

# Muse & Musings

The company of well-informed people who have a great deal of conversation.



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February – June 2023*

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Jane Austen Society of North America,  
Vancouver Region  
Newsletter No. 157, Summer 2023

# Year in Review 2022/2023

At the end of the 2022/23 session, we can celebrate another successful year for JASNA Vancouver, including our own region's 40th anniversary celebration, a slow return to in-person meetings, and talks and panels on a wide variety of entertaining subjects including illustrations from *Sense and Sensibility*, the skills behind the Austen quilt, Jane Austen memorabilia, Regency fashion, scandalous behavior in her novels, a modern psychological analysis of the Dashwood sisters, the music of Jane's time, and the life of a single woman in early 19th century England. This year in Victoria, we assembled one of the largest contingents of Vancouver members at an AGM. What an enjoyable and entertaining year!

As ever, thank you to our programming committee and to all our volunteers who contribute to the setup of a successful meeting each month. We welcome Marg Young who took over from Elaine Wong as Treasurer, Barbara Elliott who assumed the role of Program Chair, and Robyn Martin who has taken over



from Elspeth Flood as editor of the Newsletter. We are most fortunate in Jennifer Cothran who embraced the monumental task of revamping our website and continues on as our website manager. Finally, last year saw another local member, Jennifer Bettiol take the reins as national Treasurer of JASNA-Canada. We can congratulate ourselves on being a vibrant group, one of the most active, and well represented both Regionally and Nationally.

Here's to the next 40 years celebrating Jane Austen. (Reminder: in 2025, just 18 months away, JASNA will be commemorating the 250th anniversary of Jane's birth.)

It just remains for me to wish you all a happy and pleasant summer and look forward to seeing you in September!

- Janice Mallison, Regional Coordinator



# Letter from the editor



I am honoured to be the newest editor of the JASNA Vancouver newsletter, carrying on a long tradition started by Eileen Sutherland in 1983, and continued on with great dedication by Sandy Lundy, and Elspeth Flood. Forty years of newsletters! Editing this newsletter is such a fun way to combine my skills as a graphic designer and passion for all things Austen.

My love of Jane Austen was rather late in coming as I did not read any of her novels until I was in my late twenties, an interest fueled by my first visit to London in 2002. My journey began with my husband's dog-eared copy of *Pride and Prejudice*, and my love was sealed by a marathon Christmas viewing of everyone's favourite 1995 BBC production of the same. Since then, I have returned to England multiple times, including making a pilgrimage to Bath for tea at The Pump Room. It was so much fun imagining what life would have been like in the Regency Period! Reading Austen incited a passion for English Literature, and I went on to complete my Bachelor of Arts degree in English Literature at UBC.

I first joined JASNA Vancouver in 2008, when my now fifteen-year old daughter, Sidney, was just under a year old, but was soon unable to attend due to the demands of life with young children. Happily, this past February, I finally was able to rejoin the region, and now with Sidney as a JASNA member in her own right. I enthusiastically look forward to every meeting, loving the opportunity to spend time with others who share my love of English literature and history!

I know this newsletter is in a different format than you are used to so I hope you enjoy reading it. As it has not been designed to print, please let me know if you'd prefer a printable version and I will design one for printing. Should you have any suggestions for the newsletter or any content you would like to add, please feel free to email me anytime at [robynmartin.jasna@gmail.com](mailto:robynmartin.jasna@gmail.com).

With delight,  
Robyn Martin



A painting depicting a scene from a past era. A woman with reddish-brown hair, wearing a white dress with a large ruffled collar, sits in the center. A man in a dark suit stands behind her, adjusting her hair with a comb. To the right, another man in a dark suit sits, reading a book. The setting is an interior room with a bookshelf in the background and a mirror on a table to the left.

# Upcoming Meetings

September 9, 2023

October 14, 2023

November 18, 2023

December 9, 2023

Program of events to be announced soon!

All events will take place at our Dunbar location  
unless noted otherwise.

Please see Upcoming Events on the [JASNA Vancouver website](#)  
for the most current information.



Past Event: February 11, 2023

# Regency Fashion in Film

Marlo de Vaal

*Summary by Jennifer Cothran*



*Marlo de Vaal, Photo by Kenzie Rae Media*

Marlo de Vaal presented a talk focusing on how the legacy of Regency fashion (1811 – 1820) has been translated on-screen addressing the question, “Does inaccurate always mean bad?”

Marlo discussed the numerous adaptations of Jane Austen’s most famous novels and how despite the fact that Austen provides few descriptions of her characters’ outer appearances, the empire style gown is now almost intrinsically linked with Austen’s characters on screen.

The talk explored what takes precedence in period costuming and whether or not inaccuracy is equivalent to a bad costume. After some historical context and explanations of the fashion of the era, Marlo showed us pictures from several Regency time period films, pointing out fashion inaccuracies and explaining the filming reasons why these occur. She explained

how costumes are used in films to tell a story and how this can determine the style of the clothes as well as the colours used in the costumes. We looked at common mistakes in films. For example, the display of a woman’s cleavage, whereas in history the décolletage would have been covered up; and the absence of bonnets for the very practical reason that they hide an actor’s face in many camera angles. The talk ended with a “Who Wore it Best” segment depicting certain costumes that have been rented and used in multiple films.

[Learn more](#) about Marlo and watch her "Regency Fashion in Film" presentation (See her blog post titled "Persuasion").

Past Event: March 11, 2023

Panel Discussion:

# Shocking & Scandalous

Summary by Jennifer Cothran

Five JASNA Vancouver members chose a rogue and made their arguments for which of Austen's characters engaged in seductions, illicit liaisons, adultery, elopements, secret engagements or betrayals was *the most scurrilous*. After hearing many convincing arguments, the majority of the group agreed, by vote, that **Mr. Willoughby was the most scurrilous** of the characters presented.

## Mr. Willoughby from *Sense and Sensibility*

Argued by Christina Boyd

1

The list of Mr. Willoughby's faults were long. Christina came up from Puget Sound to present evidence gathered by herself and a few of her writer-friends that Mr. Willoughby was indeed the most egregious offender of all the rogues. Among his faults: getting a teenage girl pregnant and abandoning her, gaslighting, excusing his behaviour as if it was the woman's fault, placing blame on other's, and letting other people clean up his messes.

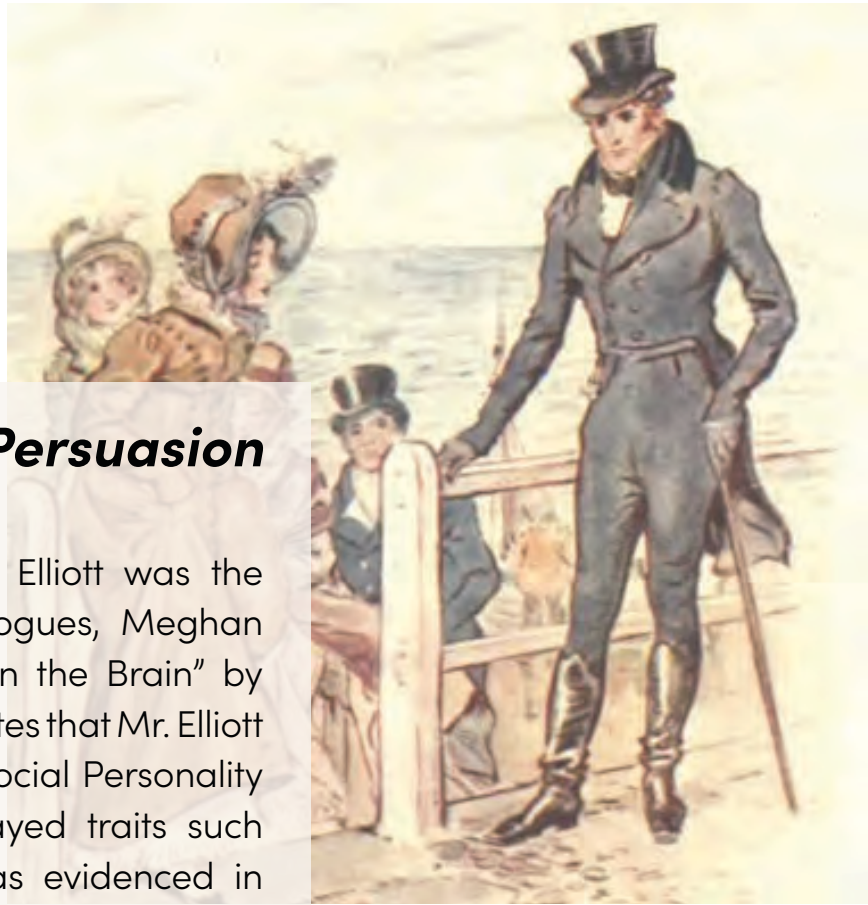


2

## Mr. Elliott from *Persuasion*

*Argued by Meghan Hanet*

As evidence that Mr. Elliott was the most villainous of the rogues, Meghan used findings in "Jane on the Brain" by Wendy Jones who postulates that Mr. Elliott might have had an Antisocial Personality Disorder since he displayed traits such as a lack of empathy as evidenced in his treatment of Mrs. Smith and artificial emotions as witnessed by Anne.



## Lady Susan Vernon from *Lady Susan*

*Argued by Naomi Sutherland*

Though Naomi liked and found Lady Susan's behaviour amusing, she does display less than amiable characteristics such as being a gold digger, liar and adulteress which certainly place her in the rogue category.

3





4

## Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax from *Emma*

*Argued by Elspeth Flood*

Elspeth made a case that Frank and Jane were not villains at all. He and Jane were in love, but Frank was vulnerable since his livelihood was so dependent on his aunt – the threat that he could be disinherited was real, and Jane had no fortune at all. Elspeth argued that the true romantic hero and heroine of the story was this couple because they chose each other for love, not fortune. By comparison, Emma and Mr. Knightly had a predictable relationship, not a romantic one. Elspeth believed that there was no villainy in Frank and Jane's secret engagement and that their behaviour was justified.

## Lydia Bennet and Mr. Bennet from *Pride and Prejudice*

*Argued by Phyllis Ferguson Bottomer*

Phyllis explained that Lydia Bennet was not a villain, rather the excuse for her behaviour was that she was only 15 years old, bored and neglected. Phyllis suspected that her neurology was also a factor, perhaps Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and Autism Spectrum Disorder as evidenced in her behaviour: She was unaware of social standards, had difficulty with eye gaze, and had no sense of others feelings. Phyllis proposed that perhaps the real villain of the Bennet household was Mr. Bennet. He was responsible for his family's wellbeing and did not uphold his duty. Phyllis speculated that Mr. Bennet, too, was on the spectrum, and as it is genetic, it could explain Lydia's condition. Lydia was at risk of being preyed upon without her father protecting her. Her behaviour was scandalous, yet she was not a scoundrel.







# Jane Austen Day

Three knowledgeable and entertaining guest speakers,  
a rare collection of first editions of Jane Austen's novels,  
and a fantastic catered lunch!





David Lank



Edith Lank

# Edith Lank's Austen Legacy

David Lank

Summary by Jennifer Cothran

Our first speaker, David Lank, told us about his mother Edith Lank (February 27, 1926 – January 1, 2023), a non-fiction author who lived in Rochester, NY. A devoted Jane Austen fan, Edith accumulated a vast collection of Austen's books (including first editions and translations), videos and paraphernalia over her lifetime. She made contributions to our JASNA publication, *Persuasions* – most notably, an article about Lord Brabourne's edition of Jane Austen's letters. She also wrote a selection of apposite quotations in her book, *Jane Austen Speaks to Women*.

One of her major accomplishments was re-writing a textbook on real estate that became a best selling manual after her revisions were made. She also had a weekly Real Estate column that appeared in more than 100 newspapers and websites until she was 93!

Everyone enjoyed hearing David's talk, seeing Edith's first editions and taking selfie's with Jane's signature!

**MANSFIELD PARK.**



The Five-Factor Model of Personality applied to

# Elinor and Marianne Dashwood

Meghan Hanet

*Summary by Jennifer Cothran*



Our second speaker, Meghan Hanet, read her essay, "The Five-Factor Model of Personality applied to Elinor and Marianne Dashwood," an Honourable Mention in the 2022 JASNA Essay Contest, in College Division.

Meghan explained the five personality traits according to the Five-Factor model and discussed where Elinor and Marianne might score. Marianne (and even her mother, Mrs. Dashwood) would likely score high in Neuroticism, as it is characterized by "sadness, moodiness, and emotional instability."\* Elinor, by contrast, would score low because she is better able to regulate her emotions.

For Extroversion, which is "characterized by excitability, sociability, talkativeness, assertiveness, and high amounts of emotional expressiveness"\* both sisters would likely rank in the middle of the continuum, with Elinor perhaps ranking slightly higher since she is more willing to invest in others.

Openness, the third trait considered in Meghan's essay, "emphasizes imagination and insight."\* Meghan argued that Marianne limits her own openness, believes "sensibility is paramount" and thinks everyone should think the same way she does. She is basically open when it suits her. On the other hand, Elinor is more open and thus attains wisdom in her openness.

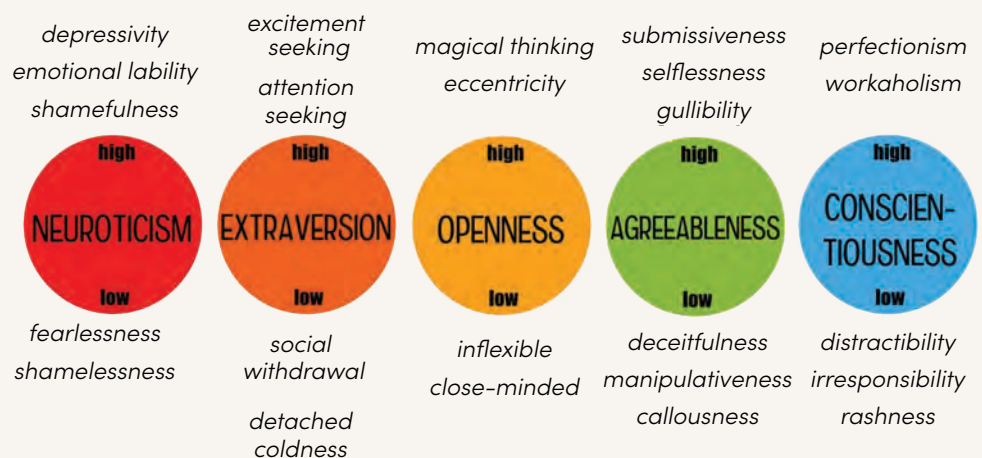
Agreeableness includes prosocial behaviours such as trust, altruism, kindness and affection.\* Elinor likely scores higher than Marianne since she is cordial – though it does have its limit. Elinor is not blind to the idiocy of others, for example. Marianne, however, trusts because she is naïve and is only agreeable to those she likes. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Elinor observes that Marianne needs an incentive to be agreeable.



The final trait considered in Meghan's essay was Conscientiousness. It is likely that Elinor would score much higher in this trait than Marianne as it is "defined by high levels of thoughtfulness, good impulse control, and goal-directed behaviours."\* Meghan pointed out a fun fact that people who score higher in conscientiousness tend to live longer.

The fact that a modern concept like the Five-Factor Model of Personality can be applied to Jane Austen's characters just goes to show that she writes fully realized human beings. I'm sure that's one reason why we connect so well with her stories.

\*quoted five-factor personality definitions are from [verywellmind.com](http://verywellmind.com)



[Learn more](#) about the Five-Factor Model and [take a test](#) yourself!



# An Accomplished Woman

Music & Gender in Jane Austen's World

Adele Marsland

Summary by Jennifer Cothran



Our final speaker of the day spoke about Georgian era music-making including classical music composers in Britain such as Handel, Purcell, and Johann Christian Bach; popular instruments used (i.e. harpsichord, forte-piano and harp); and how musical performance was perceived based on gender.

There were debates over female musical education because music was regarded with suspicion in that it was seen as connected to the body. The way in which the body responds to music was frowned upon as it was thought there was an “inherent sexuality linked to music.” The attitudes were different based on whether or not the female performer was married. A married woman was allowed to perform music, but a single woman was judged more harshly.

We then looked at Austen’s experience of music and how she used music in her novels. Adele included listening samples in her presentation to give us an idea as to the style of music Austen would have played on the piano or heard performed including "Keyboard Concerto in C Major, Op 7 no. II: Menuet" by JC Bach and "William" by Haydn (a favourite of Austen’s to sing that had themes similar to those in *Persuasion*).

Austen allowed her female characters to enjoy making music. When reading her novels, Adele encouraged us to pay attention to who is playing and what’s going on in the scene to gain insights into the characters. Austen herself is considered to have been “a good amateur pianist,” and of her singing it was said that she had “a small and sweet voice.” She played piano every day and shared music by copying it by hand. She particularly liked Pleyel’s compositions. It is known that she played in the mornings and wrote in the afternoons. Austen’s music books are on display at Chawton House.





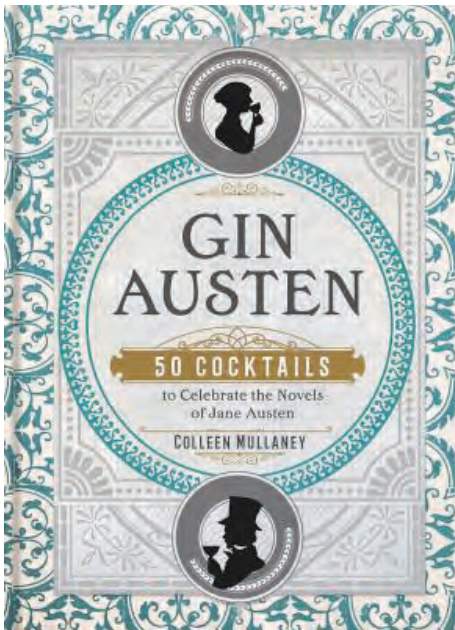
# Book Reviews



Book Review:

# Gin Austen

By Colleen Mullaney



“*It is a truth  
Universally  
Acknowledged*

that a person in possession of  
**this** good book  
must be in want of a drink.



Review by  
Michelle Siu

Cynically I thought this little hardcover would be an attempt to cash-in on some Austen-mania. But the author went above expectations and satisfied this Janeite by sprinkling her text liberally with thoughtful allusions to the novels, characters and Jane’s own life. As is the custom, the initial pages of any culinary book establishes the starting knowledge one needs: ingredients, bar ware, glassware. And here the author includes a nicely filled section on Georgian drinks as those Jane and her contemporaries would have known: flips, slings, punches and more. How did I know I was going to like this book?

The short biography of Jane concludes with raising a toast. “Make this strong, attractive cocktail possessed of enough sweetness and just the right amount of acidity to celebrate the author” with the titular **Gin Austen** (see recipe).

The recipes are organized thematically by the six novels, such as those from *Mansfield Park* being mostly in a tropical vein inspired by Sir Thomas' trip to Antigua, like Plantation Punch. She includes the Neither Norris, a classic cocktail "as brisk and medicinal as Lady Bertram's aromatic vinegar". From another novels there are Cherry Bingley, Cousin Collins, Brandon Old-Fashioned (of course it would be!) and the Devonshire Dreamscicle inspired by the eponymous cream of the locale that Jane chose for Barton Cottage. The Dreamscicle recipe calls for vanilla vodka, triple sec, orange juice, and half and half over ice. The author's commentary proves fun and witty, with full colour illustrations, making this a pretty addition to my bookshelf.

Recipe:

## Gin Austen

5 sage leaves

1/2 ounce lemon juice

2 ounces gin

2 ounces Lillet rosé

1 dash orange bitters

In a mixing glass, muddle 4 sage leaves with the lemon juice. Add the gin, Lillet rosé, bitters, and ice. Stir well, and strain into a coupe. Garnish with the remaining leaf, settle in, and read on.



*Gin and "Gin Austen" were birthday gifts to the reviewer by her brother and sister-in-law.*



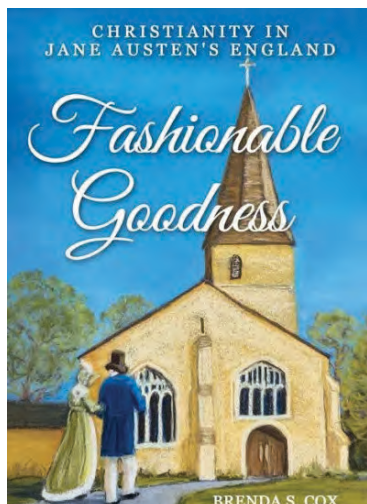
Book Review:

# Fashionable Goodness:

## Christianity in Jane Austen's England

By Brenda S. Cox

Review by Lona Manning



Often we describe an engrossing book as being "unputdownable." But sometimes you come across a book that you put down so you can think about what you just read. Then you pick it up again, and again. That's the way I enjoyed and lingered over Brenda S. Cox's new book *Fashionable Goodness: Christianity in Jane Austen's England*. And I know I will return to this book again in the future.

Cox has thoughtfully, even ingeniously, designed her book for maximum clarity and ease of reference. It begins with a basic overview of the nuts and bolts, shall we say, of the Church of England in Austen's time. Don't know a rector from a vicar? Don't know what a curate does? What's an "advowson"? Cox explains these and other church-related terms in engaging and clear prose. (She also provides a handy glossary).

Cox explains things that Austen's contemporary readers would have known all about: how a clergyman might get a "living," the role he played in society, and the basics of the Anglican church service.

Cox moves on to discuss the influence of the church more broadly, with frequent references to how Austen's Christian faith is reflected in her novels and in her private letters...

The title, *Fashionable Goodness*, alludes to churchgoers who—as *Mansfield Park*'s Mary Crawford slyly suggested—go to church: "starched up into seeming piety, but with heads full of something very different." In Austen's lifetime, the United Kingdom saw a rise of evangelicalism, a movement to replace lip-service to religion with active, devout, faith. *Fashionable Goodness* gives a valuable overview of the various "dissenting" or non-conformist factions and how their beliefs differed from mainstream Anglicanism. Scholars have long debated about how Austen herself felt about the evangelicals,

because she both criticizes and praises them in her few surviving letters. Cox puts Austen's remarks into their social and historical context.

Religious belief touched on everyday life, of course, including debates around charity and social class. Cox's chapters on the social ills of the Regency are mostly told through the biographies of notable people such as Hannah More, Elizabeth Fry and William Wilberforce, who educated the poor, reformed the prison system, and fought to end the slave trade. Cox shows that, again and again, it was ardent Christians who were the driving force behind these and other fundamental reforms. For example, Thomas Gisborne, author of *Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex*, doesn't get much love today, but he "promoted laws limiting days and hours of factory work for workers' spiritual good and physical health."

Throughout, Cox connects her themes to Austen's writing, to what her characters do and say and to what Austen says about them. She shows how Austen is more subtle in expressing her Christianity than many of her contemporaries, but her faith and her beliefs are there in everything she wrote. Remember Austen's description of Sir William Elliot as "a foolish, spendthrift baronet, who had not had principle or sense enough to maintain himself in the situation in which Providence had placed him"? Cox demonstrates that







*Elizabeth Fry (1780 - 1845), English prison reformer, social reformer, philanthropist and Quaker*

the word "principle" carries more weight than we might realize.

Austen is also referring, sardonically or not, to the wide-held belief that God ordained everyone's station in life. As the 1848 hymn, "All Things Bright and Beautiful," affirmed:

The rich man in his castle  
The poor man at his gate  
God made them, high or lowly  
And ordered their estate.

Cox acknowledges that our modern values do not always align with the Regency worldview. The purpose of this book is not to excuse the past—and certainly Cox doesn't hold up the past merely to criticize it. This book explains the

*"Some of the reform movements begun in the Regency era are still active in the world today."*

past and shows how some of the reform movements begun in the Regency era are still active in the world today.

Cox covers all this and more in a concise, information-packed, and readable style, drawing on scholarly as well as contemporary sources. She brings it all alive with the everyday voices of people from the Regency era.

*Fashionable Goodness* looks at the bigger picture of religion in Austen's



*William Wilberforce (1759 - 1853), British politician, philanthropist and leader of the slave abolitionist movement*

England; how people reconciled their faith with new discoveries in science, or the fear that teaching the poor to read would lead to social unrest à la the French Revolution. (There's a delicious quote from the Duchess of Buckingham, who complains that the Methodists, with their insistence that everyone is a sinner before God, are impertinent and disrespectful to their betters.)

Finally, we learn how the moral crusaders of the Regency led into the Victorian era, and how women, inspired by their faith and the desire to help their fellow men, joined together to work at the forefront of social reform.

*Fashionable Goodness* provides a key to understanding Austen's world--you will see how her values are reflected in her characters and her plots. If you read and re-read Austen, this book will enhance your enjoyment and understanding. If you're a devoted Austenite, you'll love this book, and if you aspire to write Austen-inspired fiction that is true to its source material, *Fashionable Goodness* is an invaluable source.

Learn more about Brenda Cox on her blog "[Faith, Science, Joy and Jane Austen](#)" where she explores the connections between science, Christian faith, church music and Jane Austen's World.



*Hannah More (1745-1833), English writer, philanthropist, poet and playwright who wrote on moral and religious subjects*



Learn more about JASNA Vancouver member Lona Manning on her blog "[Clutching My Pearls](#)" where she focuses on Jane Austen and the times she lived in.



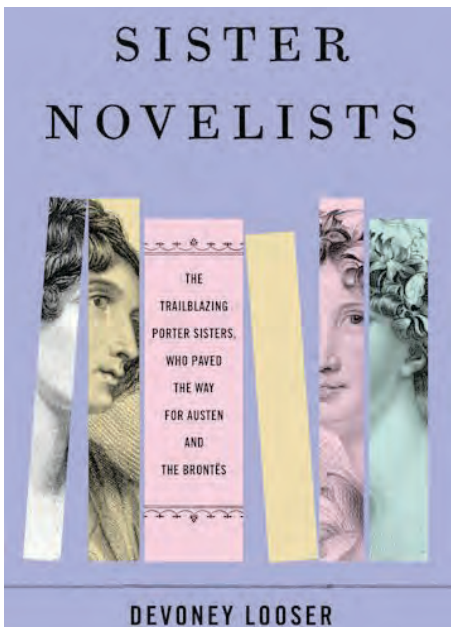
Book Review:

# Sister Novelists:

**The Trailblazing Porter Sisters, Who Paved the Way for Austen and the Brontës**

By Devoney Looser

Reviewed by Lona Manning



Devoney Looser's joint biography of Maria Porter (1778–1832) and Jane Porter (1775 – 1850) runs to over 400 pages, exclusive of footnotes and so forth. Why read so much detail about two women you've probably never heard of?

There are lots of reasons—the Porter sisters' rise from poverty to fame, if not riches, makes for an engrossing story, and Looser has uncovered the long-hidden true tale of their successes, their losses, their love lives, their friendships, and their disagreeable in-laws. Thanks to some amazing quirks of fate--also related in *Sister Novelists*--the voluminous correspondence of the family survived (unlike, for example, the bulk of Jane Austen's correspondence with her sister Cassandra).

I was also fascinated by the candid opinions of women living in an age when seeking patronage was the key to getting ahead, slavery was tacitly accepted as an economic fact of life, and the suspicion of being unchaste could destroy a woman's reputation. (The Porter sisters were professed Christians, but they sometimes befriended women who had strayed from the paths of virtue).

Then there are the everyday hardships of 18th and 19th century life to contemplate. Life was uncertain and mortality rates were high. Jane and Maria's mother waited years to marry the man she loved, only to see him sink under a mysterious illness ending in insanity and death. She was left with little money and five children under the age of eight. Jane and Maria's brother Robert was lucky to get a diplomatic posting to Venezuela, even if it meant abandoning his daughter in Russia after the death of his wife. The sisters spent months and years of their lives as guests in the homes of their wealthier friends, just to reduce their own living expenses. (This was the fate of many

a heroine in 18th century novels, and the Porter sisters are exposed to the same unpaid servitude and the romantic jealousies that arise in those novels).

Jane and Maria started publishing very young and under their own names (as per the practice of the times, they also published many magazine pieces anonymously or under pseudonyms). Celebrity came at a cost as it conflicted with the prevailing social expectation that eligible young ladies be demure and retiring. The Porter sisters had unrequited love affairs, but never married. Maria wasted many of her best years in a long-distance relationship so bizarre that you'd roll your eyes over it if you encountered it in a novel. But it all happened. A well-meaning friend tried to push Jane into the arms of a stupid, self-satisfied army major. If she had said "yes," Jane, her mother and sister would have been financially secure. She didn't hesitate to reject the major's overtures despite the fact that their earnings were swallowed by their family debts. They lived in a state—to borrow from Austen—"of most wearing, anxious, youth-killing," poverty. Time and again, their hopes for an advantageous marriage or a plum appointment or a generous patron or a useful connection or a government pension fell through. Despite being famous authors, Jane and Maria never made enough money to live comfortably.

Ironically, *Sister Novelists* would probably not exist if the monumental research

effort which went into writing it had not been subsidized by numerous grants and fellowships, and if Looser had not been willing to devote her talents over many years to bring their story alive.

In addition to the engrossing biographical and social detail Looser provides, *Sister Novelists* also demonstrates that the Porter sisters were robbed of their place in literary history. Jane and Maria's novels, such as *Thaddeus of Warsaw* (1803) and *The Hungarian Brothers* (1807), were international best-sellers in their day. But their pre-eminence as writers of historical fiction was eclipsed, starting in 1814, by Sir Walter Scott and his *Waverly* novels. The sisters were well aware of this as it was happening and they were angered because they, not Scott, pioneered the technique of placing fictional characters



Maria Porter, 1823



in real historical events alongside real people from the past, as Looser explains. Scott never acknowledged his literary debt to them.

A quick Google search confirms that Scott is described as the “father of the historical novel.” It is even stated that he invented the historical novel, and that *Waverley* (1814) was the first historical novel. Looser proves that this is poppycock.



The Porter sisters’ fame dwindled into oblivion in the 20th century while Scott’s reputation was still going strong. Looser asserts, “Thanks to Sir Walter Scott’s towering reputation, mentions of the Porter sisters’ fiction become inconvenient. The Porters’ existence didn’t fit the powerful myth of Scott’s invention, singularity, and deserved triumph.”

The *Waverley* novels were published anonymously, so in theory, for years no one was certain if the author was male or female. But perhaps those first readers recognized that Scott was the better writer. Looser is indignant on behalf of the sisters when they got bad reviews from male reviewers, but if they deserve to be remembered for their talent, surely *Sister Novelists* would contain more representative excerpts. In fact, the Porter sisters’ present obscurity may also be explained by their outdated style, which today reads as hackneyed and trite. Just skim the opening passages of *Thaddeus of Warsaw* and you’ll see what I mean. Their private letters are more readable and interesting, and these are generously quoted.

It wouldn’t be fair of me to give *Sister Novelists* any less than five stars just because I personally have no interest in the debate over literary patriarchy. Looser convincingly makes her case that the Porter sisters played an important role in the development of the novel. However, I think it’s the determination, drama, and pathos of Jane and Maria’s personal story which will remain with me. The rich re-creation of the lives of these sisters and their circle is well worth reading. The historical setting, the complex narrative, and the large cast of characters are skillfully and clearly handled. Thank you, Devoney Looser.

[Learn more](#) about Professor Devoney Looser and the Porter Sisters on her website, where you can also link to her series of video/audio lessons on the life and works of Jane Austen for *The Great Courses*.

A photograph of a grand, ornate interior room, likely a drawing room or library. The room features a large mural on the left wall depicting a classical scene with figures in a chariot. Below the mural is a large fireplace with a stone mantelpiece and a decorative screen. The ceiling is high and features a large fresco of a mythological scene with a centaur. The room is filled with classical furniture, including a red velvet sofa and a large chandelier. The overall atmosphere is one of historical elegance and grandeur.

# MURDER

at Rosings Park



# Murder at Rosings Park:

## Austen Murder Mystery Game

By Julia VanDelft

The sign on the front door read: 'Rosings Park – Downstairs'. The couples, in their borrowed and makeshift finery, headed on down the stairs to where the great dinner room awaited them. The basement had recently needed to be renovated due to the November 2021 atmospheric river, and was now bright and spacious and free of furniture or toys. There were plastic tables and chairs set up, but they looked more elegant with white tablecloths and silver candlesticks and large bouquets of fragrant peonies upon them.



The guests sat where their place cards told them to, with Mr. Bennet, Mrs. Bennet, Miss Elizabeth Bennet, Miss Marianne Dashwood, and Mr. John Willoughby on one side, and Miss Emma Woodhouse, Mr. Frank Churchill, Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy, Mr. Collins, and Lady Catherine de Bourgh on the other, facing them.

*Eating dinner and discussing our alibis*

I was Elizabeth Bennet. I would have been content with any of the female characters, but I confess I chose Elizabeth only because I wanted my husband to play Mr. Darcy. This way, with his friends also coming dressed up, he had no excuse. Mr. Darcy was wearing a new blue tailcoat that had been feverishly finished by my mom and me (mostly my mom) the week leading up to the dinner. I was sewing on the buttons at 11 p.m. the night before. And it was all worth it because all of the other guests, including the men, commented about how good he looked. (The other parts of his costume had previously been made for the 2018 Jane Austen festival in Port Alberni.) I was also wearing a new costume – a white cotton dress made from an Indian dupatta I found locally on Marketplace. Two of the other characters, Emma Woodhouse and Marianne Dashwood, were also wearing gowns made by me. It gave me great pleasure to see others dressed up in Regency era costume, as it has been my hobby for the past 4 years.



The dinner started and Lady Catherine de Bourgh opened with the news that a body had been found. The man – Mr. John Thorpe – could only have been murdered the night before by one of Lady Catherine's guests, all of the aforementioned people who were making up a house party at Rosings Park. Before the authorities could arrive, we would have to eat our dinner and discover who it was.

But first – to eat, since it was past 7:30 p.m. and we were all very hungry. The dishes, prepared by yours truly, were strawberry spinach salad, cold bacon and pea salad, baguettes, maple carrots, roasted potatoes, sugar-glazed ham, and the famous white soup. I had never made white soup before, but it was quite the hit, with a lot of compliments. (The white soup and roasted potatoes recipes came with the game; the other recipes I found myself.)





The first round began. We mostly introduced ourselves and had conversations about what we had been doing the night of the murder. We followed the script provided in the booklets, making sure to say everything that needed to be said, and asking the questions provided. Marianne and Willoughby flirted shamelessly; alas, Mr. Darcy did not.

After the round recap, where I read a summary of everything that had been said and discovered, we had the next part of the meal: syllabub, which was also unanimously liked, and jaune mange, which wasn't, although they looked pretty, having been made in silicone rose molds.

We then began the second round, and when that was finished, decided to take a stroll in the garden (a fancy name for our front yard). This was a perfect photo op, so I forced everyone to pose together, and stop and smell the newly bloomed roses. To my delight, we had several neighbours drive up and down the road to see us.



*The handsome Mr. Darcy sitting across from me*



*Stopping to smell the roses*

The third and fourth rounds passed quickly, with more astonishing things revealed every time someone spoke. Proposals were made, relationships were broken, secrets came to light, and our good opinions were lost forever. All this was over caramel pear pie and crème brûlée for dessert.

When the fourth round was over, each person had to make their guess about who the murderer was and explain why. I then took the secret envelope called "Solution", opened it, and read aloud the story of what had happened and who the murderer was. Only one person had guessed correctly, and they received a prize for their observant deductive skills.

**All in all, it was a lot of fun.** Out of the 10 of us, only I had ever read anything by Jane Austen, and only a handful of others had seen one or two film adaptations, and yet, everyone played their parts wonderfully. The costumes and accessories were well done by all. The invitation papers did give a brief summary of the character and suggestions for costume. I was hoping that it would look and feel authentic and was not disappointed. We tried our best to do British accents; Lady Catherine was the most skilled, while everyone else sounded mostly Australian or Scottish and slipped back into Canadian after a few rounds.

I appreciated how well the game was made, how helpful all of the instructions were, and how true to Austen's characters the dialogue was (with a few extra surprises). It was fun to see characters from different books interacting together. I particularly enjoyed seeing how the game-maker imagined Emma, Elizabeth, and Marianne getting along.

Why was there no Mr. Knightley? Well, while I can imagine even Mr. Darcy being a murderer, I just don't think Mr. Knightly ever could be.



*From left to right: Mr. Darcy, Elizabeth Bennet, Emma Woodhouse, Frank Churchill, Mr. Bennet, Mrs. Bennet, Marianne Dashwood, John Willoughby, Lady Catherine, Mr. Collins.*

*Disclaimer: I have not been asked in any way to promote this game or company (printablemysterygames.); I wanted to share something I did with my friends that I think many of you would enjoy.*





# Austen Sightings

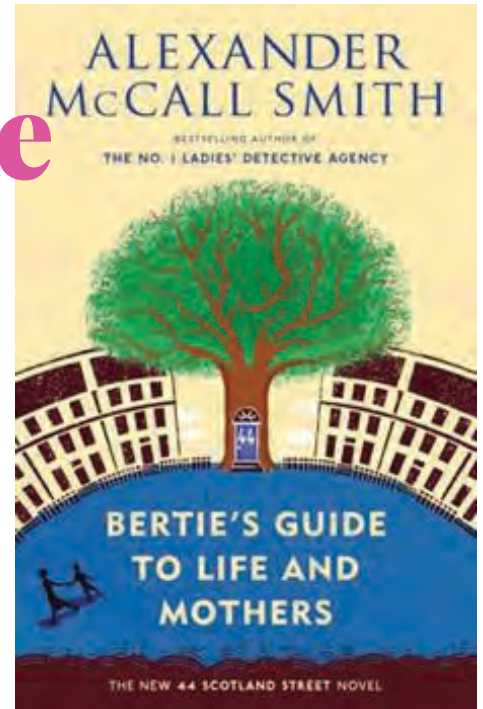


Austen Sighting

# Two hours of Jane Austen stretched ahead of him



By Phyllis  
Ferguson  
Bottomer



Alexander McCall Smith often mentions Jane Austen in his novels. As well he created a modern re-telling of *Emma* and wrote the introduction for *Pride and Prejudice* for the Vintage Classics edition.

This excerpt is from *Bertie's Guide to Life and Mothers*, the 9th book in the *44 Scotland Street* series. Bertie Pollock (6) is the only boy amid eleven other guests at Olive's birthday party.

"After tea, Olive had clapped her hands and announced that it was time for games. 'We're going to play a game now,' she said. 'A really good one.'

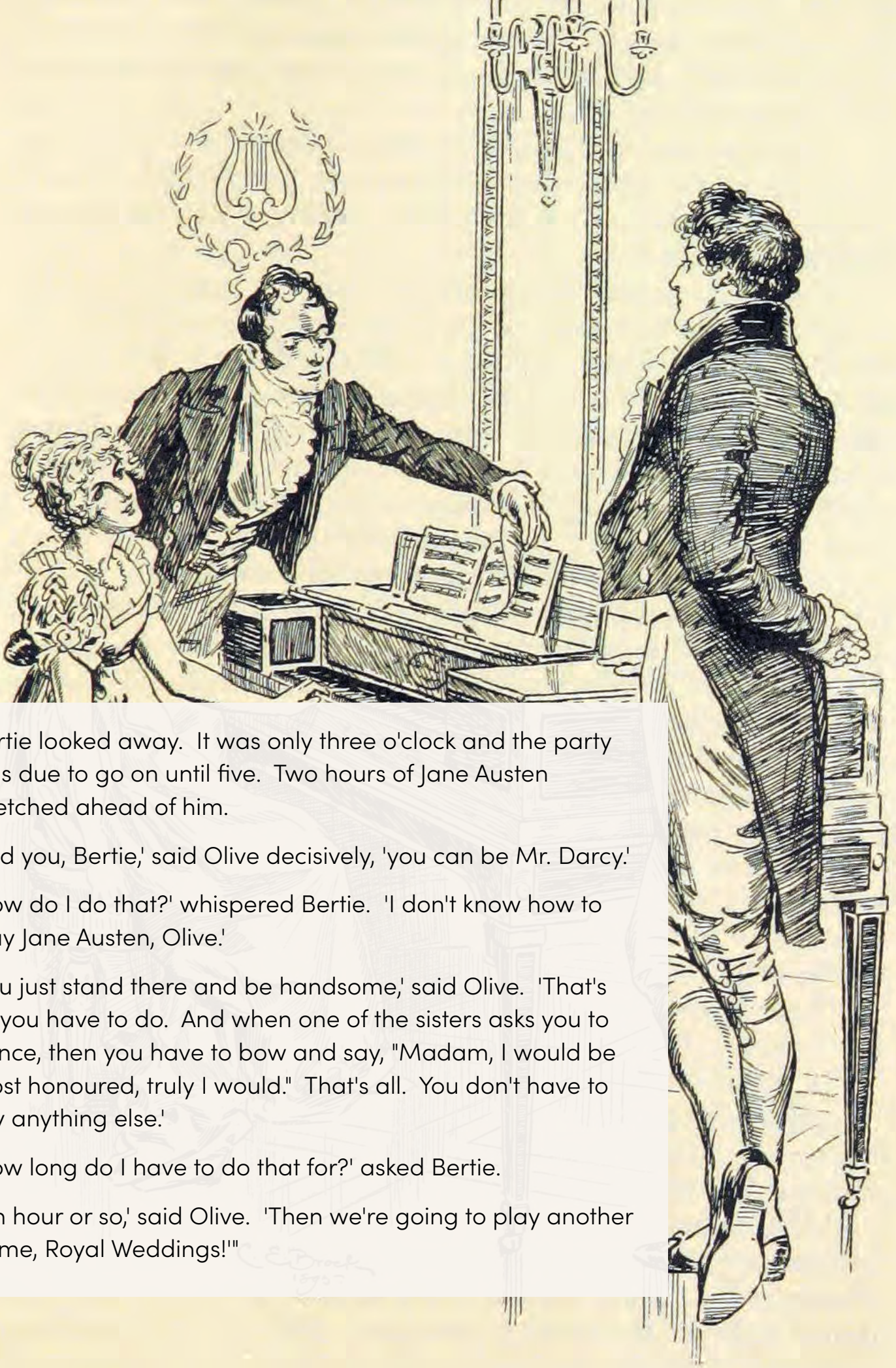
'Houses?' asked Pansy. "Could we play houses, Olive?"

Olive appeared to give this request full consideration before she shook her head. 'No, we shall not play houses, Pansy. Houses is a very yesterday game. We're going to play Jane Austen!'

There were squeals of pleasure and excitement from several of the girls. 'Yes!' enthused Pansy. 'Jane Austen!' And then she asked, 'How do you play that?'

'I'm going to be Lizzie,' said Olive. 'She's a girl with lots of sisters. Pansy, you can be her Mummy, who is very stupid, and Lakshmi, you can be her sister Jane. And Bertie...'





Bertie looked away. It was only three o'clock and the party was due to go on until five. Two hours of Jane Austen stretched ahead of him.

'And you, Bertie,' said Olive decisively, 'you can be Mr. Darcy.'

'How do I do that?' whispered Bertie. 'I don't know how to play Jane Austen, Olive.'

'You just stand there and be handsome,' said Olive. 'That's all you have to do. And when one of the sisters asks you to dance, then you have to bow and say, "Madam, I would be most honoured, truly I would." That's all. You don't have to say anything else.'

'How long do I have to do that for?' asked Bertie.

'An hour or so,' said Olive. 'Then we're going to play another game, Royal Weddings!'



Austen Sighting

# What a blessing it is to love books

By Julia VanDelft



*The von Arnim-Schlagenthin family manor in Nassenheide, Pomerania, (now Rzędziny), c. 1860*



While reading *The Solitary Summer* by Elizabeth von Arnim over the Christmas holidays, I came across a section where von Arnim enthuses over books and bookshelves and different authors. Knowing that many of our members would feel familiar with this topic, I wanted to share a few quotes, beginning with this one.



Photograph of Elizabeth von Arnim in 1900

"What a blessing it is to love books. Everybody must love something, and I know of no objects of love that give such substantial and unfailing returns as books and a garden."

*The Solitary Summer* is a sequel to *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*. I picked up a copy of *Elizabeth* at one of our "Books and Berries" meetings a few years ago! I had previously read *The Enchanted April* by von Arnim but I hadn't heard of either of these, so I have one of you to thank for introducing me to these semi-autobiographical works. I'm grateful because von Arnim's work is inspiring as well as entertaining.

Von Arnim was born in Australia in 1866 to a well-to-do family. She was named Mary Annette but was later known as "Elizabeth". Her father was Henry Heron Beauchamp, who was born in England and made his fortune in the shipping industry after moving to Australia. In 1870, the family moved to London, where she was schooled, although they often travelled around Europe. She learned to play the organ and was musically talented. In 1889 at age 21, she met Graf Henning von Arnim-Schlagenthin while she was in Rome. They married in February 1891 and she became Mary, the Gräfin von Arnim, a member of the Prussian aristocracy. They lived in Berlin where her three daughters were born (called the April, May, and June babies in her books because they were born in 3 years). While visiting her husband's estate in Nassenheide, von Arnim fell in love with the countryside and moved there with her daughters. She wrote *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* in 1898 which was an instant success, and *The Solitary Summer* in 1899. These were not published with her real name and she went on to write 19 more novels. Her most popular, *The Enchanted April*, was published in 1922.

In *The Solitary Summer*, von Arnim spends a lot of time talking about books and gardens, and gardening books, and if you're wondering what this has to do with Jane Austen, you will find out in a moment.

*"In the centre of my library there is a wooden pillar propping up the ceiling, and preventing it, so I am told, from tumbling about our ears; and round this pillar, from floor to ceiling, I have had shelves fixed, and on these shelves are all the books that I have read again and again, and hope to read many times more – all the books, that is, that I love quite the best. In the bookcases round the walls are many that I love, but here in the centre of the room, and easiest to get at, are those I love the best – the very elect among my favourites."*




How many of us can't relate to this? I know I can; I have some very elect books myself.

*"They change from time to time as I get older, and with years some that are in the bookcases come here, and some that are here go into the bookcases, and some again are removed altogether, and are placed on certain shelves in the drawing-room which are reserved for those that have been weighed in the balance and found wanting, and from whence they seldom, if ever, return."*

And now we come to the crucial point – which books are her very elect? And which author is mentioned first out of all the elect books?

*"What a medley of books there is round my pillar! Here is Jane Austen leaning against Heine – what would she have said to that, I wonder? – with Miss Mitford and Cranford to keep her in countenance on her other side."*



The background of the entire page is a reproduction of the painting 'Petworth: The White Library' by the English Romantic painter Joseph Mallord William Turner. The painting depicts an interior scene with a large, ornate wooden chair in the foreground, a table, and various objects on shelves and surfaces. The style is characterized by visible brushstrokes and a focus on light and atmosphere.

I wonder, indeed. She continues to list more of her favourites:

*"Here is my Goethe, one of many editions I have of him, the one that has made the acquaintance of the ice-house and the poppies. Here are Ruskin, Lubbock, White's Selbourne, Izaak Walton, Drummond, Herbert Spencer (only as much of him as I hope to understand and am afraid I do not), Walter Pater, Matthew Arnold, Thoreau, Lewis Carroll, Oliver Wendall Holmes, Hawthorne, Wuthering Heights, Lamb's Essays, Johnson's Lives, Marcus Aurelius, Montaigne, Gibbon, the immortal Pepys, the egregious Boswell, various American children's books that I loved as a child and love to this day; whole rows of German children's books, on which I was brought up .... And, I very believe, every gardening book and book about gardens that has been published of late years."*

I was thrilled to see Jane Austen mentioned by another prominent female writer born almost a century after her. It is my wish that if you don't already know about von Arnim, these quotes will stir up some interest, especially if you like books and gardening. Thank you again to whoever brought that copy of *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* which now occupies a space on my very elect bookshelf.

*Note: My copy of The Solitary Summer is an ebook from Amazon which was transcribed and made part of the public domain by volunteers. I don't have the details of which edition they used for transcribing. You can find more information on Elizabeth von Arnim as well as a more detailed biography at [elizabethvonarnimsociety.org](http://elizabethvonarnimsociety.org).*





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