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The Question of Ireland

By Sandy Lundy

Since time immemorial, the green fields and teeming coastal waters of Ireland have been subject to invasion. There were successive waves of conquest by the Celts, the Vikings and the Normans, and it might be said that St. Patrick's Christian mission to convert the Irish, which began in about 432 CE, was a Roman invasion of ideas. Christianity brought a period of relative peace and prosperity, so that Ireland became a seat of Christian learning and Latin-based literacy which spread to Europe with the establishment of monasteries during the Middle Ages.

It is generally considered that the English conquest of Ireland began when Henry II landed at Waterford with a strong force in 1171. Over the centuries, this domination has waxed and waned, marked by turbulence, and never in isolation. For instance, in the 15th century the Irish became embroiled in the Wars of the Roses through divided loyalties to the noble houses of York and Lancaster.

While it cannot, perhaps, be claimed that life was ever entirely tranquil in Ireland, it was events in the 16th century which caused religious strife to rear its ugly head in the Emerald Isle, and troubles of previously unknown dimensions beset the Irish. In 1509 Henry VIII became King of England, and in 1517 the German priest and theologian Martin Luther published his 95 Theses which began the Protestant Reformation against the corruption of the Church of Rome. Then, in 1531, Henry rejected the authority of the Pope who had refused to grant him a divorce, married his second wife Anne Boleyn, and in 1534 declared himself Head of the Church of England. Anyone who continued allegiance to the Roman Catholic Church was deemed disloyal, and the monasteries and other Christian institutions were broken up and the wealth distributed to the crown and favourites. The Irish, however, remained steadfast to the faith they had held for over 1,000 years, whereupon Henry and the kings and queens who succeeded him sent Protestants to colonize Ireland, claim land for the English, and force the Irish to rent their own land from their conquerors. This was particularly successful in the area around Dublin and the north east counties. It is estimated that by 1778, less than 5% of the land was in Catholic hands; so the Irish were pushed down to the bottom rung of society, forced to pay tithes, and became ever poorer as many Protestants became secure and affluent. The Irish resented the injustice.

This brief outline places Ireland against the back drop of 900 years of war between Britain and France, and also Spain and other European powers. From late in the 16th century, these continental powers attempted to conquer the English, who came to identify themselves and their institutions as Protestant, in opposition to their Catholic foes. Moreover, as Linda Colley points out, in her magnificent study Britons, Ireland was an ideal location from which continental powers could launch invasion; and Irish dissidents, both Catholic and Protestant, traditionally looked to France for aid. Ireland became a pawn between England and Europe.

Britain faced recurrent danger from without, although it was never invaded. After the Reformation, and for nearly 200 years, the wars were religious and perceived as such on both sides. Philip II of Spain launched two armadas against Elizabeth I which were finally defeated in 1588. Conflicts of the Counter-Reformation continued during the 17th century, and the English civil war, which began in 1642, with the Protestant forces led by Oliver Cromwell, had consequences for the Irish, who were divided between royalist and parliamentary loyalties. In 1649, the year Charles I was beheaded, Cromwell arrived with his Puritan army to crush a rebellion. Catholic landowners lost their property, or were relocated to western counties, while many women, children, priests and defeated soldiers were shipped to the West Indies to be sold as slaves. They were the ancestors of the so-called "Black Irish" of Monserrat.

The British monarchy was restored in 1660, and in 1685 James II succeeded his brother Charles II. James, having married an Italian aristocrat, had converted to Catholicism, and when a son was born it was feared that a Catholic dynasty would be established. James and his son were forced to flee, and powerful forces invited James's eldest daughter Mary, to take the throne so that she would rule jointly with her husband, the Calvinist Prince William of Orange. In 1690 James II landed in Ireland, hoping to find support among Catholics there, but his forces were defeated by an army personally led by William at the Battle of the Boyne, and he again fled. Protestant Orangemen celebrate this victory in July down to the present day.

The laws of succession were again set aside when Mary's sister Anne took the throne, and in 1701 Parliament passed the Act of Settlement, which confirmed that anyone who was a Roman Catholic, or married to a Catholic, was "forever incapable to inherit, possess or enjoy the crown or government of this realm", a law which still stands.

> Meanwhile, the British lion and the Gallic cock continued to maul each other. As Linda Colley points out:
> "One of France's primary objectives in the Nine Years War (1689-97), in the War of Spanish Succession (1702-13) and in the War of Austrian Succession (1739-48) was an invasion of Britain in support of the Stuart claimants to the throne, first the exiled James II, then his son James Edward Stuart, and finally his grandson, Charles Edward Stuart, alias Bonnie Prince Charlie. Since these princes were Roman Catholic, all of these wars were bound to raise the issue of the security of the Protestant settlement within Great Britain itself, as well as the spectre of another civil war on its shores. Even in the Seven Years War (1756-63), there was a slight, vestigial threat of a French-sponsored Jacobite invasion."

The English, therefore, faced a determined foe, and Linda Colley points out that, "Ever since the Reformation, a cage of legislation has been constructed primarily to protect a nervously Protestant state against what was assumed to be a fifth column in its midst." Acts in 1607, 1663, 1673, 1678 and 1689 required office-holders to take the Anglican sacrament, Catholics were "excluded from both Houses of Parliament and the vote. . .(and) . . . in Ireland the Penal Laws against Catholics were harsher still."

In 1704, the Act to Prevent the Further Growth of Popery was passed, which effectively put a £600 bounty on Catholic clergy. Among the measures in force under the Irish Penal Laws by the early 18th century were: Catholics were banned from marrying Protestants; they were barred from holding firearms or serving in the armed forces; they were excluded from the legal profession and the judiciary; they were barred from going abroad for education (although they still went); and Catholics could not inherit Protestant land. Additionally, "no person of the popish religion shall publicly or in private houses teach school, or instruct youth in learning within this realm" upon pain of £20 fine and three months in prison for every such offence.

There was a prohibition on Catholics owning a horse valued at over £5, and they had to sell a horse if they were offered over £5 for it. This seems particularly cruel, given that some of the finest horses in the world are raised in Ireland. The minerals in the soil enrich the grass which in turn strengthens the bones, so that the blood stock produced is among the most beautiful and sound anywhere. Some of us may recall that when John F. Kennedy visited Ireland, his frequent question was, "What is this county noted for?" and the answer was always the same: "Its fast horses and its beautiful women."

The thrust for empire changed the nature of war between France and Britain, and the Seven Years War, referred to above, was essentially secular. In 1759 the French lost both India and Canada to Britain, but the French combined with the American Revolutionaries to deprive Britain, in turn, of its 13 Colonies. As we are well aware, independence was declared in 1776, and with the war going badly by 1778 the British were in urgent need of cannon fodder. Where better to find it than among the Catholics of Ireland and Scotland? In that year, therefore, the First Catholic Relief Act was passed, which allowed Roman Catholics to own property, inherit land and join the army, subject to an oath renouncing Stuart claims and the civil jurisdiction of the Pope. The furious reaction against this by English and Scottish Protestants led to the Gordon Riots of 1780, the most violent until the Notting Hill riots of 1958. There was more liberalizing legislation in 1791 and 1793, but the Society of United Ireland rebelled in 1798, inspired by the French and American revolutions and their own grievances. General Cornwallis led an army of regular forces and militia which crushed the rebels and this caused William Pitt and the government in Westminster to take a step which they hoped would solve "The Irish Question" once and for all, by passing the Act of Union of 1801. This united Britain and Ireland into the United Kingdom and disbanded the parliament in Dublin.

Henry Austen was a militia officer who served under Cornwallis, and it is likely that he and the Austen family viewed the Irish as an intractable set who interfered with their comfortable lives. In this they would have been joined by the vast majority of the Protestant English, who perceived the people of Catholic countries to be indolent, ignorant and exploited, and themselves as superior and fortunate. Of course, having Ireland as a captive granary, a source of cannon fodder, and a colony to be exploited, added considerably to the comfort of the English. Most probably, the transport of rebels to Australia, beginning in 1789, was widely perceived as a useful remedy to the Irish question.

To roll the clock back, the defeat of Cornwallis at Yorktown in 1781, by the combined American and French forces, ushered in almost a decade of peace. Incidentally, as Colley points out, this was the only time, in modern history, that Britain lost a major war, and it was at the hands of a Protestant army. (It broke with the habit of losing every battle except the last one.) The relative calm was shattered, however, by the start of the French Revolution in 1789, and Britain and most of Europe (and indeed the world) were again at war for over 20 years. Many thousands of Irish soldiers fought, and had been fighting, on opposing sides as alliances shifted over many decades. For instance, historian Alan Taylor, in what he calls the Borderland War of 1812, points out that there were probably as many Irish fighting on the American, as on the British and Canadian, sides. Similarly, the Irish served in the 1815 Battle of Waterloo which brought the Napoleonic Wars to an end, and were among the estimated 35,000 dead and wounded.

To turn from that scene of almost incomprehensible carnage, Sophia Hillan has provided an opportunity to study, in microcosm, the lives of some members of the English gentry, and their individual (and I maintain, highly conventional) attitudes to the Irish and life in Ireland. May, Lou and Cass: Jane Austen's Nieces in Ireland, published in 2011, recounts intimate details of the Austen-Knight family, against a backdrop of 19th century turbulence in the Emerald Isle. The sisters of the book title were daughters of Jane Austen's brother Edward Austen Knight, owner of the Godmersham and Chawton estates in Kent and Hampshire. Born in Georgian times, they lived into the Victorian era, and two of them, Cassandra and Louisa, married into the Protestant Ascendance of Ireland. Marianne (or May), the eldest, spent the end of her life in Donegal, on the estate of her brother-in-law and nephew, and died in 1895.

In spite of liberalizing legislation, the plight of many Irish continued to be desperate. Arthur Wellesley, the Duke of Wellington, who had been born in Ireland, became prime minister of the United Kingdom, and in 1829 he pushed through Parliament the Roman Catholic Relief Act, which prevailed throughout the nation, and repealed the remaining Penal Laws in force in Ireland.

Neither May, Lou nor Cass were heiresses, yet the comfort of their lives is striking when compared with the condition of most Catholic women. Sophia Hillan gives a partial inventory of Cassandra's trousseau upon her marriage to Lord George Hill in 1834:

> "24 Day Shifts, 10 Night Shifts, 24 Prs of Drawers, 9 Night Caps, 12 Prs Morn. Silk Stockings, 12 Prs Evening ditto, 4 White Dressing Gowns, 4 smocked Cambrick Pelisses, 8 Smocked Muslin Ditto, 6 Dimity Petticoats…." which totalled 256 items in all, (and) … that was simply her underwear. For life in Dublin she would need Lilac Merino and Lavender Silk morning gowns, and for evening White Satin, Green Velvet, and Piqued Blue Satin gowns…and on and on through more dresses, morning and evening shawls, a hat and habit for riding, bonnets, caps, mittens, gloves and bags, plus a Black Satin Cloak, and this is a truncated list.

By contrast, an official listed the clothing of the peasants in County Donegal, on the north west coast, in an 1837 report to the Lord Lieutenant:

> "None of their either married or unmarried women can afford more than one shift, and the fewest number cannot afford any, and more than one half of both men and women cannot afford shoes to their feet, nor can many of them afford a second bed…"

In that same year, Lord George had bought 23,000 acres at Gweedore in the same county, with a view to developing a profitable estate by improving agriculture and building an hotel and better roads. He had limited success in winning the trust of his tenants, perhaps because they were suspicious of his intention to establish an Anglican church. Moreover, in his reforming zeal, he shut down their whiskey still!

> Again in the report referred to above, Patrick McKye describes the poverty of the people:
> "there is a general prospect of starvation…prevailing (due to) rot or failure of seed…(and) storms since October…(so that) the generality of the peasantry are on the small allowance of one meal a day, and many sometimes one meal in three days…"

In 1842, Cass died, and Louisa went to Gweedore to care for her sister's four children. [1] Then, in 1845 the Potato Famine struck. For the majority of the Irish, potatoes were the only crop which would provide sufficient food for them on their tiny holdings. A fungal blight attacked the crop, and by 1846 it had been totally wiped out.

Lord George was charitable, and set up soup kitchens for his tenantry, while organization such as the Quakers fed many, but others demanded that Catholics become Protestants before receiving aid. Some public schemes put men, women and children to work on projects such as improving the roads, but the Parliament in Westminster did not believe in giving anyone something for nothing. It is estimated a million died, and another million emigrated, during the Great Famine of the 1840s. The attitude of many was that the Irish had brought their troubles upon themselves, and all would be well if they would only convert. This view was apparently shared by Louisa, and Sophia Hillan says, "she failed to comprehend some unalterable aspects of life in Ireland. Louisa did not see that a change in religion was not acceptable to the Catholic tenants of Gweedore."

Ireland had Poor Laws which established work houses, and these were overcrowded even before the famine struck. These charnel houses were places of hunger, cold, filth and disease, and the people avoided them even when faced with starvation.

The cultural gulf between the English and the Irish, and Louisa's stony denial of reality is spelled out in a letter she sent to her eldest sister Fanny in 1847:

> "The utter wretchedness of the poor children about here is miserable to see – but as all need clothing in the same degree and it is impossible to clothe three thousand, we are obliged to nothing in that way – added to this it would do very little good – for they will neither dress the children in the clothes or mend them & had rather go about in dirt & filth than to go to the Poor House & be fed & clothed & have the children educated. There are of course a few exceptions, some who really strive to learn & do better – but this last year of bad suffering & privation has destroyed their energies & produced a kind of torpor which comprehends nothing."

In another letter Fanny, who became Lady Knatchbull in 1820, indicates that Lord George has had to devote all his energies to keeping the tenants alive, and the famine has "simply interrupted the good work of conversion."

It is, I think, only fair to point out that the callousness and contempt expressed by these sisters would have been shared by the vast majority of conventional middle-class English women in the middle of the 19th century. So it is little wonder that Queen Elizabeth said, in a 2011 state visit to the Irish Republic, "With the benefit of historical hindsight we can all see things which we would wish had been done differently, or not at all." The visit did take place amidst tight security, but it was cordial, and now in 2014 there have been several years of tranquillity for the Irish. The country, however, is divided, as the southern counties became the Irish Free State in 1921, and the six northern counties, or Ulster, became part of the United Kingdom as Northern Ireland. Civil war raged from 1921 to 1923, and the names of Fenians, Sinn Fein, the Black and Tans, and the Provisional IRA call to mind the long struggle for independence, and simmering sectarian and religious conflicts. The Republic of Ireland left the British Commonwealth in 1949, eventually becoming a member of the European Union and adopting the Euro as currency in 2002.

By far the most poignant connection between Ireland and contemporary members of Jane Austen's family occurred when Nicholas Knatchbull was killed in 1979 during the assassination of his grandfather, Lord Louis Mountbatten. The sixth-time great-grandson of Jane Austen's brother, Edward Austen Knight, had been on a pleasure craft off the Atlantic coast of Sligo when it was blow up by Irish terrorists. His mother, then Lady Patricia Brabourne, and now Countess Mountbatten, survived as did his twin brother Timothy. Questions about Ireland linger, therefore, in the intersecting hearts and minds of the Austen family and the Royal family, and so many others.

*This account was written by the **Editor**, with thanks to **Joan Reynolds** and **Jennifer Bettiol** for many source materials, and for the texts of presentations they made to a meeting of JASNA Vancouver on St. Patrick's Day.*

The illuminated "S" at the beginning of this text is copied from the Book of Durrow. This wonderful manuscript is, along with the Book of Kells and the Book of Armagh, among the prized possessions of Trinity College Library, Dublin

References:

Colley, Linda, Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837, Yale University Press, 2005
HIllan, Sophia, May, Lou and Cass: Jane Austen's Nieces in Ireland, Blackstaff Press, Belfast, 2011
MacAnnaidh, Seamas, Irish History, Paragon, 2005
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[1] Louisa married her brother-in-law, Lord George Hill, in 1847

Nelson deals with Health and Safety at the Battle of Trafalgar

Non-Janeite: *What do you do at a Jane Austen conference?*
Janeite: *We just laugh and laugh!*

A case in point is the following script, which originally appeared in the London Daily Mail on April 29, 2007, with the title So That's Why Nelson Said, "Kiss Me Hardy." Richard Littlejohn had been inspired when he saw an actor, dressed as Nelson, being required to wear a Kevlar vest before he was allowed to board a life boat.

Patrick Stokes, who is a descendent of Rear Admiral Charles Austen, regaled those present with this article, as part of a talk he gave at the recent Jane Austen AGM in Montreal. It was performed as a skit at the October 2014 JASNA Vancouver meeting, by Jennifer Bettiol and Joan Reynolds, who donned naval uniform, complete with plumed hats, on the occasion.

Nelson: "Order the signal, Hardy."
Hardy: "Aye, aye sir."
Nelson: "Hold on, that's not what I dictated to Flags. What's the meaning of this?"
Hardy: "Sorry sir?"
Nelson (reading aloud): "*England expects every person to do his or her duty, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, religious persuasion or disability…..* What gobbledegook is this?"
Hardy: "Admiralty policy, I'm afraid, sir. We're an equal opportunities employer now. We had the devil's own job getting England past the censors, lest it be considered racist."
Nelson: "Gadzooks, Hardy. Hand me my pipe and tobacco."
Hardy: "Sorry, sir. All naval vessels have now been designated smoke-free working environments."
Nelson: "In that case, break open the rum ration. Let us splice the main brace to steel the men before battle."
Hardy: "The rum ration has been abolished, Admiral. It's part of the Government's policy on binge drinking."
Nelson: "Good heavens, Hardy. I suppose we'd better get on with it ..... full speed ahead."
Hardy: "I think you'll find that there's a 4 knot speed limit in this stretch of water."
Nelson: "Damn it man! We are on the eve of the greatest sea battle in history. We must advance with all dispatch. Report from the crow's nest, please."
Hardy: "That won't be possible, sir."
Nelson: "What?"
Hardy: "Health and Safety have closed the crow's nest, sir. No harness; and they said that rope ladders don't meet regulations. They won't let anyone up there until a proper scaffolding can be erected."
Nelson: "Then get me the ship's carpenter without delay, Hardy."
Hardy: "He's busy knocking up a wheelchair access to the foredeck, Admiral."
Nelson: "Wheelchair access? I've never heard anything so absurd."
Hardy: "Health and safety again, sir. We have to provide a barrier-free environment for the differently abled."
Nelson: "Differently abled? I've only one arm and one eye and I refuse even to hear mention of the word. I didn't rise to the rank of admiral by playing the disability card."
Hardy: "Actually, sir, you did. The Royal Navy is under represented in the areas of visual impairment and limb deficiency."
Nelson: "Whatever next? Give me full sail. The salt spray beckons."
Hardy: "A couple of problems there too, sir. Health and safety won't let the crew up the rigging without hard hats. And they don't want anyone breathing in too much salt - haven't you seen the adverts?"
Nelson: "I've never heard such infamy. Break out the cannon and tell the men to stand by to engage the enemy."
Hardy: "The men are a bit worried about shooting at anyone, Admiral."
Nelson: "What? This is mutiny!"
Hardy: "It's not that, sir. It's just that they're afraid of being charged with murder if they actually kill anyone. There's a couple of legal-aid lawyers on board, watching everyone like hawks."

Nelson: "Then how are we to sink the Frenchies and the Spanish?"
Hardy: "Actually, sir, we're not."
Nelson: "We're not?"
Hardy: "No, sir. The French and the Spanish are our European partners now. According to the Common Fisheries Policy, we shouldn't even be in this stretch of water. We could get hit with a claim for compensation."
Nelson: "But you must hate a Frenchman as you hate the devil."
Hardy: "I wouldn't let the ship's diversity co-ordinator hear you saying that sir. You'll be up on disciplinary report."
Nelson: "You must consider every man an enemy, who speaks ill of your King."
Hardy: "Not any more, sir. We must be inclusive in this multicultural age. Now put on your Kevlar vest; it's the rules. It could save your life"
Nelson: "Don't tell me - health and safety. Whatever happened to rum, sodomy and the lash?"
Hardy: As I explained, sir, rum is off the menu! And there's a ban on corporal punishment."
Nelson: "What about sodomy?"
Hardy: "I believe that is now legal, sir."
Nelson: "In that case..... kiss me, Hardy."

Patrick Stokes has been involved in the world of Jane Austen for 30 years, and has served as chairman of the Jane Austen Society. Jennifer Bettiol is Treasurer of JASNA Vancouver and Joan Reynolds is the former Regional Coordinator of JASNA Vancouver.

A Receipt for a Pudding in Rhyme

From Martha Lloyd's Household Book ©Jane Austen's House Museum Blog

If the vicar you treat,
You must give him to eat,
A pudding to his affection;
And to make his repast
By the canon of taste
Be the present receipt your direction.

First take 2 lbs of bread,
Be the crumb only weigh'd,
For crust, the good housewife refuses.
The proportions you'll guess
May be made more or less
To the size that the family chuses.(sic)

Then its sweetness to make
Some currants you take,
And sugar, of each half a pound;
Be not butter forgot
And the quantity sought
Must the same with your currants be found.

Cloves and mace you will want,
With rose water I grant,
And more savoury things if well chosen;
Then to bind each ingredient,
You'll find it expedient,
Of eggs, to put in half a dozen.

Some milk, don't refuse it,
But boil as you use it,
A proper hint for the maker;
And the whole when compleat (sic)
[Sits there all so neat,]
With care recommend the baker.

In praise of this pudding,
I vouch it a good one,
Or should you suspect a fond word;
To every guest,
Perhaps it is best,
Two puddings should smoke on the board.

Two puddings! – yet, no!
For if one will do
The other comes in out of season;
And these lines but obey,
Nor can anyone say,
That this pudding's without rhyme or reason.

In Her Own Voice – A remembrance of Joan Austen-Leigh

At our April, 2014 meeting two of Joan Austen-Leigh's daughters, Damaris Brix and Freydis Welland, came to speak of their beloved Mother, who died in 2001. Joan, who was a descendant of Jane Austen's eldest brother James, was a grandmother, novelist, playwright, publisher, editor, raconteur, sailor, singer, scholar, hotelier, epicure, a beauty, and one of the founders of JASNA.

Freydis has recently sent along the following Letter-to-the-Editor, which reveals additional accomplishments of her remarkable parent.

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Dear Sandy,

My sister Damaris and I thoroughly enjoyed our visit to the Vancouver JASNA Spring meeting to talk about and illustrate some aspects of our mother Joan Austen-Leigh's life, particularly as it relates to the interests of Janeites.

Churchill and Roosevelt chatting on a bench at Chatsworth

Flora's Temple

Thank you for the kind invitation to describe another of Joan Austen-Leigh's interests; I vividly recall her considerable pleasure in maintaining a voluminous literary correspondence, and thought your readers might be interested in this story. By this stage in her life Joan was an experienced theatre and music critic, and had created several award winning plays.

"We're delighted you're here"

It was August 30, 1982, and the Duchess of Devonshire's book,
The House, A Portrait of Chatsworth, was newly published.

5 Rockland Avenue, Victoria, B.C., Canada

My dear Duchess,
It is with the greatest restraint that I refrain from addressing you as 'Debo' or 'Nine'.

We are the same age and I have been a devoted admirer of the Mitfords all my life, first of Nancy, then of Jessica, and now of you. I feel I know you all intimately. (And who doesn't?) I saw The Mitford Girls at Chichester last year, and read with interest your remarks thereon. Of course I saw on television Love in a Cold Climate (very badly done and confusing, I thought) and read your too-kind comments on that.

So when I saw that you had written a book, I thought I must buy it, not because of Chatsworth, but because it was written by a Mitford. I acquired it at Heffers while I was at Cambridge this summer, and was lucky enough to get an autographed copy…

But what I am writing for is to congratulate you on the style of the book, so well-written, so fully worthy of the Mitford literary tradition. (Remarkable talent you all have, alleged to have been brought up by governesses who merely taught one to shoplift! That is the myth, at least).
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The tone of voice in your book is masterly, one feels you are chatting to friends: the informality, the personality, the wit, make it far more than a coffee table book. Your numerous well-told anecdotes made me laugh aloud. The Duchess who steamed off stamps, the carpenter who swallowed tacks, the Coronation, and the cow that had given birth. I read somewhere that you wrote the book in the back of your Mini in a remote corner of the estate. Being a writer myself, I can readily identify with your need to escape.

Incidentally, I was interested that you made no reference to my ancestor Jane Austen, and the frequently held belief that Chatsworth was the model for Pemberley, Darcy's place in Pride & Prejudice. But perhaps you don't think it was, or don't want to commit yourself.*

Next time I am in England, I must see Chatsworth.

Yours sincerely,
Joan Austen-Leigh
(Founder of the Jane Austen Society of North America)

**Published in 1813-when the Bachelor Duke had succeeded. You may recall that Darcy also had an only sister, called Georgiana, and his name was Fitzwilliam.*

Joan Austen-Leigh kept a copy of her own letter, and the reply, dated 14 Sept. 1982, in an envelope glued inside the front cover of her copy of The House. It was a warm, charming and vividly alive response to each of Joan's thoughts, and noted the amazement of the author at the reception of the book, which was written as a labour of love. I thought your readers might be interested in this story, made timely by the death of Deborah Mitford, Dowager Duchess of Devonshire, in September of this year.

Best wishes,
Freydis

Elizabeth Philosophos Cooper dressed as Georgiana Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire, for the 2012 JASNA AGM in Brooklyn NY, Sex, Money and Power. Her photo splashed across the Atlantic with rival images in the New York Times, Forbes magazine, and the London Times. Liz is the vice-president of regions for JASNA.

Irish, I Dare Say: Jane Austen and Irish writers.

By Laureen McMahon, JASNA Vancouver

In Jane Austen's novels, we hear of the beauties of nature and her appreciation of poets who described the English countryside in rapturous terms. Like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, Jane seems to have the opinion "there is no place like home." In a letter to a friend, Austen wrote, "I hope your letters from abroad are satisfactory. They would not be satisfactory to me, I confess, unless they breathed a strong spirit of regret for not being in England."

Did this partiality extend to Ireland? Since the invasion of the island nation by England in 1171, the relationship of the two countries had been stormy and as late as 1799, Jane's brother Henry and his militia regiment were sent to Ireland to maintain the peace after the rebellion in 1798. Although the 1801 Act of Union merged the two kingdoms into the United Kingdom of Great Britain, Ireland was ruled directly by the London Parliament. This did not, however, mean that all Englishmen and women thought of the countries as one. Miss Bates for instance, said, referring to Ireland, "It was very strange to be in different kingdoms, I was going to say, but however different countries."

In 1814, Jane Austen showed a partiality for Irish writer **Maria Edgeworth** (1768-1849) in a letter to Anna Lefroy, "I have made up my mind to like no novels really, but Miss Edgeworth's, yours and my own." Edgeworth was a prolific Irish writer of adult's and children's literature. She was one of the first realist writers in children's books, and a significant figure in the evolution of the novel in Europe. She held advanced views on estate management, politics, and education and corresponded with some of the leading literary and economic writers, including Sir Walter Scott.

Although born in Oxfordshire, England, she went to Ireland when her father married his second wife Honora Sneyd in 1773 and the family moved to County Longford. She was, however, schooled for part of her young life in London. When struck by an eye infection, she returned to Ireland and was tutored in economics, politics, science and literature by her Irish father. In her novels, Edgeworth sought to create a nostalgic Irish past and celebrate Irish culture. She used her fiction to address the inherent problems of acts delineated by religious, national, racial, class based, sexual and gendered identities. Her goal was to show the Irish as equal to the English and therefore warranting equal, though not separate, status.

Castle Rackrent was a satire on Anglo-Irish landlords, showing the need for more responsible management by the Irish land-owning class. *Belinda* dealt with love, courtship, and marriage, dramatizing the conflicts within her own personality and environment, conflicts between reason and feeling, restraint and individual freedom, and society and free spirit.
Tales of Fashionable Life (1809) is a two-series collection of short stories which often focus on women's lives. The second series was particularly well received in England, making her the most commercially successful novelist of her age. After it, she was regarded as the pre-eminent woman writer in England alongside Jane Austen.

Another Irish novelist read by the Austen family was Sydney, **Lady Morgan**, (born Sydney Owenson [1778-1859]). Jane, however, could not give her the same wholehearted approval as she did to Edgeworth. Writing to Cassandra in January 1809, she commented that, "To set against your new novel, of which nobody ever heard before, and perhaps never may again, we have got *Ida of Athens* by Miss Owenson, which must be very clever, because it was written, as the authoress says, in three months." Lady Morgan often referred to the beautiful Irish scenery, the richness of the natural wealth of Ireland, and the noble tradition of its early history. "If the warmth of her language could affect the body it might be worth reading in this weather," Jane apparently said. Possibly the warmth of expression that Jane referred to was a comment on Miss Owenson's overweening admiration of her native country.

Lady Morgan also wrote words for old Irish tunes, setting a new fashion in poetry, and was considered one of the most vivid and hotly discussed literary figures of her generation. Her novel, *Wild Irish Girl,* gave her a reputation as a controversial author and champion of her native country, a politician rather than a novelist. In 1814, she wrote her best novel *O'Donnell* which described the lives of the poorer classes, of whom she had a thorough knowledge. Lady Morgan also wrote *St.Clair in 1804, a* novel of ill-judged marriage, ill-starred love, and impassioned nature worship. Influences

were Joann Wolfgang von Goethe, who is considered the supreme genius of modern German literature, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. She died in London about the age of 82. No one is certain, however, as she always gave out her age as ten years short of the real birth date.

Dubliner **Thomas Moore** (1779-1851) was another author that Jane Austen would probably have been familiar with. An Irish poet, singer, songwriter, and entertainer, he is best remembered for the lyrics to *The Minstrel Boy* and *The Last Rose of Summer*, which he wrote in 1805. He wrote comic operas and travelled extensively. In later life, he became involved in politics and settled in England.

Jane Austen and her family would have been familiar with Gulliver's Travels and its author **Jonathan Swift** (1667-1745) who was born into an Anglo-Irish family. As Dean of Saint Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin, he was deeply sympathetic towards the poor and their wretched lives. Swift left a legacy to found a mental hospital in Dublin called Saint Patrick's which is still in existence. He stayed in Dublin, but would have preferred a more lucrative living in England and possibly moving amongst powerful writers of the day.

Metaphysicist **George Berkeley** was born in Ireland in 1685 and died in 1753. He was one of the foremost philosophers of his era whose works are still in print. His was a common household name among educated people and he belonged to the school of idealism which considered that real life is to be found in immaterial thoughts, rather than realism and materials. Eventually he became Bishop of Cloyne. He also gave his name to the city of Berkeley in California, and its University of California campus.

Oliver Goldsmith (1728-1774), was a student at Trinity College, Dublin, who also undertook servant duties because his father had squandered the family fortune. Jane would have been familiar with *The Deserted Village* and *The Vicar of Wakefield* and the play *She Stoops to Conquer."* In *Emma* we learn that young Robert Martin read *The Vicar of Wakefield.*

While it is certainly possible that Jane Austen admired Irish writers and culture, she was not immune to writing about the English tendency to ridicule the Irish. In *Emma* when Frank Churchill comments that Miss Fairfax has done her hair in a very "outré" fashion, he then says, "I must go and ask her whether it is an Irish fashion."

Does this suggest that Austen held critical views on Irish fashions? Perhaps it is a question worth pondering.

Sources: Laura Boyle, the Jane Austen Centre, Bath; *Ireland in the Time of Jane Austen*,
Joan Duffy Ghiariani, whose paper on Jane Austen and Ireland was presented at the 2002 JASNA AGM

Members of the Jane Austen Society of North America extend condolences to Mary Atkins on the death of her husband, Larry, in September. They had been married for 57 years, when he succumbed after a long struggle with pulmonary disease.

This Newsletter, the publication of the Vancouver Region of the Jane Austen Society of North America, is issued periodically. All submissions on the subject of Jane Austen, her life, her works and her times, are welcome.

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