novelist with whom he was deeply out of sympathy'.

- Quoted from The Writing Desk, Toronto Chapter, December 1993.

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LOOKING AT HOUSES - E. Sutherland

Living Space in Fact and Fiction. Philippa Tristram (London: 1989. 306 p.)

Philippa Tristram looks at houses from an intriguing and different point of view. She sees the house and the novel as interconnected: the 18th century, the period of the rise of the novel, was also the great age of the English country house.

Houses in novels reflected the values of the characters. Novelists rarely gave details. A gentleman should not be conspicuous - he should resemble other gentlemen and his house should be similar to others of the same standing. Thus it would not be necessary for a writer to give minute details - readers would know what the house looked like.

Eighteenth century house interiors would look bare to us. The furniture was ranged against the walls, pulled forward only when needed, to allow the size and proportions of the room to be displayed: the structural features were important, not the furnishings. Palladio, with the values of Rome and the Renaissance, was the great influence on the Enlightenment period in England.

The characters in Defoe and Fielding move around too much to be concerned with houses. In Richardson's novels, Tristram sees the first interest in houses. The Georgians either travelled to improve their minds, or stayed at home to do the same. Even the public houses of the 18th century had private closets or retreats for study.

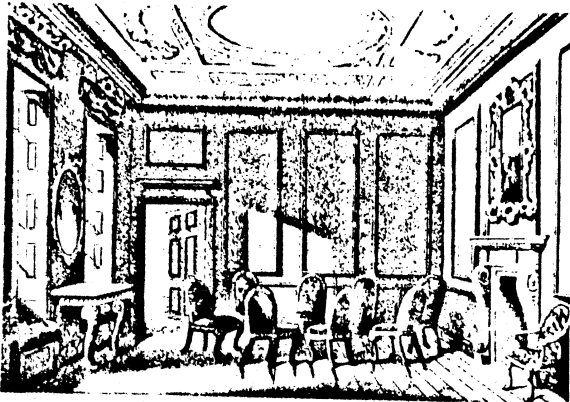
By the beginning of the 19th century, interiors had changed. Richardson and his heroines wrote from small private closets; Jane Austen and hers are in the family parlour. Uppercross is an example of people and their houses in a state of change.

In Jane Austen's novels, home is invariably in the countryside, with a great house setting the standard. By the time of Dickens and the Victorians, this has all changed. The village rather than the great house is the community. The traditional association of the great house with the land was severed when new money began to build mansions, and the centre of gravity shifted from the great house to middle class homes. Richardson and

Jane Austen knew that the Great House was the embodiment of taste, but Victorian novelists did not have this assurance. They lived in middle-class houses themselves, and their characters' houses ranged widely in size and type. In the 18th century good taste implied good morals; to the Victorians the expression of good morals was good taste.

Jane Austen's novels, like the houses of her time, are open and proportioned; Victorian novels are as rambling and intricate as the houses. Rooms were devoted to a purpose, not to an individual's privacy. Victorian lives were connected because they all lived under the same roof, but otherwise separations were maintained between family and servants, and between sexes of both groups. Servants were separated from the family of the great house - in Richardson's novels they have names and important roles; Smollett's servants have as much to say as their masters. In Jane Austen, they are nameless and invisible.

In the 18th century and the Regency, in fact and in fiction, the upper classes rarely entered the homes of the poor: Emma did, but the reader remained outside. If landowners built cottages for their labourers, it was to have the cottage as "a diversion to the eye, a focus for a view..."



Old-fashioned cedar parlour



Modern living-room (c. 1816)

their role as accommodation was strictly secondary". The 18th century had no love of old buildings - they pulled down, remodelled, or reconstructed. The Victorians idolized country cottages as Jane Austen did not. City life was equated with pollution; country life was seen as pure and wholesome.

In the years from Richardson to Jane Austen and to the Victorians, the psychological aspects of living space changed as much as the physical. Richardson's gardens are heavy with sexual implications; in Jane Austen's, one enjoys the fresh air and walks. Her doors are unlocked and easy to get in and out of; Richardson is constantly concerned with locks and keys; the Victorian novel has plenty of doors, open and closed, but less significant.

Windows are used by Richardson like closets as places to read a letter or conceal emotion. If windows are eyes, Richardson's are closed, but Jane Austen's are open - her houses look out of their windows, as the characters do, to look at the prospect or watch the world go by.

Looking into a fire was an institution in Victorian novels; in Dickens, the fire has a sacramental symbolism. Richardson and Jane Austen scarcely ever mention firesides. Public rooms differ between these periods also: in Richardson this is where his characters defend their right to privacy. In Jane Austen, the public rooms are social, filled with family or friends. In Victorian novels, public rooms do not achieve this complexity. "Where Richardson's public rooms are psychic entities," writes Tristram, "and Jane Austen's are spaces furnished with human figures, in Victorian rooms the furniture and upholstery take over".

In Richardson's novels, the reader has the run of the house from attic to basement, from salon to closet. In Jane Austen's houses, one only goes into the rooms a guest might enter - occasionally a dressingroom, never a bedroom, or even a kitchen. In the Victorian novel the movement from public to private rooms is less significant, partly because they are defined by function rather than as public or private spaces. The symbolism of rooms for Richardson is sexual, for Jane Austen it is social; for the Victorians it is neither - "the language of objects is of a different kind".

You may not agree with all Tristram's conclusions, but it would make a fascinating project to re-read the novels of these periods, and look in a new way at the use of the houses.

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EMMA THOMPSON AND JANE AUSTEN

The British actress Emma Thompson ("Remains of the Day") is planning a screen-play for Sense and Sensibility. She was asked about it in an interview: Which sister did Miss Thompson hope to play? "Elinor", she said, with what sounded like resignation. "I'm too old for Marianne. Actually, I'm too old for both of them, and I've had to make them much older - about twenty-three or twenty-four, when, of course, they're really only seventeen or eighteen in the novel. That's where the world has changed. Adolescence is a very modern invention". She went on to say that she hadn't changed much else in her adaptation for the screen. "I don't think you can present what Austen has chosen not to", she explained. "In one version, I had scenes with Gypsies and the poor - they're mentioned, you know, in Emma and Mansfield Park. But I took them out. I even took out the duel, though it is sort of extraordinary. People forget that there actually is a duel in Sense and Sensibility - between Willoughby and Colonel Brandon. It takes place in just a sentence or so, and neither of them gets hurt. But if you present all that, it's just so visually striking that it throws the rest off kilter. So I've tried to concentrate on the real issues - money and marriage. If you haven't any money, you can't get married, and if you don't get married you'll never have any money. Horrible, really"....

She went on to say that she hoped the film wouldn't look too pretty, and added, "That's what's wrong with the television versions of Jane Austen. They're just - Well I find them so offensive. They're so cozy - there's no sense at all that they're satire. Austen is actually much closer to Cruikshank than to Sargent or Whistler or Sickert... Jane is not a minimalist; she's a cartoonist!"

- New Yorker, November 1993.

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ANOTHER JANE AUSTEN

Isabelle de Charrière. C.P.Courtney (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation. 810 p.)

Letters of Mistress Henley Published by Her Friend. Trans. Philip Stewart and Jean Vaché. (New York: Modern Language Association. 42 p.)

She came from an aristocratic Dutch family, grew up speaking French, and married a Swiss gentleman who had been tutor to her brothers - yet she is being spoken of as "a French Jane Austen". The 18th century writer, Isabelle de Charrière, has a growing reputation exemplified and enhanced by the recent publication, in both English and French editions, by the prestigious Modern Language Association of her novel Letters of Mistress Henley Published by Her Friend (1784).

In a review, Margaret Higonnet (TLS January 28, 1994) writes that this brief ironic story of a young woman married to a cold indifferent husband "challenges the cult of reason unredeemed by affection, the miseducation of women, and the rigid social structures that can drive single women into prostitution". Charrière has "an ironic equilibrium that suspends her between the Age of Reason and Romanticism, as well as between the values ascribed by her contemporaries to masculinity and femininity".



Another of Charrière's novels, The Noble (1763), sounds like a delightful mixture of Elizabeth Bennet, Charlotte Lucas and some of the heroines of the Juvenilia: "[the] vivacious heroine tosses ancestral portraits into the moat in order to elope and escape from the decayed family castle. Yet romantic love, her disabused narrator suggests, may be as much a prison as paternal rule or an arranged marriage".

The reviewer admires "the wit of Charrière's letters, the audacity of her behaviour, and the shining intelligence" that attracted suitors and admirers as disparate as James Boswell, Benjamin Constant and David Hume. Charrière was a "child of the Enlightenment", with "sublimated eroticism" and "voluptuous sensuality" along with a brilliant mind and a "life-long pursuit of knowledge - scientific, aesthetic, philosophic". Her restless self-analysis and quest for identity are shown in advice to a young friend: "Write, write. You will come to know yourself more intimately".

Charrière's writings are full of paradox and irony: "Neither 'aristocrate' nor 'democrate' in politics, a contradictory composite of masculine rationality and feminine 'sensibilities', she makes others laugh when she herself wishes to cry", Higonnet writes. At times she comes near to despair at the gap between her desires and her options as a woman. In the end she married a cold, rational man in the hope of remaining "as free as an honest woman may...retaining the freedom to speak and write".

Higonnet ends her review: "With a sharper satire and a darker atmosphere of destruction than we find in Austen, whose ironic light glances from social convention to narrative conventions, Charrière fixes our attention on institutions and the ways that we internalize their regulatory powers...Estranged from an order to which she belongs, she suggests that 'we should content ourselves to quit the system, not destroy it'."

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WAS IT REALLY CHATSWORTH? - Jocelyn Cass, London, Ontario.

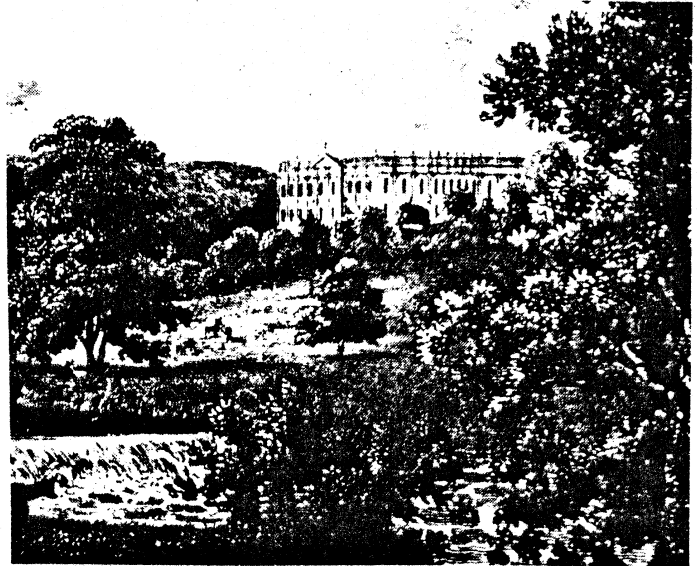
It was a large handsome, stone building, standing well on rising ground, backed by a ridge of high woody hills;- and in front, a stream of some natural importance was swelled into greater but without any artificial appearance... Elizabeth was delighted. She had never seen a place for which nature had done more, or where natural beauty had been so little counteracted by an awkward taste. (P&P III.1.)

Pemberley, it has been suggested, was modelled on Chatsworth, the large and elaborate seat of the Duke of Devonshire, situated on the banks of the River Derwent, in Derbyshire. I have always doubted whether the ornate and dark interior of Chatsworth would have appealed to the Georgian taste for light and elegant simplicity. The reaction of a traveller contemporary with Jane Austen suggests that neither the inside decoration nor the landscaping was consonant with the description of Pemberley.

After remarking that Chatsworth has a pleasant approach, the anonymous author of A Tour Through England Described in a Series of Letters from a Young Gentleman to His Sister (London, 1804) continues, "and the edifice itself, with the river Derwent running in front, is happily situated and makes a grand appearance". Certainly Chatsworth is topographically a suitable choice and corresponds with Pemberley in standing on rising ground with wooded hills behind.

The young gentleman next describes Chatsworth's elaborate interior, noting - without approval - such details as "the window frames on the South [which] are entirely gilt". But Darcy's home is "less splendid but more elegant" than Rosings, "not gaudy, not uselessly fine".

Above all, the gardens of Pemberley represent the best of eighteenth century taste, "nature to advantage dressed" as Pope puts it. Elizabeth, replying to Jane's "Will you tell me how long you have loved him?" says, "I believe I must date it from my first seeing his beautiful grounds at Pemberley". Like many good jokes this contains the germ of truth and a trace of the confessional. But, according to the young gentleman who wrote the letters of 1804, the gardens at Chatsworth "are laid out in ancient stile, and attract notice only on account of their singular and fantastic decorations. Cascades, jet d'eaux, and other ingenious absurdities amuse the eye but offend the taste."



He did find a nearby mansion which he admired - Kiddleston, home of Lord Scarsdale, in the Peak district: "one of the noblest mansions in this part of the kingdom. The hall is richly decorated with pillars of variegated alabaster and other ornaments; and every particular apartment displays the hand of taste."

It is at least possible that Pemberley is an amalgam of houses Jane Austen saw on her Northern journey. If so, perhaps Chatsworth provided her with the topography of Darcy's home. But in every other respect Chatsworth seems an unlikely model. Pemberley differs from it not only in detail but in essence; they represent two different definitions of beauty and of taste.

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[The young manservant] gives such help as zeal, unsupported by intellect, can afford. (Marriage: Susan Ferrier, 1818)

A remark worthy of Jane Austen.

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Relative doubts poem Austen's

The Vancouver Sun, Tuesday, February 15, 1994

A POEM in Jane Austen's handwriting has left experts wondering whether the esteemed 19th-century novelist could write something so awful.

The poem begins:

*Fair rising from her icy Couch
Wan Herald of the Floral year
The snowdrop marks the Spring's approach;
Ere yet the Primrose groups appear
Or peers the Arum from his spotted veil
Or violet scents the cold capricious gale.*

"It's absolutely over the top and ridiculous, but it is definitely in her handwriting and I think it may well have been composed by her as well," said Angus Stewart, curator of a London exhibition about Jane Austen and her family.

Deirdre Le Faye of the British Museum said: "I cannot believe she wrote it, even as a joke."

"Her parodies are witty, where I think this is dull and pedantic," said Le Faye, author of *Jane Austen, A Family Record*.

She suggested that the poem was written by someone who wanted to show off a knowledge of botany, and that Jane Austen copied it for her sister Cassandra, who was interested in flowers.

— Associated Press

The Vancouver Sun, Thursday, February 24, 1994

VICTORIA — The great-grand-niece of Jane Austen scoffs at the suggestion a poem written in the English author's handwriting was actually composed by Austen.

The poem is terrible, Joan Austen-Leigh of Victoria said this week. The poem has emerged at a London, England, exhibition about the early 19th-century novelist and her family.

"It is definitely not written by her," Austen-Leigh said. "She used to copy things out and I have got some sermons that she copied."

There's a note on the back of the sermons written by Austen-Leigh's great-grandfather, stating: "This is the handwriting, not the composition, of my aunt Jane Austen."

"She probably just copied it out,

whether as a joke or an example of how not to write a poem or something," Austen-Leigh said.

Deirdre Le Faye the author of *Jane Austen, A Family Record* said "I cannot believe she wrote it, even as a joke."

Le Faye said she published the first stanza of the poem in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1990, asking whether anyone knew the author but received no response.

— Canadian Press

POETRY CHALLENGE

Here is a sample (published by Brabourne, Letters, 1884) of Jane Austen's usual clever and witty style in poetry:

Verses to Rhyme with 'Rose'

Happy the lab'rer in his Sunday clothes!
In light-drab coat, smart waistcoat, well-darn'd hose,
And hat upon his head, to church he goes;
As oft, with conscious pride, he downward throws
A glance upon the ample cabbage rose
That, stuck in button-hole, regales his nose,
He envies not the gayest London beaux.
In church he takes his seat among the rows,
Pays to the place the reverence he owes,
Likes best the prayers whose meaning least he knows,
Lists to the sermon in a softening doze,
And rouses joyous at the welcome close.

* *

All you budding poets: — I challenge you to pick a rhyme, and see how much you can do along these lines. The Newsletter will honour all worthy compositions.

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ANOTHER OPINION (Letter to the Editor, Daily Telegraph, Feb.15, 1994)

Sir:- Who on earth are these Jane Austen experts who venture to pronounce upon the merits of a hitherto unknown poem in her handwriting? Far from being 'over the top and ridiculous', the poem clearly drives from the nature poetry of James Thomson as expressed in The Seasons. Another influence could be the work of William Cowper, which was quoted with approval by Fanny in Mansfield Park.

What is exciting about this poem is that Jane Austen has advanced from the once-daring poetry of Thomson into a much freer and simple style, more immediately based upon personal observation. Far from being 'deliberately obfuscating', the language in it is perfectly intelligible to any educated person and approaches the simplicity of Wordsworth, whose Lyrical Ballads were published in 1798.

Miss Deirdre Le Fay [sic] suggests that Jane Austen 'saw it in a newspaper and copied it for her sister Cassandra, who was very interested in flowers'. She also suggests that it is 'the work of a spinster who wanted to show off her knowledge of botanical terms'. Jane Austen was a spinster - indeed, a maiden aunt - and, like Cassandra, loved nature and natural observations.

As for the suggestion that the religious references are 'dreary and pompous', Jane Austen was a clergyman's daughter and anyone who has read her letters, or even her novels, knows how completely Christian beliefs and feelings suffused every aspect of her life.

This poem's provenance - it is written in her own handwriting and was cherished by her beloved and admiring brother Charles - almost certainly denotes it as being written by her. That something so exquisitely beautiful should be so denigrated is a sad sign of the times. - Rosemary Anne Sisson.

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THE ENDING OF SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

"The sisters married the wrong men. Marianne took Colonel Brandon, who wore a flannel waistcoat and whose step she dreaded to hear. Elinor inexplicably chose Edward Ferrars, a nice but hapless sort of chap - Margaret Thatcher would say 'wet'.

Edward would have been much better for the intense Marianne. He teases her. He makes her laugh. What greater service can one human being do another? As for Elinor and the colonel, they could go through life as through the novel, comparing notes on the follies and lapses around them.

I'm not suggesting anything like husband-swapping, so popular in films today. The switch could come before they head down the aisle. Think about it."

- Mary McGrory, The Washington Post.

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HOTEL GIVEAWAY

Unfortunately there is no date on this little book, but long ago it was one of a series privately printed to be given to the guests at the Hotel Taft, New York, under the publishing logo "Tarry at the Taft" - the book is Pride and Prejudice.

- From the catalogue of Richardson Books, NH, \$25.

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