JASNA-SW Reading Groups Come to Life on the Silver Screen!


One screening on September 19 was hosted by Sony Classics specifically for the JASNA-SW membership at the Landmark Theater in West Los Angeles. An audience of about 150 people attended, including JASNA-SW women – smart, engaged looking women, who resemble the smart, engaged women in the movie! We had our share of male members, spouses and men friends in the audience as well, some of whom were as sweet as Hugh Dancy’s character, Grigg, in the movie.

While waiting in line outside the theater and finding our seats, the atmosphere resembled a family reunion. People who only see each other a couple of times a year at regional meetings were filled with pleasure at seeing old friends and anticipating the movie. Most of us had been present at Ms. Fowler’s presentation at the Annual General Meeting of JASNA in Los Angeles in 2004, when her book was first published. The film was greeted by an enthusiastic audience, with lots of empathetic laughter, especially at the opening montage, representing our hectic, busy post-18th century lives. The scenes of book group discussion of each novel resonated with members active in JASNA-SW reading groups. Without a doubt, no Janeite who has seen the movie, will ever view a “Walk/Don’t Walk” sign in the same way again….when crossing the street, we will now see them as a guiding light to help us with our conundrums, and ask ourselves: “What Would Jane Do?”
After the film was shown, Nancy Gallagher, a past Coordinator for JASNA-SW and currently Recording Secretary on the Board, warmly introduced Los Angeles Times movie critic, and long-time JASNA member, Kenneth Turan and Robin Swicord, the writer, director, and producer of the Jane Austen Book Club, for a question and answer session. Ms. Swicord said she wanted to show how a group of people reading can be an antidote to the fractured lives we live. She looked for a cast of seasoned players, “a little band of brothers,” who could work together as an ensemble. She said a line producer at Sony Classics gave her the best advice in directing her first feature film: “Always go with your gut instinct.” In answer to an audience question, Ms. Swicord told us that she made the movie in 30 days in locations around Los Angeles for about $6 million. The only way the movie can have been made was to make it with a low-budget, since it wouldn’t earn back the money that a big explosion and car chase movie will. She told us she was grateful to Sony Classics for taking a chance on a movie about a bunch of people who read books.

JASNA-SW members hung around chatting with Ken and Robin, as you can see in the photos from the evening. We extend our warmest appreciation to Nancy, Ken, Robin and Sony Classics Pictures for providing a festive evening.

Claire Bellanti, Mimi Dudley, Jaye Scholl

Ken Turan and Claire Bellanti

I have something to say about the screening—I wish I had been there! - Laurie Viera Rigler
**Zocalo Jane Austen Book Club Event by Natasha Zwick**

Many of you attended a special screening for Janeites of the new film adaptation of *The Jane Austen Book Club*; I was at the other one. My special screening, held at the Harmony Theater on Sunset Blvd, was the work of Zocalo, or Public Square, a group that offers lectures in various locations on various subjects, free of charge to the interested public. I, of course, was quite curious who “interested public” would be, given that my usual Jane Austen peeps would likely attend the event designed for them, held on the following evening.

With my beloved mom and dad in tow, I began to talk, first with my fellow movie-goers standing near us in line. Silvia Blackstone was drawn to the event because Patt Morrison of the *LA Times* would be interviewing the adapter/director and two actors after the screening. Mary Dahbour has been attending Zocalo events for several years now, and is always interested in the Mexican catering offered free of charge after the screening. Several movie-goers heard about the event on the Zocalo website; others on the public library’s. Lou Sobel, a gentleman who helped divert the overflow traffic in line for the ladies’ restroom to the now empty men’s restroom, said he reads nothing without explosions or car chases; he teaches at Southwestern Law School.

In short, none of the people I interviewed were there for Jane Austen. To be fair, I was not 100% alone. Alice White sat across the room, I felt Carol Krause’s presence somewhere nearby, and my own parents helped encourage my passion for Jane. But this was not a room of our peers.
They loved the movie. They clapped enthusiastically for Robin Swicord, whom I was fortunate to meet at the Disney set when I visited last year with Diana Birchall. Kathy Bates was popular, too, and I must say I wasn’t alone in my appreciation for Hugh Dancy, also on stage.

Natasha, Alice White and Carla Washburn

The panel had insight to offer. In addition to hearing that Jane Austen was the 19th century’s Oprah, “someone through whom the prism of our own lives can be understood,” we learned that Robin first borrowed *Pride and Prejudice* from her school library and then proceeded to act it out with her paper dolls in what she termed, her “first adaptation.” But Robin immediately stated that she was no Janeite, and felt no need or desire to dress up and have balls of the period. Morrison commented that perhaps this was because Robin doesn’t “like pantaloons,” but Robin corrected her gently (as I corrected her, muttering to myself perhaps less gently, from my seat in the audience): “ladies wore nothing under there.”

Robin attributed her recent success to the producer of the film, John Calley, whom Diana and I also met on the set. According to Robin, ideas go “from John Calley’s lips to G-d’s ear.”

The relative dearth of men reading Austen and participating in book clubs was a subject oft visited throughout the panel discussion. Robin clarified that, in fact, many men throughout history have embraced Jane, even, famously, Rudyard Kipling, who said something to the effect that “if not for Jane Austen, not I.” Men have always loved Austen, Robin said, which explains why all six novels are in the Western canon; after all, “you don’t get there without the boys.”
In response to several questions from the audience and from Patt, Robin told us that she tried to recreate the Austen village in the film; though only the “thinnest narrative line” connects the six separate stories in the Karen Joy Fowler novel, Robin made it her task in the screenplay to connect them without dwelling in the past (as the novel does). The audience, she said, doesn’t have to have read Austen (good thing, given this audience), but those of us who do will get a little more from it. We can bring our non-Austen reading loved ones (or is that phrase an oxymoron?) because Robin always took pains to have one or two of the characters review the plot in the course of the movie. And the Austen characters are simply a “mask” for the characters in the story (including Bernadette, played by Bates, and Grigg, played by Dancy).

Fowler, by the way, “has been lovely” about the adaptation.

One lesson Robin hoped to reveal, echoed appropriately by the shirt she wore the day Diana and I visited the set (“You have my continuous partial attention), was that our lives are somewhat fractured. We have a semblance of community, but often we can’t be bothered to focus on each other. In the film, it becomes the role of the “den mother” of sorts to bring these characters together and help them learn to focus on each other.

I had no problem focusing on Hugh Dancy. True, I know from my research (In Style has some genuine first rate articles) that he is happily dating Claire Danes, and worse, his almost first words to us were “I’m not a Jane Austen fanatic.” Also true, Dancy, like Kathy Bates before him, had difficulty remembering reading Austen, but figured it must have been at Oxford, which he termed “the world’s worst book club.” He knows he got through Pride and Prejudice, but beyond that, had difficulty recalling which other one(s) he has read. For a moment it did cross my mind, I admit, that hot is simply not enough.

Nonetheless, his charm and good looks re-won my attention, especially when he praised both his co-star Kathy, and his writer-director, Robin. When asked about his work on his character, Dancy admitted with honesty that he “never really thought deeply about Grigg’s past life”—the basic facts are laid out already—because Grigg seems very happy where he is, and “probably always has been.” Dancy acknowledged that his response “sounds like a massive get-out clause for an actor,” but had little compunction using it.

He had a delightful exchange with Kathy Bates about book clubs. Kathy is in a book club, composed of all women because women, she said, “are the best.” Men, she reasoned, don’t have all-male clubs because then they “would have to listen to each other.” Robin told the audience that now we can see “what Hugh had to put up with,” and he then joked about his solid education at the hands of these women. Dancy has never been a member of a book club, and he said he can easily believe that individual personalities would take over a group. Impatient with people who move more slowly or more quickly than he does, Dancy said he has no desire to join such a group. Several minutes later, Bates asked if he would have an all-male or a mixed gender group, and he asked, “in the book club I don’t want to be a member of?”

Robin felt differently, however. She argued, in fact, for a bit more restraint in our modern, fractured world. She said that sometimes, even if we have to force ourselves, we should say, “Alright. I’m putting down my Blackberry and going to my book club to communicate with other people!”

Alice White took this opportunity to encourage members of the audience to visit our local website, and to join one of our reading groups. I have no doubt her friendly invitation will garner us some new members.
With a swing back to the literary, Morrison mentioned that Austen “is almost Shakespearean in the plasticity of her characters,” referring to the emergence of Shakespeare and Austen in a variety of different cultures. Robin pondered that many people in many cultures read Austen and say, “I see myself” here.

By this time, I had managed to jot down a few of my questions, and, if only I could slow my heart rate down a bit, I could raise my hand, stand up, and ask them in front of all these people. Before I could stop myself, my hand flew up, and the Zocalo representative held a microphone in front of my face. I introduced myself (the whole delightful interlude will be broadcast on the radio this Sunday) as Natasha Zwick, who visited the cast and crew on the set as a representative of the Jane Austen Society. My mom says Robin waved. I was too nervous to note it. My questions were, first, for Robin, what her upcoming plans include and if Jane Austen might factor in them, and secondly, as a single fan, for Hugh, how his relationship is going. After I spoke (my face flaming, no doubt), the audience laughed, and Hugh answered—“in ten words or less”—with a “good.” (I put my hand on my heart and said I was happy for him; I’m a horrible liar). Robin’s response was a bit more complete: she’s taking a break as she decides what project she would like to begin next.

At the reception afterward, I approached Hugh and said, “If I can’t date you, may I at least take a picture with you?” He obliged (as you can see), and I praised his recent work. Then I saw Robin—holding the JASNA-SW issue I had given the Zocalo microphone girl. I approached her, and she was warm and friendly and knew who I was right away. She said she had received a copy of the newsletter with her profile from Ken Turan, but that she would send this copy to her mom. I then asked her permission to introduce my mom to her. All in all, an exchange of which Jane would have approved, I think.

As wine glasses reinvigorated the crowd, my parents and I discussed our impressions. My dad, himself a writer, was impressed by how likeable and articulate Robin was on-stage, and commented that it was no wonder that, in a script she wrote, every line had a purpose (either character development or plot progression), and every character had a reason for doing what he or she did.

The actors revealed that the movie champagne was not real; Robin promised, and I have complete faith in her, that on her next movie, she will perfect that detail, as she has all the rest in this one.
Becoming Jane
Movie review by Natasha Zwick

Becoming Jane movie review by Natasha Zwick

I gathered with members of JASNA-SW for a special screening of Becoming Jane at the Landmark Theaters in the Westside Pavilion on a Thursday evening in late July. There have been some strong reactions to the film in general, including several criticisms of its non-authenticity, given how little we know about the real relationship between Austen and the mysterious Tom Lefroy, and doubts about Anne Hathaway’s suitability as the actress to play our Jane.

To help you judge whether you should see the film (for the first time or again), let me warn you that I am one of those rare Janeites who admit openly to having enjoyed the Patricia Rozema Mansfield Park, despite its apparent melding of Jane Austen’s voice into Fanny Price’s and a risqué lesbian love encounter, among other revelations. So I am likely less bothered by the liberties taken with Austen’s life in Becoming Jane than the average Janeite might be. These liberties include, of course, the intense romance between Austen and the Irishman about whom we all wish to know more than we do, and the melding of Elizabeth Bennet’s characteristics into Jane Austen’s. The movie argues, in fact, that the events it relates inspired Pride and Prejudice. The author comes up with the beginnings of First Impressions in London on a trip with Mr. Lefroy, and a wealthy widow (with a wealthy nephew) in Austen’s hometown resembles Lady Catherine, although a bit softer. Similarly, Mrs. Austen is a softer version of Mrs. Bennet, and Mr. Austen, about whom we all concurred we would have liked to see more during the film, a more responsible version of Mr. Bennet. Dear Cassandra is, of course, Jane Bennet, and Mr. Lefroy is a blend of Wickham and Darcy—portrayed as a bad boy at first, then revealed to be a better boy who makes bad, but responsible choices.

That’s all very nice, but you still don’t know if you should bring yourself to see it. So, let’s hear from some of our peers.

Susana Ashton came to the film because she likes Jane Austen and the period, but especially because she always wondered why Austen never married and if, in fact, Austen’s intelligence was just too much for men at the time to grapple with.

Elizabeth Goldbaum felt irritated that the film gave Austen a Lizzy Bennet flair because Elizabeth was under the impression that Austen, for the most part, did not act on her Lizzy-esque feelings but used them to fuel her stories. That breach bothered Elizabeth throughout the film, but even she was impressed by the cinematography, the beautiful way in which nature was captured on film, and the heat between the would-be lovers. Her comments on Ms. Hathaway included this generous concession: “she did the best she could.”

I will insert my own view here and comment that many criticisms of Ms. Hathaway stem from her beauty and her American-ness. I cannot fault her for either trait: yes, she is
probably more conventionally beautiful than Jane was, but we are always faulting the likenesses that remain of Jane as being too severe upon her; Hathaway casts a more cheerful possibility for us of Austen’s appearance. And if we want the general public to read more Austen, a beauty like Hathaway is certainly one way to go about securing potential readers, so I have no problem with that. As for her being American, she is an actress. Playing people different from themselves is what actors do! I think she handles the accent and the period quite well, on par with say, Gwyneth Paltrow in Emma and in Shakespeare in Love (which, incidentally, does something similar with inventing a love story as the inspiration for one of the writer’s greatest works).

Claire Bellanti enjoyed the representation of the period and commented on the music, which, I, too, found beautiful and appropriate; Claire, current co-president of the Southwest Chapter, observed that, “like every Hollywood Bio-Pic [she has] ever seen, much of the story was entirely invented to help reinforce a semblance of truth about the subject’s life. In this case, the semblance of truth is that Jane Austen must have looked for affection in marriage, but her inability to bring money to the marriage agreement would have severely limited her ability to make an arrangement that she would choose.”

Given that I don’t have such severe limits, I dare say I should have used this reporting opportunity to inquire after the thoughts of a well-heeled gentleman sitting but two seats away from us, but alas, I did not 😞.

I was struck, during and after watching the movie (which, as promised by some reviewers, does tug on heartstrings sufficiently to bring tears), by how sad the story would be, if true. Jane was a vibrant, intelligent woman who, in her novels anyway, demonstrates a real appreciation for human character, for goodness, for companionate marriages. As she is forced by principle to yield her true love to his familial obligations, one can’t help but feel pain for a woman who might have found such a different sort of happiness from any that we know she found. In the film, the lack of money causes a lifetime of sorrow for both Austen and Lefroy, and they are left to find consolation in their respective careers, and in both their “offspring” (I will leave the rest of the surprises of that scene to you—if for that scene only, you must go see this film).

Though the film ends on a cheerful note, I felt very sad for some time after. It makes sense, I suppose, that if this had really happened, Jane Austen would spend the rest of her life creating happy endings, so different from her own. It also explains how she became the master of understated passion, intellectual and physical chemistry that draws heroes and heroines to each other without having either yield to impropriety, vulgarity, or poverty.

Each of us who loves and appreciates Jane Austen wonders how she came to master everything she did with so little life experience; this film offers one possibility, and I enjoyed it as such.

Post script: I have just seen the movie a second time, with another former student, this one an ’07 graduate. As the film ended, and I was once again surprised at just how sad I felt, Olga’s first comment was, “That has to be the saddest movie I’ve ever seen.” It’s amazing
that a story of love, a story where the real tragedies happen to subordinate characters like Cassandra’s fiancé or their mentally retarded brother, feels so deeply sad in the end. The Austen character’s loss of love—or rather, loss of a life shared with a man who always loves her and whom she always loves—becomes a tragedy that the audience cannot help but feel, and feel strongly.

Olga’s second question, by the way, was exactly the same as my first had been to Claire right after I saw it for the first time: “How much of that was true?” I had taken comfort from Claire’s response about how little information we really have about Tom Lefroy, which meant that maybe our beloved Jane didn’t have such heartache. Olga and I concluded differently, however, contemplating that maybe it is, as the cliché has it, better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.

Particularly if that joy and that pain fuel a work like *Pride and Prejudice*.

**Save the Date…**

…for our Jane Austen and Mysteries event scheduled for December 8, 2007 at the historic Los Angeles Athletic Club. Margery Rich, longtime JASNA-SW member will speak to us about *Pride and Prejudice* as a detective novel. And Lynda Hall from Chapman University will speak about, “Addressing Readerly Unease: Discovering the Gothic in *Mansfield Park*.” Additionally, everybody in attendance will participate in a special "the mysterious popularity of Jane Austen" event.

Check your mailbox at the end of October for our mailer containing more details and a sign-up sheet.

**Member Profile: Lillian Goldstein By Natasha Zwick**

Lillian Goldste
Natasha: You have played an important role in the Jane Austen Society. How did you become involved in JASNA-SW? Please describe your jobs over the years.

Lillian: In 1978, my husband, Irving, and I visited the former home of Samuel Johnson on Fleet Street, in London. We got such a powerful feeling of Samuel Johnson’s personality from his home that we decided to take the train from London to Chawton, to visit Jane Austen’s little cottage, the last one she lived in, before she died. I was strongly moved by the small size of the bedroom she shared with her sister, Cassandra, and by the other aspects of her home. I joined the British Jane Austen Society and read all her writings when I got back to Los Angeles.

In the meantime, Joan Austen-Leigh, J. David Grey and Henry Burke started JASNA, with the membership list of the British JASNA. And a branch was started in Los Angeles, using the same membership list (I think). There was a meeting announced at USC, with Dr. Ruth ApRoberts and Professor Donald Greene, which I attended. And when they asked for volunteers to serve on the Board (!), my sister volunteered me. (There were very few volunteers).

Dr. ApRoberts, who taught English at UC Riverside, became ill soon after and allowed the new-born branch to lapse. I couldn’t allow that. So I planned a meeting at the Huntington Library and was amazed at the numbers of people who attended.

I had asked Jack Smith, a popular columnist for the *Los Angeles Times* of that period, for his advice about an appropriate place for the meeting, and he suggested the Huntington Library in San Marino. As he was on the Board of the Huntington, our request for a room and a date sailed through.

I was lucky that others were willing to assume responsibility for the South-West branch, so I got out from under after a few meetings. Jack Smith, dear man that he was, wrote several articles about Jane Austen, alerting Jane Austen fans in Southern California and Arizona to the existence of JAS-SW (including our invaluable Diane and Peter Birchall). And the branch swelled with members.

Natasha: Newer members have little knowledge of the history of JASNA-SW. What do you remember of the early days that you’d like to share with us?

Lillian: You know, of course, how JASNA started, and why it is called the Jane Austen Society of North America. It seems that Joan Mason Austen-Leigh lived in Victoria, British Columbia, J. David Grey lived in New York City, and Henry Burke lived in Maryland. All three were fans of Jane Austen, and they would travel to England for the annual British JAS, where they were looked at askance, as “those Americans.” Joan’s husband said, “Why put up with that? Form your own society.” So they did. And as Joan and her husband lived in Canada and the other two lived in the United States, they named the society JASNA.

Natasha: When did you begin reading Austen? What special appeal do Austen’s works have to you?

Lillian: I began reading Jane Austen’s novels when I was mature, and I was able to appreciate her humor, her characterizations, and the form and elegant style of her writing. I enjoyed learning about life in the late 18th and
early 19th centuries, and I pursued information about the culture in which she lived, her social class, the Dame school she attended, and other aspects of her society.

**Natasha:** Can you tell us a bit about your family and interests other than Jane Austen?

**Lillian:** I was born and raised in New York City and attended Hunter College as an English major until my family moved to California. When I married, my husband and I got our BA’s and MA’s at UC Berkeley and UCLA.

I was a teacher in the LA Unified School District and Culver City for 25 years while raising two children, who presently gifted me with three grandchildren. After I left teaching, I worked for Fannie Mae, a mortgage investment company, as a risk management analyst.

Currently, I pursue interests in politics and in the world through travel, dance, music, literature and theater—and of course, Jane Austen.

**Natasha:** *What about you might surprise our readers?*

**Lillian:** Surprise? I am not an academic. I’m just an ordinary reader who values fine writing.

**Natasha** again: It must be as clear to all of you as it is to me: there is nothing ordinary about this woman who laid the groundwork for the joys we all now take for granted in our mutual enjoyment of each other’s company and expertise. Lillian Goldstein brought together people not only of the time during which she physically served on the Board but also of the future. All our bonds—with each other and with this society—come, in no small part, as a result of Lillian’s devotion to our cause. On behalf of all members, past, present, and future, I’d like to offer sincere gratitude to Lillian Goldstein.
Play Reading in New York by Diana Birchall

Sept. 15/16, New York

The usual pressure to get ready to leave: got a nice fantasy novel about demons at 6 PM, read it Friday evening (in addition to finishing packing and visiting with an English journalist house guest in the afternoon). Got a few hours sleep, despite ghastliness of flying phobia (which isn't incapacitating, but I inevitably spend night before flight worrying about Peter and Paul What If). Got taxi to the airport for my 1 PM flight, which was smooth, except for lady in seat next to me with tubercular cough, and chicken sandwich consisting of one lump of chicken for ten dollars. Managed to write up my entire book coverage on the plane, battery died just as I finished.

Arrived 9 PM, long wait for luggage, taxi to the Larchmont Hotel on 11th between Fifth and Sixth Avenues, where I've stayed the last few times. After getting settled (somewhat bleak double room with pretty view of 11th St.) I wandered out to find something to eat, and decided on Vaselka, the Ukrainian restaurant that's a 24-hour coffeehouse on Second Avenue and 9th Street. Veal goulash and salad, and their really superb apple crumb cake with ice cream. Walked back; it was Saturday night, and so many young couples - it seemed as if the city was mostly composed of beautiful young people between 18 and 22, dating and kissing and trying to look edgy but mainly looking like very sheltered well-heeled young people from good homes and fancy colleges who think they are having an
adventurous life experience by being young in New York, as if that's never been done before. All seemed to be intensely having fun, and some of the girls are astonishingly pretty - those pale flower-like faces, long shiny hair, long legs and short skirts, and the young men were all over them. Forty years ago Peter and I were having our own romantic young New York life, and if the young people think they're unique in their uniqueness, I'm sure I'm not unique in wondering how those forty years passed: New York makes me feel like a ghost.

The next day was anything but ghostly! Took a pill and slept a few hours, but felt kind of groggy in the morning. Went to the brasserie on the corner, Paris Roast, for a cappuccino and Croque Monsieur which made me feel much better. Then took taxi up to the House of the Redeemer at 7 E. 95th (off Fifth Avenue) for my Jane Austen talk. Handsome hall, and in trooped the JASNA-NY people and I helped set up - they'd bought 120 of my books so I helped arrange them, and in between the waves of arriving Janeites, I was distracted and diverted to see my own invitees, friends and relatives, come in: in no particular order, my publisher; my cousin Anne and her 10-year-old daughter Joanna; my childhood best friend Mark and his wife; some of my Hunter friends; my mother-in-law; a cousin on Winnie's side of the family; my Charlotte Yonge friend Barbara; and more! It was absolutely warming and wonderful seeing everyone, from all corners of my life, though I was a bit unnerved over technical details: they had a microphone for a person two feet taller than I am, and we fiddled with that - I decided not to use one, though I'd have to really project - then they kept wanting me to put more things in the talk ("can't you put in how you came to write your Mrs. Elton books online"), and since my talks are carefully scripted it's disconcerting to have to change at last minute. All was building up to a thrum of readiness however, and I was thrilled to meet Kathleen Chalfont and her actors, when suddenly I looked at the playlet program and there it said, "Mrs. Elton - Diana Birchall." Gulp! I had thought it was ALL going to be professional actors, and not only did they have me reading Mrs. Elton, but in a professional lineup? What's wrong with that picture?

My publisher saw I was somewhat stunned and took me into a corner and marked my lines and listened to me gabble them once. Then she fetched me a glass of water - what a nice publisher! At the same time people were asking me to sign my books and taking pictures of me with Kathleen Chalfont and my feet were hurting because of fancy shoes and I felt like I was being tossed in a blanket. But then everyone was sitting down, and they made their introduction with a Power Point, typing all the negative words people could think of to describe Mrs. Elton, vulgar, pushy, manipulative, etc. Then they turned to me and I said, "Misunderstood!" and they introduced me and up I went. Didn't use microphone, just projected, and read paper which took about 30 minutes. Oh dear how do I make myself sound modest here - it was a home run, one of the very best papers I ever gave, research laced with humor, and was way up there as one of the best receptions I ever had. That feeling like you have them in the palm of your hand, that you're in control? Yup, that feeling. The adrenalin produces a state where time moves just a fraction more slowly and you are able to assess everything you're going to say and every inflection, so you pause for a laugh (and there were, ahem, a lot of them), and project with intensity during the slightly researchy parts, and make eye contact and give sardonic intonations and it all goes - just as you will and intend it. There were a lot of questions afterward, but no time to rest! They explained how I hadn't known I was going to read the role, and I filed back up to the front
with the actors, feeling slightly surreal. Kathleen Chalfont did all the narration, and I stood between my two "suitors," Mr. Elton and the puppy Mr. Bird, who was a great tall handsome young man who emoted largely, while Mr. Elton was a small bearded young man who "made love" to me by gazing at me lovingly with large brown doggy eyes which startled me so much I almost jumped out of my skin. However, I have lived with Mrs. Elton a long time and wrote the lines, after all, which the other actors were reading more or less cold, so I gave Mrs. E. a funny nasty little voice and ACTED. It, erm, worked.

The real thrill was not the sort of hideous realization that I am schizophrenically half ham, but the magic of hearing actors read my words. Goodness! It really made chills go down my spine, and as Kathleen Chalfont was reading, the thought went through me, "this is really a fairly high point in my life, this moment, isn't it." Yet I thought of Peter and Paul back in California and felt that it wasn't really my life at all...it was all kind of an out-of-body experience. Afterwards I just flopped down and let people bring me tea. Being exhausted and jet lagged while adrenalyzed is an odd and unfamiliar feeling and I wouldn't like it for every day, but it will be nice to remember.

**In Memoriam, Gloria Gross**

Gloria Sybil Gross, Professor of English at California State University, Northridge, was a beloved and prominent member of JASNA-SW, who generously contributed her talents to the group and to the cause of Jane Austen studies over many years. We have innumerable fond memories of her at Austen events, and of her many excellent talks, most notably at the 1992 JASNA AGM in Santa Monica, where she spoke on "Flights into Illness: Some Characters in Jane Austen," discussing the ironical dynamics of hypochondria. Gloria was a loyal member of the Santa Monica reading group, though she had to drive a long way from her home in the Valley, but whenever she attended we delighted in her sage professorial insights, combined with her insouciant humor. *Emma* was her favorite Austen novel, and she was especially fascinated and diverted by Mr. Woodhouse, always saying, when she couldn't come to a group meeting, that she was "doing a Mr. Woodhouse."

Another of her favorite themes was her adored golden Chow Chow dog, Mordechai Sensation, in whose honor she wrote an article for our Newsletter. "Mordechai loves Jane Austen," Gloria wrote, "having devoured the entire Oxford Series, in addition to several biographies and critical studies."

In addition to Jane Austen, Gloria had other lifelong literary favorites, including Anthony Trollope and Isaac B. Singer, but perhaps her greatest love of all was for Samuel Johnson. She would light up with enthusiasm when talking about him, and her first published book was *This Invisible Riot of the Mind: Samuel Johnson's Psychological Theory* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992). She admired and revered her teacher, the late eminent Johnsonian scholar Professor Donald Greene, founder of the Samuel Johnson Society of Southern California, and she edited a posthumous volume of his selected essays. Gloria attended the Johnson Society dinner almost every year, where she would hobnob spiritedly with a host of old friends. Her last book appropriately explored the literary relation of her two favorite authors, and was charmingly entitled *In a Fast Coach with a
Pretty Woman: Jane Austen and Samuel Johnson (AMS Press, 2002). In her acknowledgements, Gloria graciously thanked "our own especial set, the Jane Austen Reading Group of Santa Monica, principally Diana Birchall and Sheila Ober-Brown, who preside over high tea, conversation and books." Gloria dedicated the book to Donald Greene, with the words, "Let Johnson speak for me when he honors his mentor: 'Such was his amplitude of learning and such his copiousness of communication that it may be doubted whether a day now passes in which I have not some advantage from his friendship.' (Lives of the Poets, II, 21.)" The same can very truly be said for the advantages we have received, over a period of more than twenty years, from our friendship with Gloria.

We remember her warmth and wit, her sympathy and acuity. We also remember that she fought with depression, and would occasionally muse that her beloved Dr. Johnson suffered from "melancholia," too. She lost her battle with depression on September 10, 2007, at the age of fifty-nine.

Condolences may be sent to her father.

Mr. Julius Gross
556 North Croft Ave. #1
Los Angeles,
CA 90048

The Department of English at CSUN will hold an on-campus memorial service in her honor in the Student Union Building Thousand Oaks Room, on Friday, October 19, 2007, starting at 3:00 p.m.

Diana Birchall