



Jane Austen Society Screening of *The Duchess*

By Natasha Zwick

With not quite the enthusiasm I had felt when last I saw a Jane Austen Society screening at the Landmark Theater (that time, for *Becoming Jane*), I anticipated the latest screening of *The Duchess*, a film based on the book *Georgiana*, by Amanda Foreman. I had not read the book, and at first assumed the film was based on a story about Mr. Darcy's little sister.

So “ignorant” would be a euphemism for my state when I accepted the invitation. By the time I included two of my non-Janeite buddies and saw the film, I had divined that we were invited because the story takes place in roughly the same time Jane Austen lived, but not because of any explicit connection to our beloved Jane.

I really enjoyed the movie, and so did my friends. I was struck particularly by Rachel Portman's (Emma) haunting score (which the actors didn't hear until they saw the finished film, and about which the interviewees didn't seem nearly as excited as I was), by the lavish costumes and hair design, and by the story itself. Diana Birchall, our very own writer, interviewed both Amanda Foreman, the writer of the book, and Gabrielle Tana, the producer of the film. The two latter women have been long-time friends. Diana's slightly breathless set-up of our illustrious personages soon led to a discussion of the odyssey for this particular approach to the film which, unlike the book on which it is based, focuses on the marriage of Georgiana (pronounced Jor GEE na). The text itself could have made 10 movies, we heard. Gabrielle told us that they had to find out what the crux of the work is, and, in so doing, decided to leave out Georgiana's writing, addictive gambling, and drinking. Told that each problem requires 15 minutes of film, the creators knew quite quickly that the story must center on the marital problems of this disturbing marriage—and how each partner finds a release of sorts. Georgiana's letters to her best friend, Amanda told us, explain why she's giving up Charles Gray—whom she equates to her own soul. These letters also reflect Georgiana's own guilt about the choices she had to make during these difficult years. Also interesting to viewers of the film was information on Bess, the friend/traitor/facilitator of love in many, unexpected ways. Bess, we learned, was so fake she was real, akin to a “Chinese vase shattered” and then put together again. In the end, however, Bess loved Georgiana more than G's husband.

Several mini-discussions ensued, including one about Keira Knightley and her possible use of Princess Diana as a model for the character, given recent media speculation. Keira was only 11 when Diana died, however, and did not know about it until after it happened, so the speculation is merely that. Another arose about the Devonshire House drawl (Amanda's example was the pronunciation of “balcony” as “bal CO nee,” a la Bertrand Russell). We learned that being a Whig was more than having a particular political ideology; it was “in their bones.” Diana, who said she read the book about a month ago, asked some questions of Amanda about it. She wondered, for instance, how Amanda developed such thorough knowledge about 18th century England in her 20s. A clever question on Diana's part, and one whose answer interested all the life-long learners in the room. Amanda, who chuckled self-effacingly that her social life was “slightly curtailed,” told us that she was working on a doctoral dissertation at Oxford on Georgiana's husband when she came across this interesting material. Amanda now has five children, so, through that prism, it makes much sense to see Georgiana's story as a crisis between personal happiness on the one hand and responsibility as a mother on the other. Nonetheless, Amanda gives all credit for that focus of the film to its creators, not to herself. Amanda also told us that she is currently working on a tale of the British men and women who fought in the U.S. Civil War and ended up fighting each other at Gettysburg. One audience member commented that she wasn't much interested in U.S. history, but if *Georgiana* represents what Amanda is capable of doing to history, the speaker could hardly wait to explore U.S. history again with Amanda's guidance. And all of us heartily agreed with Amanda's simple observation that she's “hoping for a sequel.” Suffice it to say, we all are.

Save the Date — December 13, 2008
JASNA-Southwest December Meeting at
The Los Angeles Athletic Club



Holidays at Highbury: Understanding Jane Austen's *Emma*

Speakers who share our passion for Jane Austen will entertain us on a day devoted to Jane Austen and *Emma*. Professor Kay Young from UC Santa Barbara will deliver her JASNA Traveling Lecture on “A Mind Lively and at Ease’: Imagination and *Emma*.” Our own Diana Birchall will give a talk on Mrs. Elton’s Bristol connections to accompany a reading of her short playlet *The Courtship of Mrs. Elton*.

Call for Nominations — Again

JASNA-SW needs to elect a new coordinator. As you recall, Laurie Viera Rigler was elected in September to serve a two-year term, but she has reluctantly had to withdraw due to her writing commitments (she is writing a sequel to her book, *Confessions of a Jane Austen Addict*). She has graciously agreed to continue as the JASNA-SW webmaster.

An election will be held at the Winter Meeting, Saturday, December 13, 2008. The JASNA-SW nominating committee has nominated Nancy Gallagher as the new coordinator. Nancy is a past regional coordinator and currently serves as the recording secretary and will be resigning that post, should she be elected.

If you are interested in nominating another individual (including yourself) for the office of JASNA-SW Coordinator, please submit your name to:

Jaye Scholl Bohlen
Chairman, Nominating Committee
372 Brockmont Drive
Glendale, CA 91202
818 241-6169
email: jayescholl@aol.com

Should Nancy be elected, the JASNA-SW board will appoint an interim recording secretary until the next election a year from now.

Co-President's Message

Dear JASNA-SW members,

In the coming year, the JASNA-SW Board will be making changes to the Newsletter. To help reduce costs, many of the articles and book reviews that currently come to you on the printed page will be placed on the JASNA-SW website (www.jasnasw.org). We will be publishing an information newsletter twice a year, before each of our major regional meetings, instead of three or four large Newsletters that we currently publish annually. Also, we are sending out a monthly event calendar via electronic mail to notify members of reading group meetings, regional meetings and other events of interest to JASNA-SW members. If you are not receiving it, please send your email address to Pat Cross (pcross910@roadrunner.com), so you may be added to the list.

Why are we making this change? Economics, of course! It is expensive to mail these large multi-page issues to all of our members. The last one cost more than \$500 to produce and mail. Aside from the Newsletter, dues are spent on the following recurring items:

1. Programs. For the last four years we have been charging you only the actual cost of the lunch at these events. The Board is using the reserve funds to subsidize the full cost of the meetings, including:
 - Speaker expenses (who receive an honorarium and sometimes plane tickets and a night's lodging)
 - Rental of A/V equipment, pianos and the like
 - Coffee and tea at the beginning of a regional meeting
2. A contribution to each Reading Group's annual Jane Austen Birthday celebration
3. Postage and printing for paper mailings such as program announcements and membership renewal and for contacting new members.
4. The cost of the e-mail listserv software.
5. The cost of the web page and domain name.

Many of you have told us that good programs are your priority. It takes money to put together a good program!

As with much of the publishing industry today, the world-wide-web may not be the final answer for sharing information, but it is at least an interim solution to the high monetary and environmental costs of printing a paper Newsletter. We hope that each reading group will identify those individuals without easy web access and have members take turns printing articles and information from the web and from our email announcements.

If you are affected negatively by this change, we would like to hear from you. Please give us a call, so we can discuss options for you.

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Book Review

Seducing Mr. Darcy by Gwyn Cready

Reviewed by Natasha Zwick

If Jane Austen-related fiction came with NC-17 ratings, this book would have one. Even its cover is a departure from those of “the usual” books we read on the subject, including the books that reveal the sexy underpinnings on which this love story is based. A muscle-clad, open-shirted man caresses the exposed leg of a sexily-clad blond woman in strappy sandals. Textual warnings include the author’s thanking of Linda Berdoll for giving her a “first taste of what Austen may have missed.”

As someone pretty convinced that Austen missed nothing in her novels, I was a bit on edge when I began to read this seeming Harlequin romance. Though somewhat mollified by Cready’s acknowledgement of the “incomparable Jane Austen, who [she hopes] can look the other way for a few hours,” I wasn’t expecting to have a positive reaction to the story. But after reading this text, I have to imagine that, had Austen lived in modern times, she wouldn’t have needed to look away, and might actually have enjoyed the tale Cready has spun from *Pride and Prejudice*.

The story begins with our aptly-named heroine, Flip, accusing her friend, Dinah, a defensive, know-it-all, high school English teacher (uh oh) of overusing her vibrator. Flip is an ornithologist, and her friend Eve Bloomberg is a lawyer with a pharmaceutical company. Flip is rereading *P&P* for her book club and keeping track of the time since she was last, uh, carnally satisfied. An outsider observes that watching these women is like watching *Sex and the City* except that these women discuss the classics (I think some of the *SATC* girls could, too!). Thus we are introduced to our cast of several 30-something single, professional women looking for meaning, fulfillment, great sex, and a great book.

Enter Magnus Knightley (forgive the pun; blame the spirit of the book!). Mr. Knightley is a British Austen scholar living in the States and known for showing women a good time in the Rare Book Room at the library. He overhears the ladies’ discussion of how Netherfield is named for the nether regions to which Darcy is so drawn, and is quickly appalled by what he deems willful misinterpretation of the novel that, for him, represents “objective representationalism” and not a lurid fantasy involving sinks and sugar bowls. In a nice parallel to the mutual faulty first impressions of the novel, Magnus makes a similarly poor impression on Flip, despite physical attraction between them, when he deliberately embarrasses her when she asks for suggestions for her book club. But the stage has been set: they both read Austen, she has not been sexually tended to for two years, and he’s a known lothario. OK. Match! Let’s go.

Flip goes for a massage and finds herself transported in time . . . to Netherfield, where Mr. Darcy saves her from public humiliation about her husband’s cheating (which also caused Flip’s divorce from a Wickham-esque character in the modern world). Jed, like Jared in the alternate *P&P*, is indiscreet with his affairs and unwilling to give Flip the one thing she wants most of all: a baby. Flip has several significant experiences, both with Darcy and with the discovery of the (now extinct) passenger pigeon, which fascinates her. What she does not know, however, is that her presence and her choices will change the novel (whose characters’ passion she didn’t quite understand until visiting firsthand). Without my revealing too many plot details, know that if you invest your time in *Seducing Mr. Darcy*, you will enjoy several intense intimate scenes (one outdoors and almost public; and one involving some foodstuffs), several details of a modern *P&P* story (even the muddy heroine: how does she not see that she’s playing Lizzy?), sexy socks, philosophical discussions about the role of sex in relationships, the destruction of our beloved novel and several attempts to restore it, and more birds than you’ve probably pondered seriously for some time. Our characters will be asked to choose between love of Austen and love of each other, and their choices will both horrify and delight you.

I think it delightfully ironic that, when reviewing a book based on one that teaches that first impressions are often incorrect, I judged the book by its cover and its “acknowledgements” section; I have learned to correct my first impressions, and I have enjoyed the journey. I think you will, too.

Around the Reading Groups

The Long Beach Reading Group

Contact Gerda Kilgore at 562.496.4452 • gskmuc@verizon.net

The Orange County Reading Group

Contact Anna Freeman at 949.786.7170

The Pasadena Reading Group

Contact Margery Rich at 626.614.8697

The Riverside Reading Group With Friends of Temecula Library

Contact Rebecca Weersing at 909.699.7814 • temausten@hotmail.com

Contact Lois McMillan at 951.301.8827 • ronlomcmil@aol.com

The group meets at the beautiful new Temecula Library on Pauba Road at 10:30 AM on the first Wednesday of Sept, Oct, Nov, Dec, Feb, Mar, Apr, and May. In December we enjoy a Regency Tea and in May a Box Hill Picnic. This fall we are reading *Lady Susan*, *The Watsons* and *Sanditon*. There is no charge to join. New members are invited and we welcome visitors.

The San Fernando Valley Reading Group

Contact Gina Gualtieri at 818.788.4383 • gmguaitieri@yahoo.com

The Santa Monica Reading Group

Contact Diana Birchall at 310.394.2196 • birchalls@aol.com

The Ventura Reading Group

Contact Lillian Goldstein at 805.644.4238 • email goldstein@vcss.k12.ca.us

The West Los Angeles Reading Group

Contact Clara Browda at 310.278.8759

The San Diego Region

Contact Leila Dooley at 760.726.7815 • leila@nctimes.net or leila1@peoplepc.com

JASNA Southwest Newsletter

The quarterly Newsletter of
The Jane Austen Society of North America, Southwest

Address newsletter correspondence to:

Diana Birchall, 225 Montana Avenue #204, Santa Monica, CA 90403
310.394.2196

Email: birchalls@aol.com

The Jane Austen Society of North America

Annual dues \$30; send check payable to JASNA to
Bobbie Gay, 7230 N. San Blas Drive, Tucson, AZ 85704

The Jane Austen Society of North America, Southwest

Annual dues \$15; send check payable to JASNA-SW to
Patricia Cross, 910 19th Street #105, Santa Monica, CA 90403

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