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Sisters in the Wilderness: The Lives of Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Trail,

by Charlotte Gray, (1999). Review by Eileen Sutherland.

The lives of these two sisters, genteel young ladies in England, and indomitable pioneer settlers in the Ontario "bush," make a fascinating story. Charlotte Gray's writing is vivid and detailed. She begins:

"The childhood of Catharine Parr Trail and Susanna Moodie in the early 1800s was very similar to that of Jane Austen, born a quarter of a century earlier. Like her, they grew up in rural England, with its settled rhythms and reassuring continuity. And like the Austen family in Hampshire, the Stricklands didn't quite fit into the society of prosperous landowners who were their neighbours in Suffolk. Thomas Strickland, father of Catharine and Susanna, had lifted his family out of the lower reaches of gentility, but failed to slot his children safely into the ranks of East Anglia's landed gentry. As a result, the Strickland girls, like Jane Austen and her sister Cassandra, felt themselves to be on the margins of county society and became acutely attuned to social nuance. The sense during their childhood of being outsiders affected each of them in different ways."

Catharine and Susanna, with a brother and three other sisters, had an almost idyllic childhood in rural Suffolk. "The children were happily enclosed in two overlapping worlds - their own close-knit family, and the timeless routines of rural Suffolk. During the mornings, they congregated in the brick-paved parlour for lessons. The elder children acted out scenes from Shakespeare, or studied Greek and Latin under their father's supervision, while the younger children were taught to read by their mother. Elizabeth and Thomas Strickland were strict parents who insisted that their children's education be well grounded in history, geography, mathematics and the theology and morality of the Church of England. . . . After their mornings in the schoolroom, the Stricklands spent the afternoons around the garden and farmland, or accompanied their parents on local errands. . . . 'In the long winter evenings we gathered around the fire and the elder ones would tell long stories bearing upon some point of history but embellished according to the invisible genius of their fertile minds,' Catharine recalled years later."

Money became a problem when they grew up. All the sisters were writers, but making a living by one's pen was a difficult life.



“Susanna had felt on the margins of family life as a child, while sweet-tempered Catharine got all the attention. Now, as a woman, and as someone uncertain about her own social status, she once again felt like an outsider in London’s *beau monde*. Nobody observes her fellow human beings with a more acid clarity than someone who feels she doesn’t really belong in the magic circle, and Susanna’s whole life had prepared her for this role. In letters she polished a style of cool amusement that echoes Jane Austen’s delicious sense of irony. ‘There is to me a charm in literary society which none other can give,’ Susanna wrote to a friend, ‘were it only for the sake of studying more closely the imperfections of temper and the curious manner in which vanity displays itself in persons of superior mind and intellect.’

“After a few weeks of trying to support herself, however, the pressure to produce and the battles to secure adequate payment began to erode Susanna’s confidence. ‘A single woman of good fortune is always respectable, and may be as sensible and pleasant as anybody else,’ Jane Austen had written in *Emma* a few years earlier. ‘But a single woman with a very narrow income must be a ridiculous disagreeable old maid! The proper sport of boys and girls!’ When Susanna was in a good mood, she believed she could conquer the world. But when her spirits sank, nightmares of penury, spinsterhood and emotional starvation shrank her horizons.”

There are no further references to Jane Austen in the book. From this time their lives took on a course very different from that of Jane Austen. The sisters married, Susanna to John Moodie, and Catharine to Thomas Traill, and both young families decided to take up land in Ontario. It was a tremendous change and only their fierce determination to continue writing kept their spirits from failing.

“Throughout the mid-1830s, Thomas Traill and John Moodie continued to chop, fell and clear the trees from their acres. Then they prepared the ground for crops by dragging a heavy iron plough over the rocky ground (carefully avoiding any boulders or stumps that would break its teeth.) If they planted the seed too early, it might get caught in the late frost. If they left it too late, the growing season might be too short and the crop destroyed by rain. The only crops that proved reliable were the root vegetables, particularly potatoes, that every settler’s wife planted close to her cabin. . . . Both John and Thomas were grimly aware that wrenching a desirable ‘estate’ from the dense backwoods was a monumental task. . . .

“The demands on both men and women in the bush were endless: there were always crops to harvest, maple sap to boil for syrup and sugar, apples to dry, fruit to bottle, fences to build or mend, potatoes to plant, candles to make. But even in the busiest season, Catharine found time to pull a crudely made wooden chair up to the scrubbed pine kitchen table and write in her journal or begin a letter home. . . . She wrote about the shortage of basic supplies such as tea and milk, and the dire state of the roads. She described how her clothes crackled with static electricity during a January cold snap, and how she had developed a taste for maple sugar in her tea. She enthused about Sam’s skill at spearing fish in the lake, and the elegance of Indian quillwork. In her eyes, snow always twinkled like diamonds; a flock of snow buntings sparkled like ‘stars of silver,’ even the bonfires of brushwood were ‘a magnificent sight.’ ”

Both Susanna and Catharine published books and articles for local Canadian as well as English magazines. Their story is an inspiring one, and Charlotte Gray tells it with sympathy and admiration - a delightful account of early Canada.

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“Not to like Jane Austen is to put oneself under suspicion of a general personal inadequacy and even - let us face it - of a want of breeding.” Lionel Trilling.

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The Architecture of Distress. Jane Austen, Follies and the Cult of Sensibility:

Dr. Inger Brodey. [April lecture at SFU Harbour Centre]

Fortunate was the Georgian gentleman whose ancestral halls crumbled into massive ruins - to form a prestigious and picturesque focus of view glimpsed on rising ground behind his luxurious modern country house. Otherwise, to be in fashion he would have to construct at great expense a ruined moss-covered tower or folly, to evoke the horror and melancholy feelings required by the 18th century cult of sensibility.

There was great interaction among different artistic disciplines at this time: Walpole designed landscape gardens, and wrote novels; Humphry Repton maintained close contacts with the evangelical writer Hannah More; garden designs were published widely. Hence this talk on the novel and landscape gardens - the relationship between the novel of sensibility and the cult of the picturesque.

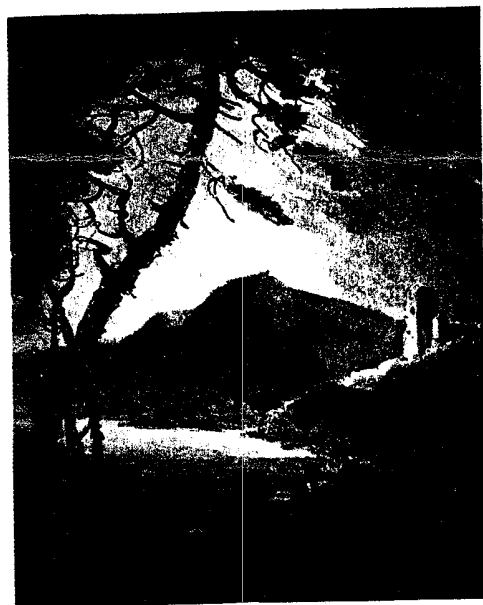
This new way of looking at and thinking about nature took Britain and the Continent by storm, influencing philosophy, literature and ethics. Sensibility was demonstrated by passion and spontaneity, rather than reason: heroes and heroines wept easily and copiously, suffered deeply and sincerely. The basic theories of landscape gardening changed, emphasizing the sensible and the natural of the typical "English" garden which developed all over Europe, in contrast to the rigid formality of the French gardens. The new designs featured serpentine pathways, avoidance of straight lines, and surprises around each corner. The landscape gardens and the cult of sensibility relied on each other; they shared a didactic impulse to teach "how to see."

One consequence was the rapidly growing "tourist industry." William Gilpin published travel guides which helped identify the most picturesque locations and viewpoints. He taught that objects should be clumped in irregularly shaped groups of three - people, or trees or cows. Jane Austen picked up on this in *Pride and Prejudice* when she wrote of Darcy and the Bingley sisters walking in the shrubbery at Netherfield; Elizabeth refused to join them: "You are charmingly group'd . . . the picturesque would be spoilt by admitting a fourth."

Monuments were more picturesque when they were decayed and ruined. People offered more interest when they were suffering. It was felt one needed to cultivate feelings of sensibility - be receptive to impressive external sights such as scenery of the Alps, or distress near home: the undertrodden and unheard - children, animals, the poor, or those in pain.

Landowners had castles built and purposefully ruined them to ensure interest and feeling. Hermits, clothed in tatters, with long beards and matted hair, were hired to live in the ruins, or in specially built hermitages, with bark walls and thatched roofs, rough and tumbledown-looking on the outside, but comfortably furnished inside with bed, table and chair, sofa, mirrors and a library. Mrs. Bennet suggested that Elizabeth show Lady Catherine "the hermitage" at Longbourn, and Henry Tilney, supposed to be reading *Udolpho* to Eleanor, took the book into the "Hermitage-walk" at Northanger Abbey.

Readers raised in a culture of sensibility came to expect certain aspects in novels. It was too tempting to believe in life as shown in the novels. Authors needed new strategies to counter these expectations. A dose of rationality - money is required



for happiness - threw cold water on anyone wishing to glorify the "romance" of poverty. When Catherine Morland tries to transform life into a melodrama, Henry gives her a stern lecture on reality. The novel stresses the courage and strength required to achieve moderation, the exertion involved in the attainment of tranquillity. Jane Austen gives us a new kind of heroine, who chastens the reader's response to sensibility while unwilling to give up heroism itself.

Illustrating her talk with slides of picturesque beauty spots and paintings, Dr. Brodey gave us a new insight into sensibility, this aspect of culture that permeated all 18th century life.

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Jane Austen Day - April 26, 2003. - Eileen Sutherland.

We rejoiced in bright sunshine and mild temperatures for another successful Jane Austen Day, with a good turn-out of 64, including 8 guests. At the University Golf Club, in a large pleasant room (but difficult to darken adequately for the slides), we listened to interesting talks, and enjoyed a delicious buffet lunch. Congratulations to everyone who worked so hard to make the Day a success..

Joan Ray, president of JASNA, was the key-note speaker, with "The Woman Who Came to Dinner," talking of the pleasurable custom of country-house visiting by Austen herself and others of the nobility and gentry of her time. Joan used the term "country-house" referring to the great and luxurious mansions of England, and also merely a house in the country, encompassing every type of home in between.

Illustrating her talk with slides, Joan began with Deane House, where Austen knew the Harwood family, who subsequently went into debt as did Sir Walter Elliot at Kellynch Hall and Willoughby at Combe Magna, not unusual in trying to maintain a lavish lifestyle. The Vyne, home of the Chute family, was another grand home which Austen knew and visited. The only architect mentioned in the novels (by Robert Ferrars, in a slighting way) was Joseph Bonomi, who built Laverstoke House in Hampshire in 1796-8, the second of two great homes of the same name there. Austen would have known the first as the home of James Austen's wife Anne Mathew, and the second where she visited the William Portal family.

The next house mentioned, Ibbthorpe, was very familiar to Austen as the home of her good friends, Mary and Martha Lloyd, formerly of Deane Rectory near Steventon. The adoption of Edward Austen by wealthy relatives gave Jane Austen an opportunity to visit many other Country-Houses: Goodnestone, the former home of his wife Elizabeth; Rowlings, an early 17th century manor house, where they lived when they were first married; and Godmersham Park and Chawton Great House, very large and impressive mansions, which Edward inherited and lived in later.

Jane Austen's letters, especially of September 1796, give accounts of how she spent her time at these homes: enjoying visitors, practising the piano, sewing shirts for Edward, dancing at an impromptu ball, dining at neighbours, and writing to and receiving letters from Cassandra. Joan's talk, with slides of the Great Houses, and enlivened with interesting anecdotes about the places and people, helped us picture Jane Austen's daily life, and confirmed our admiration for her. The "goings-on" at the various homes proved an excellent inspiration for the novels to come - Jane Austen wrote about what she knew.

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Keiko Parker gave a brief outline of the AGM of 2007 to be held in Vancouver, and Joan Ray and Kimberly Brangwin, from Seattle, gave us inspirational suggestions to encourage us for the hard work and good fun ahead of us.

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Rosemary Coupe spoke to our group in May, 1997, about "Dancing in the Novels of Jane Austen" so we knew we could expect a stimulating and informative talk. For this Jane Austen Day she changed her topic, but kept up to her high standard, with a talk on "The English Garden in the Novels of Jane Austen."

A dramatic change took place in landscape gardening in a relatively short period in the latter half of the 18th century. Formerly, gardens were rigid, geometrical, with a strong division between the garden and the countryside beyond the walls. They were gardens imposed on the landscape, not a part of it. In the time of the great landscape architect Capability Brown the keynote was "improvement", a radical total remodelling of the landscape. He advocated a structured landscape, following the "line of beauty" - streams were dammed to provide smooth sheets of water; soft areas of gardens came right up to the house, with no obvious division between the garden and the world outside, an unbroken continuity. The breaking down of boundaries was a mark of the time.

The "English Garden" was a reaction against aristocracy, an expression of liberty. Jane Austen, too, saw its social and moral values as well as its aesthetic values. She was concerned with responsible ownership, and a useful functional as well as aesthetic estate, not just for show but a place where people lived, self-supporting, closely tied to the land. In *Emma*, the description of Donwell Abbey shows her feelings; it was an old-fashioned estate, considered as a heritage, valued for what it was: "English verdure, English culture, English comfort."

A later shift in aesthetic attitudes came with the works of William Gilpin, who found value not only in smooth sensuous beauty, but also in rocks and mountains, rushing streams and cataracts - rough rugged terrain, purely natural with no signs of human control. Pemberley is emblematic of the character of Darcy himself - many facets, a variety of possible viewpoints, surprises around every corner. Strangely, the home farm, the rising smoke from cottages, and the labourers prominent at Donwell Abbey are not shown at Pemberley, and yet we as well as Elizabeth are convinced that Darcy, like Knightley, is a responsible landlord.

Rosemary Coupe advised us not to judge Jane Austen by her response in *Mansfield Park* to "improvements" at Sotherton or Thornton Lacey. The improvements she favoured were the kind that Fanny found on her way back to Mansfield from her exile at Portsmouth: "The change was from winter to summer. Her eye fell every where on lawns and plantations of the freshest green . . . when farther beauty is known to be at hand, and while much is actually given to the sight, more yet remains for the imagination."

One member spoke later of Rosemary Coupe's talk as "just brilliant, the best over-all discussion of Jane Austen and landscape gardens I have ever heard." It was easy to agree with that.

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The Austen Industry - Dr. Miranda Burgess, UBC - Adele Shaak.

Burgess started out with a slide showing an illustration for an American magazine, commenting on the "bankability" of the movies made from Austen's books. The picture showed Jane Austen, in Regency dress, sitting on a webbed aluminum *chaise longue*, poolside, in the California sunshine. She is on the phone, and holding one screenplay in her hand while another screenplay rests on the poolside table. This illustration was referred to frequently, as the presenter took elements from the illustration and used them to refer to the Jane Austen industry.

It was Burgess' contention that the Jane Austen industry is presaged in the books themselves. This was not made absolutely clear, as the speaker's argument was difficult to follow.

However, here are some points. Burgess compared the lush California vegetation in the illustration to the English verdure, which is something England sells when it sells its tourist attractions, and is also featured in Austen's novels, as with Mr. Rushworth's garden development in *Mansfield Park*, and the beautiful grounds of Pemberley.

The Californian pool was compared to outdoor entertainment, and to water as part of the landscape at Pemberley, for example. The telephone was related to communication and, of course, to all the letters in the Austen books.

In the illustration, Jane Austen's shoes are more in a 1930's style than 1810, and Burgess related that to some of the ways the novels are changed when they are made into movies. She questioned the obsessive quest for historical accuracy in some of the productions, in view of the fact that the content of the stories is enjoyable whether the costumes and settings are historically accurate or not.

The speaker also mentioned the way the locations in the movies and TV series are listed in the credits, so we can all go visit them and spend tourist dollars, and compared that to the country-house visiting, such as the Gardiners and Elizabeth visiting Pemberley, to see the sights.

"It was a delightful [day];- perfect, in being much too short."

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"Feminism and Politics in 18th century British Women's Writing" Claire Grogan.

In the last few years we have had various talks about 18th century women writers. At the May meeting, Dr. Grogan gave us another interesting discussion of those novels which Jane Austen read and enjoyed

In 1761, Rousseau wrote a novel, *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, in which he emphasized the value of feelings as opposed to reason, and of impulses and spontaneity as opposed to self-discipline and restraint. His heroine Julie has an illicit affair with her tutor. In spite of the diatribes of moralists, the novel was widely translated and read all over Britain and Europe. Julie became the role model for young susceptible female readers everywhere. By the early 1800s, *Héloïse* was so well known it could be used in a myriad of ways to express radical ideas: it was a flexible work which could sustain the political theories of each author.

Dr. Grogan chose four English women writers, contemporaries of Jane Austen, who illustrated how undisciplined reading of such novels can over-influence and ruin developing young minds: Jane West, Mary Hays, Elizabeth Hamilton and Mary Wollstonecraft. They all depict young heroines whose sensibility, passion, and naiveté make them susceptible to Rousseau's novel: fantasy rules their imaginations, and they are seduced by sexuality and desire.

Jane West (1758-1852) was a novelist, poet and play-wright. She wrote *A Gossip's Story* to prove "the Advantages of Consistency, Fortitude and the Domestic Virtues" and that oversensitivity may cause undesirable "female irresolution." In 1816, Jane Austen wrote to Cassandra "I often wonder . . . how good Mrs. West c^d have written such Books & collected so many hard words, with all her family cares." She evidently agreed with many of West's ideas and opinions, but "hard words" doesn't suggest that she admired the writing style.

Mary Hays (1760-1843) was an ardent feminist and radical Dissenter. She set down her ideas about women's plight, marriage and other concerns in fictional form: *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*. Emma is a girl of strong, undisciplined emotions, who finds in philosophy not a means of regulating her feelings, but a sanction to indulge them under the guise of reason and candour. She offers herself physically to the man she loves, and finds he is already married - she is horrified. Her second-best marriage plunges her into melodramatic suffering, and leaves her longing to escape the tyranny of passion and to live by reason.

Elizabeth Hamilton (1758-1816) was distinguished in literary society and highly respected as a moral writer. Jane Austen called her "such a respectable writer." In *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*, Hamilton's parody of Emma Courtney is unrestrained. There are three heroines: the

beautiful Julia, unthinking and uninformed, with an imagination stimulated by voracious reading of romances; the gentle Harriet, whose actions and opinions are always dictated by strict principles of honour and duty; and the cartoon-character Bridgetina - short-legged, awkward and cross-eyed - who quotes philosophical principles she doesn't understand. Harriet loves and marries a proper noble hero. Bridgetina is rescued just in time from "a fate worse than death" after following to London a man she had become infatuated with. Julia elopes with an unscrupulous rogue who soon abandons her. At Julia's prolonged and affecting death-bed, she gives wise advice, asks forgiveness and accepts her fate.

Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) was a feminist moral writer and novelist. She wrote reviews, educational treatises, political theories and novels. Her novel, *Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman*, a posthumous fragment, follows very much in the pattern of these other novels. The heroine, incarcerated in a mental asylum by her husband, gains solace by writing her memoir for her absent daughter's guidance. But her lack of active duties makes her susceptible to fantasies. She catches a glimpse of a man walking by and succumbs to a violent passion for him. However, he falls short of the fictional ideal she has studied in *Héloïse*, and she is left in misery.

Jane Austen knew all or most of these works, and adopted the theme, but used it more lightly. Catherine Morland is seduced by Gothic novels, but in the end her good sense saves her. Marianne Dashwood's lover falls short of the ideal she had expected, but again her life has a happy ending.

Claire Grogan's talk was informative and interesting, showing how these disparate novels could be linked to one common theme.

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Books and Berries Meeting, June 21, 2003.

Norah Morrow: *Every Man Will Do His Duty*, Dean King, ed. This is an anthology of accounts of the British Navy in the Nelson age: storms, wrecks, great battles, courage, loyalty, difficulties and hardships, maps and charts. It is perhaps not a book to read cover-to-cover, but is very interesting to dip into. Included is an account of the battle of Corunna, and the embarkation of the survivors on the *Endymion* - this was one of Charles Austen's ships - and the hero killed in the battle, Sir John Moore, was some connection or acquaintance of the Austens. The article on "privateers" gave lots of information: they were armed vessels owned and operated by private people, authorized to attack and take enemy vessels. Many of the accounts reminded Norah of Jane Austen's sailor characters: William Price, Captain Wentworth, Admiral Croft, and others.

Marg Savery: *Atonement*, by Ian McEwan. This 1935 novel depicts the devastating effect on a family of a young girl's lies. The Preface quotes Jane Austen: Henry Tilney chastises Catherine: "Remember the country and the age in which we live. . . Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you . . . where every man is surrounded by a neighbourhood of voluntary spies, and where roads and newspapers lay everything open." This leads to the theme of the book - the twelve-year-old writer witnesses an encounter between her older sister and a young man, and believes he will do some evil to her sister. The whole event is misinterpreted, he is accused, and imprisoned. The mystery is only why she said this. The aftermath seriously affected many lives. When she is older she begins to understand it was all untrue. The book moves into several directions: what might have happened if she didn't confess her mistake; if she confesses and tries to make atonement. The reader is encouraged to choose whichever ending he/she wants to believe in.

Ron Sutherland: *Barrow's Boys*, by Fergus Fleming. John Barrow, Second Secretary to the Admiralty, decided in 1816 to employ a portion of Britain's naval force in trying to fill in the blanks in many maps, launching the most ambitious programme of exploration the world had ever

seen. Some of the scenes depicted can only be described as surreal - naval officers wearing cocked hats in the Arctic, and frock coats in the Sahara. Their lack of preparation at times is amazing but so is the personal determination to succeed in their missions. Parry led a number of voyages to the Arctic, over-wintering in the ice. To keep his officers and men busy and entertained, he had a rigorous schedule of activities, including theatrical presentations, and educating the illiterate members of the crew. Franklin's voyage to the Arctic was one of total inexperience and incompetence. He travelled 5500 miles by boat, canoe and overland, losing 11 of his 20 men by starvation, but Franklin must have had a strong personality, as all the survivors re-joined for another voyage. Meanwhile Lt. George Lyon was the only surviving officer of a trans-Saharan expedition to find the source of the Niger. They wore native clothing, grew beards and travelled as converts to Islam. They did not find the Niger headwaters, but mapped an amazing amount of territory for others who would come later. The author writes in an engaging style, and quotes liberally from journals, diaries and letters, bringing the accounts to life.

Keiko Parker: *Camilla*, by Fanny Burney. The book is in five volumes, each divided into two books, with multiple chapters. After a long struggle, Keiko completed the novel, and gave us her final assessment. She found too many characters, complicated plot lines - too much for the reader to keep attention focused. Practical jokes, matchmaking, antagonisms, favouritism, debts, errors of judgement, friction, dubious friendships - all have their place. The incidents are *not* laden with meaning as they would have been in Austen's works. The descriptions of scenery are topographic, with no inner meaning. Jane Austen received ideas, expressions, single events from Burney, but greatly excelled the older novelist in many ways.

Eric Foweather: *A Fairy Story*. Eric changed the tone of the meeting by passing out handouts written in what appeared gibberish. **Joan Reynolds** read it aloud and gradually our ear became attuned and it made sense - it was *Ladle Rat Rotten Hut / Little Red Riding Hood*. The piece has long circulated in the English Departments of innumerable universities, for the teaching of phonetics and linguistics. Here are some excerpts: "*Wants pawn term dare worst err ladle gull hoe life wetter murder inner ladle cordage honor itch offer ladge dock florist*. (Once upon a time there was a little girl who lived with her mother in a little cottage on the edge of a large dark forest). . . '*Comb ink, sweat hard,*' *setterwicket woof, disgracing is verse*. ('Come in, sweetheart,' said the wolf, disguising his voice). . . '*O grammar, crater ladle gull, wart bag icer gut!*' ('Oh, grandma, what big eyes you've got'.) [Ask ES if you want a copy of the whole story]

Sandy Lundy: *Southern Women's Writings: Colonial to Contemporary*. Eds. Mary Louise Weakes and Carolyn Perry. From this beautifully produced and designed 1995 anthology Sandy spoke of one item, the letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney, who was left by her father in South Carolina to manage three plantations - a great responsibility which she carried out with competence. The letters were to a friend in Charleston, and show precision of writing, great capacity to communicate, and great charm. A friend said she "had a fertile brain at scheming". She made plantations of oaks, which she knew would be very valuable "when they come to build fleets" - preparing for the Revolution. Eliza Pinckney was so respected that at her death, George Washington asked to be a pall-bearer. Two-thirds of the profits of the book were designed for charity.

Eileen Sutherland. *Ladies of the Grand Tour*, by Brian Dolan. Some women managed to make a Grand Tour of Europe, and benefitted as much as the men did. The chapters describe their motives: *Education and personal improvement, Liberty and independence, Fashionable society and foreign affairs, Health, Fine art and fashion, and Revelation and revolution*. Dolan doesn't follow the travels of one woman at a time, but mentions several under these themes. Many were in their 40's and 50's, having finished their years of child rearing, and were at last free of

encumbrances. They took masses of furniture, especially designed for travel, condiments to enhance the strange food, and a supply of medications for any possible accident or ailment. Accommodations were often dirty, the food sometimes caused problems, but when they visited the art galleries and museums, they forgot all their troubles. This is an interesting account, but I wish Dolan had concentrated on fewer travellers and had told their stories in greater depth, quoting at length from their diaries and letters. He tries to do too much, and we don't end up knowing much about their specific trips, or personal opinions.

Bev Gropen. *Hen Frigates: Wives of Merchant Captains Under Sail*, by Joan Druett. The author draws on many resources, including letters and diaries to illustrate the experiences of American sailing women - daily life at sea, children at sea, sex and a seafaring life, ships' accommodations, occupational therapies, going ashore, and many more. Their voyages were mainly in the late 19th century. They were aboard coastal ships, deep sea vessels sailing from New York to England, and all around the world.

Lorraine Meltzer. Lorraine read a short but impressive poem about the slave-trade in Jane Austen's time, from the point of view of the slaves, looking at the other side of the life at Mansfield Park. It was thought-provoking and powerful.

Murray Wanamaker ended the programme with reference to the Jane Austen Calendar, from JASNA Wisconsin: the Donwell strawberry-picking party was at "almost Midsummer", and Harriet Smith's birthday was two days later, June 23.

We adjourned for a tasty "cold collation", with plentiful local strawberries - bright red, juicy and delicious.

The next meeting is scheduled for September 13. Until then, we hope that for you, as well as for Marianne, "The summer will pass happily away."

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More Literary Discoveries.

Last year, the literary world was agog at the news of the discovery of three volumes of Austen's first edition of *Pride and Prejudice*, inadvertently "lost" in three different bookcases in a castle in Scotland. Bev Gropen recently sent me a newspaper clipping with the news that last month it happened again: the same book expert from a Scottish auction house, John Sibbald, was asked to inspect 70 newly-inherited boxes of books in an Edinburgh warehouse. Sibbald reported: "The owner hadn't looked through them, so we didn't know what to expect . . . one of the first things we found was another set of first edition *P&P*." Further examination uncovered a first edition of *Northanger Abbey*, a second edition of *Sense and Sensibility*, and early anthologies of poems by William Wordsworth. As Sibbald said, "From a scholarly point of view, often changes were made to later editions, which means first editions are closer to what the author intended to see in print."

That's not the only exciting find in the world of letters. Last February, two Yorkshire booksellers in a second hand Glasgow bookshop, noticed a folio of watercolours by the English artist and poet William Blake. They had been commissioned in 1804 for a new edition of Robert Blair's poem *The Grave*, and were last seen at an auction in 1836. A London art dealer commented: "It was like finding the Dead Sea Scrolls. You have a better chance of finding a drawing by Titian or Michelangelo than of coming across one by Blake." British art lovers hope they will go on display by their new owner in the near future.

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The World's Worst Weather.

We have had sad weather lately . . . Our Pond is brimfull & our roads are dirty & our walls are damp, and we sit wishing every bad day may be the last. March 13, 1816.

Jane Austen's specific weather comments describe the results of the world's unusual weather after the eruption of the Indonesian volcano of Tambora. **Barbara Helling** sent a clipping from *Harper's Weekly* with an article by Simon Winchester of the devastation caused by volcanic eruptions in the 19th century. Besides the local disasters, the resulting dust cloud circling the earth blocked out the sun, and lowered climatic temperatures by several degrees. Crops failed, prices for flour and other foods doubled, and famine was prevalent in many places.

Winchester reported that "Byron composed his most miserable poem, *Darkness*, - "Morn came and went - and came, and brought no day" - under the influence of that dismal year, and Mary Shelley may have written *Frankenstein* (1818) while gripped by a similarly unseasonable melancholy." British agricultural records reported: "1816: A wet summer with a very poor harvest. A winter of storms, gales and floods. Spring was late and cold. Summer and autumn were also cold and wet, with very little sunshine. 1817: Another wet summer with a poor, late harvest. The year began with storms and floods. Spring was late. (Finally!) 1818: A fine summer with an excellent harvest."

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Dinner-party.

Rae Fraser sent a clipping mentioning the expression "dinner-party" - "One of the little-known achievements of the late writer Miss Jane Austen was to introduce into the English language the expression 'dinner-party'. In Chapter 16 of her novel *Emma*, she wrote: 'Mr. Woodhouse considered eight persons at dinner together as the utmost that his nerves could bear - and here would be a ninth - and Emma apprehended that it would be a ninth very much out of humour at not being able to come even to Hartfield for 48 hours without falling in with a dinner-party'."

Rae writes that "It came from the 'Beachcomber' section of the *International Express* so the validity may be questionable!!!"

However, I found that the *Oxford English Dictionary* gives the definition: 'a party of guests invited to dinner; the social gathering which they compose' and uses the same quotation as an example of the earliest usage of the word in English writing.

Actually, *Mansfield Park* (1814) uses the word earlier: Fanny Price was horrified at the thought of having Henry Crawford in Portsmouth "join their family dinner-party." The word is also used in *Persuasion*, when Mary Musgrove laments that they "have not had one dinner-party all the holidays."

Jane Austen is using it casually and frequently as if it were part of her common usage. Did she also use it in the *Letters*? If anyone comes across this word there, please let me know. E.S.

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