JANE AUSTEN SOCIETY OF NORTH AMERICA

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CHRISTMAS CAROLS - Eileen Sutherland

Christmas without carols is unthinkable. However, originally carols had nothing to do with Christmas or Christianity. They were some of the many pagan customs taken over by the medieval church, in the celebration of Easter as well as Christmas. The carol gradually developed as a distinctive musical form somewhere between hymn, folksong and ballad, and having as its subject matter the story of the birth of the Christ-child.

There are several suggestions as to the derivation of the word "carol." It probably goes back through the old French "caroler" and the Latin "choraula" to the Greek "choros", a circling dance accompanied by singing and dramatic actions with religious and fertility rite associations. It became a major element of celebrations at the winter solstice and the promise of spring.

Pagan customs such as Saturnalia and Yule were early incorporated into Christmas nativity celebrations, but it was not until the early Renaissance period that carols came to be considered Christian folksongs. The new humanism stressed the importance of the cradle and the Babe of Bethlehem in Christian observance. Singing and dancing around Christmas "cribs" and "crèches" occurred as early as the 12th century in Italy, and St. Francis promoted the idea of a manger surrounded by animals, a feature of many carols. This new style of sacred song rapidly spread to France and Germany, and initiated new carols in both countries by the 14th century.

It was no doubt the Franciscan Friars who brought Christmas carols to Britain. Collections of poems of the 14th century in Ireland and Scotland contain lullabies to the infant Jesus. The period from 1400 to 1550 was the heyday of the English carol, then established as a popular religious song, usually on the theme of the nativity. Carols were written especially to be sung during performances of the open-air mystery plays. More worldly aspects of Christmas celebrations - the "Boar's Head Carol", for instance - dwell on eating and drinking festivities.

The carol usually had a couplet refrain, repeated at the end of each stanza, suitable for lively performance in home or on the street. The carol also favoured narrative and drama, with a cast of shepherds, wisemen, animals and the star, rather than direct praise of God. Acknowledging the appeal for worshippers, the Church gradually allowed the singing of carols to supersede Gregorian chants in the liturgy, in services on and around Christmas.

The Reformation in Germany encouraged rather than curbed carol singing. Luther was enthusiastic about congregational singing in the church services, and he himself wrote hymns in the style of popular folk tunes. In England and Scotland, Calvin predominated, and carols were no longer allowed in church, although they were still popularly sung elsewhere.

Choristers at St Mary's Church, Devon c.1812.

The Restoration ended the prohibition on carol singing in England, but throughout the 18th century the only Christmas hymn officially permitted in Church of England services was the paraphrase of St. Luke's account of the nativity, "While shepherds watched their flocks." By the end of the century, "Hark the herald angels sing" and Wesley's "Hark, how all the welkin rings" found a place in some Christian church services. Mostly, however, at this time, carol singing was an activity of the home, the streets, and Dissenting chapels. New carols were written: "The Holly and the Ivy" and "O come, all ye faithful" date from the mid-18th century.

An old Christmas tradition in towns and villages, probably dating from medieval times, or even pre-Christian fertility rites, was "wassailing" - going from door to door singing and drinking the health of those visited. In some areas this merged with Twelfth Night singing and shouting to drive evil spirits away from orchards, and pouring cider over the roots of apple trees to encourage fertility. It also merged with the tradition of "waits" or watchmen who went through the streets ringing a bell or sounding a horn to mark the passing night hours. Over time, the term "waits" became used for people going from house to house over the Christmas season in both town and country areas, with general merrymaking and drinking, and wishing everyone good fortune. Often it was groups of boys and girls, on the nights leading up to Christmas Eve, knocking on doors and singing carols, sometimes for a money donation or Christmas "goodies."

In the early 1800s, there was considerable concern that the custom of carol singing was dying out. Antiquarians and folk-song collectors made efforts to gather together and publish collections of traditional carols. One such collector, Davies Gilbert (1822) described Christmas in the "Protestant West of England" up to the late 18th century:

> "At seven or eight o'clock in the evening cakes were drawn hot from the oven; cyder or beer exhilarated the spirits in every house; and the singing of carols was continued late into the night. On Christmas Day these Carols took the place of Psalms in all the churches, especially at afternoon service, the whole congregation joining; and at the end it was usual for the Parish Clerk to declare, in a loud voice, his wishes for a merry Christmas and a happy new year to all the parishioners."

Some of the carols which might have fallen into oblivion without the efforts of collectors at this time were: "God rest you merry, gentlemen", "The first Nowell", and "I saw three ship come sailing in."

The Victorians re-invented Christmas with sentiment and nostalgia as a largely domestic celebration full of good cheer. A large number of new carols were written, many in a pseudo-traditional style. It was the Victorians also who brought snow into the nativity story: "In the bleak mid-winter", "See amid the winter snow", etc. American writers produced "Away in a manger," "We three kings" and "It came upon the midnight clear." Since the middle of the 19th century, carols have been part of the liturgy of most churches - a living tradition, constantly being added to and changed, while retaining what is best and most beloved from the past.

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Jane Austen said it first:

Emma: "I always deserve the best treatment, because I never put up with any other."

Somerset Maugham: "It is a funny thing about life - if you refuse to accept anything but the best you very often get it."

THE ANNUAL REGISTER or a View of the History, Politicks, and Literature of the Year 1758

This publication was issued by Dodsley in Pall-Mall, London, and is still coming out annually. In the Preface for the year 1758:

"It is our province to collect matters of a lighter nature; but pleasing even by their levity; by their variety; and their aptitude to enter into common conversation. Things of this sort often gradually and imperceptibly insinuate a taste for knowledge, and in some measure gratify that taste. They steal some moments from the round of dissipation and pleasure. They relieve the minds of men of business, who cannot pass from severe labour to severe study, with an elegant relaxation. They preserve the strenuous idleness of many from a worse employment."

Here are some excerpts from December, 1775, the month of Jane Austen's birth:

1st Weather very cold in November, changed to very hot.

His Majesty gave royal assent to a bill punishing mutiny and desertion, and one to enable His Majesty to assemble the militia in all cases of rebellion in any part of the British dominions, for a limited time.

5th The Norwich stage was attacked by highwaymen on Epping forest; three were killed by the guard before he too was shot, and the coach robbed.

13th £8,000, destined for America on board a man of war, was seized at Spithead and confiscated to His Majesty.

A Ship, the Abby Herbert, from Virginia to Liverpool, laden with tobacco and slaves, went aground off the coast of Ireland, with only four survivors.

At the Magistrates Court in Bow-street, before Sir John Fielding [brother of novelist Henry Fielding], an apothecary from Dublin was charged with attempting to defraud the county of Middlesex of 373 guineas, claiming to have been robbed by footpads. He subsequently confessed he had lied in his testimony, but the money was recovered and he seemed thoroughly contrite, he was discharged.

Mons. Kerguelin has been appointed by the French King to the command of a fine new man of war, of 74 guns, in order to make discoveries in the South Seas, and is to be accompanied by two frigates of 32 guns each. They are to put to sea at the beginning of next month.

14th At the sessions at the Old Bailey, twelve capital convicts received sentence of death and were executed: one for murdering her bastard child, two for treason, for counterfeiting, five for house-breaking, three for robbing on the highway, and one for robbing his master.

16th War-Office. It is His Majesty's pleasure, that from the date hereof, and during the continuance of the rebellion now subsisting in North-America, every person, who shall enlist as a soldier in any of His Majesty's marching regiments of foot, shall be entitled to his discharge at the end of three years, or at the end of the said rebellion, at the option of His Majesty.

19th Letters from Naples recorded that Mt. Vesuvius had for some days thrown out fire and seemed to indicate an approaching eruption, which had drawn thither a great number of foreigners.

20th The dividend on East-Indian stock was declared to be 3 per cent. for the half year ending at Christmas.

21st Instructions from the council in Philadelphia to their delegates in congress read: "Though the oppressive measure of the British Parliament and administration have compelled us to resist their violence by force of arms, yet we strictly enjoin you, that you, in behalf of this colony dissent

from, and utterly reject, any propositions, should such be made, that may cause, or lead to, a separation from the mother country, or a change of the form of government."

23rd His Majesty gave royal assent to the following: "The bill to prohibit all trade and intercourse with the North-American colonies, now in actual rebellion, during the continuance thereof; the bill for the better regulation of His Majesty's marine forces while on shore; the bill to encourage adventurers to make a discovery of a northern passage from Europe, by British subjects only, to the western or southern ocean of America, and for penetrating to the North Pole; the bill to explain and amend an act for widening certain passages, and for better paving the parish of Shoreditch."

It blowing a gale of wind, and being thick weather, the Rockingham transport was lost, mistaking their position. There were on board three companies of the 32nd regiment. Upwards of 90 officers and soldiers, as well as the Captain and crew, were drowned. During the last war, the Ramilies, of 90 guns and 850 men, perished with all on board except 20. These, among innumerable other instances, show the great necessity of sea-lights, particularly distinctive ones.

Above 40 Americans, taken prisoner in Canada, arrived on board the Adamant. They were lodged in Pendennis castle, and, by the best accounts well treated. But, whilst their friends in London were preparing to bring them up by *habeas corpus*, to have the legality of their confinement discussed, they were sent back to North-America to be exchanged.

25th A young man of good family was carried before Sir Charles Asgill . . . for attempting to put off to a Quaker some counterfeited bills, drawn on Alderman Plomer for £700. But on the Quaker refusing to make oath of the affair, he was only ordered to go into the East-India company's service, and bailed out till a proper station in it could be procured for him.

31st The Americans before Quebec miscarried, with great loss, in a *coup de main* on that place; owing partly, it is said, to the defection of a great number of Canadians, who had at first joined them, . . . and partly by the[Americans'] having suffered themselves to be deceived by false intelligence and false promises from within the place.

It may be gathered from authentic papers, that our stage-coaches generally drive with 8 inside, and often 10 outside passengers each. That there are now of these vehicles, flies, machines, and diligences, upwards of 400; and of other four-wheeled carriages, 17,000. That 12,300,000 news-papers are now annually printed. That the number of packs of cards, stampt last year, amounted to 428,000; and of dice, to 3,000. That there has been coined, at the Tower of London, since the year 1772, about £13,000,000 in gold. That the public pays the Bank of England £50,000 a year for management; and that the proprietors do not divide more than £240,000 a year.

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Jane Austen was Mad, continued:

I must add something to my note in the last Newsletter about Jane Austen's letter to the publisher, Richard Crosby & Co. (I spelled it the way Jane Austen did, "Crosbie"). She signed the letter Mrs. Ashton Dennis, using the initials M.A.D.

The person who first pointed out the significance of these initials was Eileen Morris of Toronto - she wrote about it in Persuasions No 4, 1982. I am glad to take this opportunity to give Eileen the credit for her inspired discovery, and to thank Joan Austen-Leigh for pointing it out to me.

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October Meeting - **Kim Hicks: Courtship in Jane Austen's Novels.** Eileen Sutherland.

An attractive young woman was seated before the fireplace at the front of the room, wearing an elegant Regency striped gown of green silk. Her dark hair, drawn back with a velvet band, was caught in a cluster of ringlets with a few stray tendrils curling beside her cheeks. She was intently putting stitches into a delicate piece of embroidery. On the small table beside her was a nosegay of flowers, a quill pen, and a few old leather-bound books.

When the audience became hushed and expectant, Kim Hicks put down her work, picked up a book, faced us, and - became Jane Austen. Then began a memorable experience as she gave readings from the novels on the theme of "Courtship."

The programme began with a short excerpt from *Frederic and Elfrida.* Her voice quivering with emotion, and almost unable to overcome her feelings, Kim told the pitiful story of Charlotte Drummond who accepted the courtship of two suitors at once. Unable to bear making either one miserable, she threw herself into a deep stream and was drowned, to the general distress of all. This nonsense was followed by the well-loved dialogue between Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, when a courtship is foretold with the jubilant words, "Netherfield Park is let at last!" Next, a young woman avid for courtship of any sort, the coquette Isabella Thorpe, with her seductive smiles, tosses of the head, and swirls of her gown, was contrasted with the genuine, inexperienced Catherine Morland, wide-eyed with amazement at the antics of her new friend.

The unique beginning of a courtship was Henry Tilney's teasing account of the frightful horrors which will befall Catherine on her arrival at Northanger Abbey. Then for a contrast, we were delighted with the portrayal of one who never experienced a courtship at all - Miss Bates was vividly evoked by her non-stop flow of trivial details as she ushered Mrs. Weston, Emma and Harriet across the street and up the stairs to inspect the new pianoforte.

Courtship proceeds to a proposal. Elizabeth, fighting to control her exasperation, tries to convince Mr. Collins that she means her refusal, while he insists on thinking of her as "an elegant young female" who wants to "increase [his] love by suspense." After Darcy's second proposal and Elizabeth's loving acceptance, she must tell her parents the news. She overcomes her father's initial doubt and distress; but Kim Hicks gave full rein to Mrs. Bennet's effusive rhapsodies when she is told of her daughter's good fortune.The last piece on the programme took us back to the Juvenilia, with a letter from a self-confessed murderess who gains a fortune and a husband (no better than she is) by giving perjured testimony in court. Our laughter was mingled with regret that this was the end.

It was a splendid experience. I doubt if anyone has heard Jane Austen's works interpreted better. There was no extra text purporting to be words of Jane Austen; no long explanation to set the scene or re-cap the plots of the stories we know so well; no quick changes of costume to usher in new characters; not even any props to enhance the illusion. With only slight changes in tone of voice, posture or facial expressions, Kim Hicks became the character who was speaking: leaning over in his chair with an elbow on the table was Mr. Bennet; clutching her hands to her breast to calm her fluttering nerves was Mrs. Bennet; a come-hither little wave of her fingers and a sly sideways glance was Isabella; chest expanded and one arm behind his back was the epitome of pomposity, Mr. Collins.

They were all there, interpreted and brought to life just as I think Jane Austen would have intended. We will never again read these passages from the novels without recalling our enjoyment, and remembering Kim Hicks.

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Library Corner - Dianne Kerr.

Rachele Oriente is your new Librarian, as of December 2000; there couldn't be a better choice!

Martin, Joanna, ed.: *A Governess in the Age of Jane Austen.* The Journals and Letters of Agnes Porter. In our library Oct.1999; catalogued, but never reviewed by me. (Editor Sutherland reviewed this in our Issue of May 1999 (A sensible Review - she left the fun stuff for me - you should check hers out).

Pedestrian, I thought, and unnecessarily sycophantic in style, but - there are gleanings: Agnes iterates and re-iterates that: "my very, very, dear Lady Mary" and "my dear Lady Elizabeth" both simply adored their husbands, adored country living, and loathed London with passion fierce. Facts: Both husbands were Untitled, but very rich owners of enormous country estates. Daughters of an Earl retain their titles; they don't always marry for money; (Lady Susan O'Brien, the Ladies' aunt, eloped with a penniless actor), but . . .

At age 17, Lady Mary wed Mr. T.M.Talbot, a man nearly 30 years her senior; at age 23, her sister Lady Elizabeth wed his cousin, Mr. W.D. Talbot, a man nearly 40 years her senior. Both Ladies lost their rich husbands while still in their 30s; both wed again, and each chose a Uniform, not only the same age as herself, but also utterly "unfortunate" (no $). And guess what? Both promptly decamped to London, where they remained for the rest of their lives, even after surviving second mates by many years! How could they have been so untrue? What would Agnes have said?

The French Revolution rates some notice: "Went to see a French lady's pictures . . . she and her husband lost an estate of £4000 per annum. She draws portraits and he lets a chaise." Agnes repeats without comment an Earl's delighted observation that French Governesses are now more easily to be obtained than any time in British history, and those of the highest quality too!

At church service: "Mr. Collins' text . . . a very good and sensible discourse. MEM. He used the word OBEDIENTIAL." Later entry: "Mr. Collins made use of this expression: "Let not presumption PRESUME." (both emphases = Agnes'). You might not allow presumption to overwhelm, or persuade, but can you stop it from "presuming"? "Can he be a sensible man, sir?" One of Austen's early detractors wrote that she had no artistry at all, she merely wrote down what she saw around her. Mr. Collins . . . by chance?

Two splendid donations from Vivienne Brosnan:

Nicolson, Nigel : *The National Trust Book of GREAT HOUSES OF BRITAIN* (We have no Nicolson in our library; he is said to be an Austen admirer). Lucid prose; of particular interest to us - THE VYNE, in Hampshire, where Austen is known to have danced; and CHATSWORTH, in Derbyshire, which is near the little town of Lambton, Mrs. Gardiner's former residence . . . AND

Many Hands: *Carlton House, The Past Glories of George IV's Palace*; catalogue of the exhibit currently located in The Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace. Presented to the Prince upon his reaching majority in 1783, to serve as his permanent London Residence; he altered, re-built and remodelled incessantly until its demolition in 1827 - with unceasing extravagance; his friend Walsh Porter was paid £1,250 quarterly to supervise architectural alterations, from 1805 until his death 4 years later. Tradesmen's bills for Carlton House then surfaced, totalling £28,730+. There is nothing known regarding the payment of these bills, although the records do show that the Prince did then purchase at auction a number of Walsh Porter's paintings - despite the fact that the Newspapers were pillorying him for his unpaid bills. Jane Austen's favourite

brother, Henry, personal Banker to the Prince, went bankrupt at just about this time. Speculation? However, to do the Prince credit: in 1813, Lady Elizabeth Feilding commented on the "oriental air" of Carlton House, likening it to "Mahomet's Paradise" - did you guess? Yes, indeed, she is Agnes Porter's dear Lady Elizabeth Fox Strangeways Ilchester Talbot Feilding! Excellent photographs, both b&w and colour, of artifacts, furniture, paintings, weapons, etc., including blueprints. A pair of choice acquisitions for us.

Wheatley, Louise and Ivison : (Edinburgh)*The Indispensable Fan, The Story of the Fan in Society.* In our Library for years; catalogued but never mentioned. Donated to us by none other than - KATHLEEN GLANCY of Edinburgh, a not infrequent JASNA AGM presenter, AND a subscriber to our Newsletter! For literally hundreds of years an assortment of Fans was an indispensable part of any lady's wardrobe. Larousse's Grand Dictionnaire Universel of 1865 devotes 5000 words to the Fan, including . . . "le complement indispensable d'une toilette de femme." A "puzzle" Fan reads: "Why do we go to bed? . . . Because the bed won't come to us." Illustrated booklet.

Austeniana Clippings for the year 2000; donated by Keiko Parker, via JASNA President Elsa Solender; in our 2000 Other Regions Newsletters file. Snippets: a review of *M.P.* the movie concludes: "(*M.P.*) may be a genuinely bad movie, but it's a first in the history of English literature: the word vulgarity can now be associated with Jane Austen." A splendid review by Claudia Johnson, entitled: "Run Mad, But Do Not Faint"; and an excellent article from *NY Times Book Review*, concluding: "Of herself Austen gives away nothing directly; she's everywhere and nowhere. She was the original master of what we now call 'cool'."

PLEASE, PLEASE, PLEASE! One of you borrowed Deirdre Le Faye: JANE AUSTEN'S LETTERS. You undoubtedly paid; everyone remembers to do that. But you forgot to sign the card; I am certainly partly to blame for lack of vigilance. Restoration accepted with delight, and no blame attached.

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Mr. Woodhouse's Diet - Kathleen Glancy.

I don't know how it is over there, but in Britain there have been so many scare stories about food that if you believed them all there would be hardly anything you could eat at all. Eggs, for example, fell out of favour several years ago when a Tory Health Minister made unwise remarks about some flocks of hens harbouring salmonella. Eggs have been rehabilitated, but the British Heart Foundation announced they should still be taken in moderation as it was the fat absorbed in frying that gave concern. This foolishness caused no less a person than Thomas Braun, the Dean of Merton College, Oxford, to indicate politely that there is more than one way to cook an egg by quoting Mr. Woodhouse: "An egg boiled very soft is not unwholesome . . . ."

On reflection, however, would Mr. Woodhouse have still been of that opinion today? His eggs would have come from free range hens fed organically, and little doubt that they were very wholesome, but he would still be nervous about that salmonella if he lived today. That would put him off eating chicken and turkey, too. He would believe every sensationalised story in the Press. He doesn't seem to eat beef anyway, which would spare him the terror of contracting CJD from eating a victim of Mad Cow disease, but his pork would be tainted by stories of swine fever and his mutton by rumours of scrapie. Fish would be out because of toxic waste in rivers and radioactive waste at sea. He couldn't even eat his gruel, for fear that genetically modified grain had got into it. It is as well Mr. Woodhouse lived when he did or he would have starved to death.

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High Society: A Social History of the Regency Period, 1788-1830: Venetia Murray (1998)
Review by Eileen Sutherland.

Jane Austen did not write about the French Revolution. Venetia Murray discusses only the elite. One should not find fault with what an author chooses to omit. The title *High Society* tells what Murray's book is about. The sub-title, however, makes us expect more.

It is fitting that the illustrations - a dozen black and white drawings in the text, and a special section of 28 colour plates - are mainly caricatures, because that is what Murray has written: a caricature of Regency society, not necessarily incorrect, but strongly biased. Murray seems to be trying to give both sides of the question, but for every paragraph that gives an impartial, balanced account there are pages and whole chapters of sensational, gossipy stories and endless examples of expenses, debits, extra-marital liaisons, gambling and licentious conduct. Some chapter headings are: Bucks, Beaux and 'Pinks of the *Ton'*; A Mistress Had a Better Deal Than a Wife; Clubs and Taverns: Gambling and Gluttony; Charades and Epigrams: The Country House; Fashion, Manners and Mores: The New Liberalism.

I had mixed feelings. Murray gives a vivid account of members of the "high society", their extravagance, vices and excesses, catching the reader's attention. But it all seemed to be a warped view of Regency times. I studied the Index to see if my negative feelings were fair. The Index proved to be badly flawed - I found a least a dozen, literally, names and topics in the text that were not indexed, and as many page references in the Index which did not agree with what was on those pages. For this reason alone the book needed much more careful editing.

At the beginning of the first chapter, Murray writes: "The romantic image of the Regency...tends to concentrate on the artistic achievements of the period and forgets that it was also a time of tremendous innovation in the world of science and technology." Murray lists as examples: William Hedley built a primitive train; Charles Babbage began work on the first calculating machine; Sir Humphry Davy and Michael Faraday joined forces in scientific experiments; Daguerre produced a prototype camera; Sir William Herschel published his catalogue of the stars; and Thomas Telford built more than a thousand miles of roads. Murray goes on to mention steamships, gas lighting, the new telegraph system and efficient postal services. Of these Regency figures, only Telford is given any further coverage, a few sentences in a section on the revolutionary changes in transport during the last half of the Regency.

The "artistic achievements" of the period fare only a little better in Murray's account. In the beginning of the period, London was surrounded by country villages, open heaths and uninhabited green space. During the Regency, business men began building themselves large family homes in these outlying areas, and wealthy landowners developed their properties into elegant "Squares" lined with luxurious mansions. Within a few decades London was transformed. Murray mentions the architects Henry Holland, John Nash and James Wyatt in connection with her descriptions of Carlton House and the Brighton Pavilion, ignoring any other work they did. Regent Street and Regent's Square, transforming central London, are mentioned in the text but not indexed. The Adam brothers are not even mentioned. Yet these are the architects who built, remodelled and decorated the homes of the "high society."

"There has seldom been a period when so much flair and imagination has been spent on the arts," writes Murray, and the Regent "became one of the greatest royal patrons of the arts the country has ever known." Turner, Lawrence, and Reynolds are mentioned by name occasionally, usually trivially in a list of guests at one of the clubs or in a fashionable salon; Raeburn and

Constable are omitted completely. Yet these are the great painters of the period, "patronized" by "high society."

Music is given short shrift. I couldn't find mention of Dr. Burney or even of Haydn. The opera was considered a fashionable evening out, and the "Italian opera" was one of the touring entertainments of the time, with no details given. The Prince Regent was very fond of music, and Murray gives a short but attractive picture of an evening at the Pavilion, with the Prince's own orchestra, with visiting singers and musicians, performing. The Prince himself "was in his element, either singing along with the star or conducting the band himself. When he was not actively joining in with the orchestra, he would sit for hours on end beating his thighs in time to the music." Murray follows this passage with derogatory and mocking remarks about the Prince.

The theatre is referred to throughout the book, mostly in fairly superficial instances. One house party performing amateur theatricals is briefly described. The leading actors and actresses of the time are occasionally mentioned by name. Murray's main emphasis so far as the theatre is concerned is the attitude of high society to a performance: arriving over an hour late, talking all through the performance, flirting, and making it a social occasion to see and be seen.

Literature is not given much more attention than the other arts. Scott is quoted briefly, and the furore caused by his publication of *The Lady of the Lake*, which more or less introduced the Highlands of Scotland to English tourists, is described with a quotation from Lockhart's *Memoir*. Wordsworth is dismissed in one line. Keats is given a couple of pages of quotations from his letters. Of the female authors, Maria Edgeworth and Mrs. Radcliffe are not mentioned; Fanny Burney was noted for being "the best weeper in the kingdom" (a sign of sensibility), and was listed as an early visitor to Brighton. Jane Austen does better with six references, including Isabella Thorpe's opinion of the paltry income of a parson in *NA*, and Mrs. John Dashwood's description in *S&S* of how well Mrs. Dashwood and her daughters will be able to live on £500 a year. In the account of Brighton, Murray quotes Lydia Bennet's imaginary picture of herself surrounded by officers. Murray also quotes from Jane Austen's letter to Cassandra about the fabulous fruit and flower trimmings on the ladies' hats. Byron is the writer given the most prominence, mainly because of his affair with Lady Caroline Lamb, and because his romantic appearance and disdainful attitude best fits in with the society Murray describes.

Politics formed an integral part of Regency public life, and an important aspect was the political salons where hostesses kept open house for their supporters. Murray describes Lady Cowper, daughter of Lord Melbourne; other ladies of authority, intelligence and influence in political affairs, the famous Whig hostesses Lady Melbourne, Lady Holland and the Countess of Bessborough, are given only trivial mention.

Regency "high society" spent their time between splendid town houses in London for the social "season"; spas, seaside resorts and "exploring" to the romantic lake and mountain areas; and their magnificent country estates. Murray emphasizes the pleasure aspects of all these settings, but scarcely mentions that responsible members of the upper classes were in London to attend Parliament, and in the country conducted the business of their estates - enclosures, improvements, and perhaps the "cutting down of avenues" in agricultural experiments - all a far cry from balls at Almacks, visits to Vauxhall, and lavish house parties.

Venetia Murray has written a lively, gossipy and detailed description of one side of Regency life, but "Reader, beware" - there was more to Regency society than "the pursuit of pleasure."

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The Year of Her Birth

1775 - War of American Independence.
Catherine the Great re-organized local government in Russia.
War between Britain and the Marathas in India.
British engineers, James Watt and Matthew Boulton, formed a partnership to produce the first commercial steam engines.
Lucien Bonaparte, reputedly the most gifted of the Bonapartes, was born.
Samuel Johnson wrote: *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland.*
Sheridan wrote *The Rivals.*
Charles Lamb, English essayist, was born.
Sarah Siddons appeared for the first time at Drury Lane, London.
J.M.W. Turner, English painter, was born.
Mozart wrote *La Finta Giardiniera,* opera buffa, Salzburg.
André Ampère,French physicist, was born.
Captain James Cook returned from his second voyage.
The first British Banks' Clearing House was established in Lombard St., London.

Christmas Festivities.

At Dove Cottage (the home of William and Dorothy Wordsworth in the Lake District), "There was also much hospitality to neighbours: at Christmas 1805, a fiddler came and 'all the children of the neighbouring houses' came into the kitchen to dance."

A Literary Guide to the Lake District: Grevel Lindop (1993).

Library Books

"The Lower Library at Chatsworth, in the time of the sixth Duke of Devonshire (from 1811), held more than 5700 books. Some of the doors were covered with the leather spines of fake books, for which the Duke amused himself inventing titles, such as:

'Johnson's Contradictionary'
'Boyle on Steam'
'Burnet's Theory of Conflagration'
'Minto's Coins'
'Macadam's Rhodes'
'Percy Vere, in forty volumes'
'Raffle's Lottery of Life'
and 'Cleopatra's Pearl, by the venerable Bede'."

- *High Society*: Venetia Murray (1998) .

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