Austen and Byron – Together at Last!
Conference Report by Diana Birchall

New York, May 3, 2008. New York has done it – a fabulous Austen/Byron day-long conference that outshines any other such conference that ever was; though I have heard that there was a predecessor 18 years ago, held at the Donnell Library jointly by JASNA-NY and the Byron Society, as this one was. Eighteen years is a period, however, so it was quite time for Austen and Byron to come together again. And quite time for me to fly to New York and witness the events.

Union Theological Seminary
It was a rather grey day, but I’m sure the 102 attendant spirits present at the meeting at the Union Theological Seminary, were rejoicing. I arrived about 9:30 at this Gothic pile, coincidentally an architectural sister to all my former New York schools (Hunter College Elementary, High School of Music and Art, C.C.N.Y.), but with an Oxonian enfolded green quadrangle of great peace and beauty. On arrival I immediately encountered everyone’s favorite New York Janeite, Program Chair Gene Gill, womaning the registration table, and Regional Co-Coordinators Nili Olay and Jerry Vetovich, in beautiful 18th century costume, a gracious reminder of the period we were about to enter. After half an hour of excited chat and bagels and shopping at Pug’s Boutique (I bought a purple T-shirt with a gilt head of Byron encrusted across it, an appropriately gorgeous object indeed), Elsa Solender and her opposite number from the Byron Society, Marsha Manns, welcomed us from the stage, and sternly adjured us to turn off our cell phones as there was a long program. Indeed there was: four speakers, two actors, and lunch, is a formidable and ambitious undertaking, but so superb were every one of these elements (well, admittedly the lunch was good but not celestial; but nobody cared, our souls were lifted well above buttons, or mutton) that the eight hours spent at the Seminary sped like eight minutes: truly!
The first speaker, Jonathan Gross, was, suitably, a young man with a startlingly Byronic profile. More prosaically he is Professor of English at DePaul University, and is the author of *Byron: The Erotic Liberal*, and editor of *Byron’s Corbeau Blanc: The Life and Letters of Lady Melbourne*, as well as the Duchess of Devonshire’s two novels. His talk, “Austen and Byron in Regency England,” was packed with information, stitched with cross currents in time, and glittering with fabulous personalities. When he dived right in, talking about the Albany, I sat up and took extreme notice. For the Albany was at one time not only the residence of Byron and of Monk Lewis, but also Henry Austen’s place of business, raising some tantalizing possibilities of how the Austen-Byron paths may have crossed. Unfortunately the dates don’t match; Henry had his office when young Byron was still at Harrow.

Monk Lewis, who inherited a plantation and visited Jamaica where he seems to have tried with mixed results to be kind to the slaves (I must read his *Journal*), may have influenced Austen’s portrait of Sir Thomas Bertram: she would have read and known about Lewis.

The house belonged to Lady Melbourne originally. Her happiest days were passed there, as she wrote years later when living at Whitehall. Her various sorrows and troubles included the exile to the Continent of her friend Georgina, Duchess of Devonshire; aspects of Lady Melbourne’s own affair with the Prince Regent, (she wore a black band round her neck signifying she was his mistress — detail from Mabell Airlie’s book, *In Whig Society*, which I have since procured: a gorgeous gold-embossed blue edition) and her long affair with Lord Egremont, the father of her son William Lamb. The problems of William in his marriage to Lady Caroline Lamb also troubled her. She lived very much in the Bon Ton, writing that she changed the “bells of St. James to the chimes of Westminster,” and the speaker showed us a slide of how ladies in society were ranked for qualities such as Wit, Principles, Figure (Georgiana received top scores; poor Lady Melbourne was the only one of the ladies to score zero for Figure). Lady Melbourne would reminisce with Byron about how happy she had been at magnificent Melbourne House. She was his Corbeau Blanc (Augusta Leigh was his Corbeau Noir), and the model for his Lady Pinchbeck in Don Juan. Lady Melbourne, the Duchess of Devonshire, and er, another lady, were sometimes portrayed as the three witches of Macbeth. She was in her sixties, Lord Byron in his twenties, when they corresponded.

Byron would practice boxing in the courtyard of the Albany, wearing a thick flannel jacket and fur-lined pelisse (presumably to lose weight). At times he would thrust a dagger through his bed hangings, for God knows what nightmarish reasons. Lady Caroline Lamb pursued him to his rooms at the Albany, and once wrote “Remember me” in his copy of William Beckford’s *Vathek*. This was an allusion to Turkish and Greek sexual practices that Byron had told her about, and a threat, since sodomy was then severely punished. Lewis may have introduced Byron to the Albany.

“Pestilently prolix,” Byron called Lewis, and “Apollo’s Sexton.” Lewis once visited the Duchess of York’s Oakland estate, and cried because the Duchess said something kind to him. “Never mind,” said a friend, “she doesn’t mean it.”
The speaker also talked about dogs in Austen and Byron — the small size of Lady Bertram’s lap-warming pug in *Mansfield Park*, compared with Byron’s large Newfoundland (a Newfoundland rescued Napoleon in 1813). The depiction of the pug is a critique of sentimentality: how people preferred to indulge in feeling for their lap dogs rather than slaves in Jamaica. The link of slaves, dogs and sentimentality typified Lewis, and Jane Austen perhaps echoed this in *MP*. Lewis visited the Villa Diodati, where he talked of his then recent visit to Jamaica. He quarreled with Madame de Stael about sugar cane and the necessity of the trade.

In 1804 Henry Austen had his bank office in the Albany’s courtyard. It’s not known if Jane Austen visited, though she did before he moved in, bringing her manuscript of *Northanger Abbey*. In 1811 she came to London to correct proofs of *S & S*, and read the manuscript of *MP* to Henry as they traveled in the post chaise. Henry Austen attended the ball for the Duke of Wellington at Burlington House in 1814, where Byron was dressed as a monk.

It was Lady Melbourne who arranged for the newly married Byron and Annabella to have as their matrimonial home the Duchess of Devonshire’s house in Piccadilly. Annabella told Lady Melbourne that Byron “desired space,” and he gave up the apartments at Albany House to move into Devonshire House, which he could ill afford. This was where Georgiana used to gamble, and Byron inherited her financial woes, and lived to see bailiffs in his house.

In case I haven’t made myself abundantly clear, Jonathan Gross’s speech was excellent and of extreme value. The man talked fast and every silver word fleeting by was of urgent interest. I think some in the audience had trouble hearing him, but I sat in the first row, and was all ears — and scribbled as fast as I could!

The second speaker, Peter Graham, spoke on “A Tale of two Abbeys: Austen, Byron, and Ambiguities of the Gothic.” He is Professor of English at Virginia Tech and Director of International Relations for the Messolonghi Byron Research Center in Greece. His titles include *Byron’s Bulldog, Lord Byron and Regency England*, and the recently published *Jane Austen & Charles Darwin, Naturalists and Novelists*.

It was one of his first sentences, spoken with heartfelt truth, that lingered in everyone’s mind at the conference, and seemed to provide its overall theme: Graham very simply said that he was originally attracted to Byron and Austen because they were “the two great romantic writers with a sense of humor.” He compared *Northanger Abbey* with Norman Abbey, of *Don Juan*, which rather resembled Byron’s own Newstead Abbey. Gothic backdrops in horror tales began with *Castle of Otranto*. After giving a précis of *Northanger Abbey*, for the Byronists, he did the same for *Don Juan* for the Austenians. Readings from *NA* and *DJ* were made by different audience members. *Don Juan’s* ghost story in Canto 16 is a hybrid, a civilized comedy of manners plus a Gothic tale, satirized, something Austen also did. *Don Juan*, restless on retiring, stimulated by several English women, paces the hall, and has a supernatual visitation from a monk. The ladies staying at the hall are Lady Fitz-Fulke, Aurora Raby, and Adeline. On a second visitation it turns out to be Lady Fitz-Fulke in the cowl, and there’s only one way this nocturnal visitation could end.

In the morning both the lady and DJ are exhausted — a very different ending from the bourgeois
marriage of NA. Austen and Byron were uniquely equipped to explore and expose ambiguities of the Gothic. Asked for a modern novelist who might be considered a Byronic/Austenian heir, Graham spoke of Roddy Doyle, author of Paddy Clark Ha Ha Ha, and the Perryton Trilogy, as he focuses on domestic milieu, and is unsentimental and funny. His later story, The Great Ortiz, provides a contrast showing Dublin 20 years after his earlier work, with its influx of immigrants. I can’t say I share Graham’s taste for Doyle, but people come to Austen and Byron from all sorts of different directions and that’s what makes it interesting!

We then went up to the Refectory for lunch, and my own personal great moment of the day came when Professor Rachel Brownstein came up to me and said that my books were the best written of any of the sequels; that I got the tone and style right and was a very good writer! She then took me by the hand and introduced me to a television producer. I was quite awed, since it is really the other way around and Brownstein is the one for me to admire!

The next speaker was Marcia Folsom, Chair of Humanities and writing at Wheelock College, who has edited Approaches to Teaching Austen’s Pride and Prejudice and Approaches to Teaching Austen’s Emma, as well as the collection By Women: An Anthology of Literature. She spoke on “Secret Friends of the Author: Austen in Class and Out.” Her talk was only scheduled for half an hour as was that of Rachel Brownstein who succeeded her.

Folsom discussed Austen’s reading of Lord Byron, and Austen’s own readers. In 1930 Catherine Mansfield (?) made the point that every reader cherishes the thought that they are the secret friend of Austen, and they tend to express anger at other readers. Folsom recounted the opinions of Brian Southam, Dierdre Lynch and Claudia Johnson on this subject. D.H. Lawrence thought Austen was a thoroughly mean and nasty lady “in the English way.” Johnson said that Henry James couldn’t stand that Austen was loved by the undiscriminating, that she was “everybody’s dear Jane.” Folsom quoted a recent online diatribe, “Jane Austen Must Die,” and noted that Harding pointed out that Austen was loved by the very people she would have hated. In his Jane Austen and the Romantic Poets (2004) he theorizes that the greater depth of her last three novels was the result of her reading Scott, Coleridge, and Keats. The Giaour represents the wretchedness felt by Benwick, and this Austen deplored. It was Mary Waldron who pointed out that ironically it is Anne’s loss that makes her most tragically like the figure in the Giaour, herself. Some of the quotes Anne uses about autumn are Byron’s. Like the Giaour, Anne expects her sadness to be permanent. This was an elegant talk.

Rachel Brownstein, Professor of English at Brooklyn College and the Graduate Center, CUNY, specializes in 18th and 19th century English literature, Women’s Studies and biography. She is famously the author of Becoming a Heroine: Reading about Women in Novels, and Tragic Muse: Rachel of the Comedie-Francaise. Her talk was entitled “Fans & Fiction.” She began by citing Auden’s 1937 Letter to Lord Byron, taken from his Letters From Iceland, in which he argued whether he would choose to write to Byron or to Austen. Auden’s view on Austen was that she was a proto-Marxist, and Brownstein quoted his famous line about being shocked by her, the English spinster of the middle class writing about brass. He had an easier relation to Byron and wondered if they would have been drawn perversely toward one another. Brownstein’s paper on Romanticism, for JASNA in 1990, was about the intersections of Byron’s and Austen’s lives. Lord Portsmouth had been a student of George Austen, and later, the celebrated poet cut a figure when he gave away the bride Miss Hanson to Lord Portsmouth (this is described in Austen’s letters). Miss Hanson had been Byron’s mistress and it was said he promised to make her a lady — which he did by marrying her to Portsmouth. Woolf, parenthetically, speculated on whether Byron had “married” his sister. Brownstein called Austen and Byron “bookends that bracket an era.” She also discussed the transformation of Austen in modern movies; how her heroines are now seen as skewering the patriarchy. Byron was the first in a line of Byron impressionists; Emma and the Legend of JA by Lionel Trilling, makes people think they can play the roles themselves. To Austen and Byron, life is a choice of language; thou shalt believe in Milton and Pope, said Byron. Austen determined the form of sentences for the English novel for generations, as did Johnson. She may have been buoyed by success at the end of her life, but her real buoyancy was in her practice as the perfect mistress of the art of fiction. It seems wrong to remember Austen and Byron, but to leave the words out.
Following the talks, the famous actress Kathleen Chalfant (Tony Award winner for “Wit,” as well as star of a long string of Broadway and West End plays — she’s the one who narrated my playlet, “The Courtship of Mrs. Elton,” when JASNA-NY did it last October) and Erik Jensen, who also has a long stage career and wrote the play “The Exonerated” with his wife, read respectively as Jane Austen and Byron. What roles! Chalfant dazzled with a phenomenal reading of the Lady Catherine/Elizabeth Bennet encounter, flicking back and forth between the parts and bringing both to absolutely mesmerizing life, in a way I’d not seen before: it was beyond thrilling! This would have been an absolutely impossible act to follow for any actor, and despite Elsa’s strictures, Mr. Jensen was unfortunately hounded by an audience member’s cell phone (“Canto IV...with Verizon,” he dryly commented), but he did an extremely able and beautiful Byronian line readings just the same.

I know I waited home on as high-wrought an air of perfumed musings as ever Anne sported with along the streets of Bath. Was it worth coming all the way from California to New York for this conference? A thousand times yes; it was “perfect, in being only too short.”

Call for Nominations

Every two years, members of the Jane Austen Society of North America-Southwest Region elect officers to its governing board. The board meets four times a year to plan regional events and conduct JASNA-related business. If you would like to run for any position listed below, please send by July 21, 2008, a two-sentence description of yourself to Jaye Scholl, chairman of the nominating committee, via email: jayescholl@aol.com, or by regular mail. Her address is 372 Brockmont Drive, Glendale, CA 91202.

A list of nominees will be posted on the JASNA-SW website on August 1, 2008, at www.jasnaws.org. Once the slate has been posted, please vote by downloading the ballot and sending it to Jaye at the above address by September 1, 2008. If you do not have access to a computer or would like to receive a ballot by mail, or if you have any questions, please contact Jaye at the above email address or by telephone: 818.241.6169.

Officers to be elected:
Regional Coordinator
Secretary
Program Directors (2 people)
Treasurer
Website Master
Membership Director
Publicity Director
Newsletter Production (2 people)
Electronic Communications
Education Outreach Director

Thank you,
Nominating committee members Jana Bickel, Terry Ryan and Jaye Scholl
Co-President’s Message

Reserve the date and place: the Winter Meeting will be held on December 13, 2008 at the Los Angeles Athletic Club. Please put the date on your calendar now; further information will be coming soon.

The JASNA-SW email listserv is now up and running. A welcome message and the July reading group calendar were sent out on June 24. If you did not receive the email, but would like to be on the mailing list, contact Jana Bickel at janasue2001@yahoo.com.

Board elections will be held this summer. Information about the election will be sent via email, be posted on the JASNA-SW web page www.jasnaw.org and will be sent on paper to members without email.

We are happy to announce the Royal Oak Society has asked JASNA-SW to co-sponsor a joint event with a speaker on Regency Interiors in October at the UCLA Faculty Center. JASNA and JASNA-SW members may register for the same fee as Royal Oak Society members. See the announcement elsewhere in this Newsletter for more details.

Finally, we wish to welcome the Long Beach Reading Group to our family. This is just more evidence of our continued passion for all things Jane. Enjoy the summer Janeites!

JASNA-SW
Co-Presidents and Co-Coordinators
Claire Bellanti    Mimi Dudley

Come Meet
Laurie Viera Rigler...

Laurie will read and sign her best-selling novel, *Confessions of a Jane Austen Addict*, which is now celebrating its paperback publication.

Place and time:
Friday, July 18, 7:00 PM
Vroman’s Bookstore
695 E. Colorado Blvd
Pasadena, CA 91101
626.449.5320
Book Reviews

The Rules of Gentility by Janet Mullany
Reviewed by Natasha Zwick

The quotation on the cover of this book claims that its author is “clearly the witty, secret love child of Jane Austen and Lord Byron.” An intriguing premise, and an accurate one. Our heroine, Miss Philomena Wellesley-Clegg, considers the “pursuit[s] of . . . bonnets and [of] husband[s] fairly alike,” and the task of the book is to document her pursuing both, and potential suitors pursuing her. These pursuits are made more interesting with quasi-diary entries of both our heroine and the reader’s first choice of hero, Inigo Linsley, who, though he has a shameful past, may offer her the best future.

The other choices, which include a rather dull childhood friend, a man so interested in bonnets—and in Inigo—that the reader is immediately concerned about his desire to perform with Philomena, and a man (like Diana Birchall’s eldest Darcy son) more interested in horses and dogs than in real romance.

Our heroine is likeable, bright, and passionate, like Austen heroines before her, but her obsession with the bulge in Inigo’s breeches and the bonnets she can design—after all, “every woman knows [that] a new bonnet is the best diversion of all”—make her more Lydia, than Jane, Bennet. It turns out that Mullany was inspired by Lydia to create Philomena, so this is a new twist. We’re rooting for the virginal girl who gets cornered in the water closet on multiple occasions—and likes it.

Even her family resembles the Bennets in the sense that her mother rambles on without punctuation or pauses for breath, and her father can be counted to do what’s right by her—after making a few errors in judgment. A primary suitor is troubled that her family is linked to trade, while his is part of the ton. Twin sisters, though annoying, offer insight into Philomena’s life, especially on the honeymoon, when the married pair keep “disappearing.”

Prior to that happy time, one Byron may address in his works, but Austen certainly does not, our heroine also seems to be witness to several illicit liaisons—why aren’t these people more cautious with their stays?—some accidentally, and some, when she has more experience, deliberately. Nineteen-year-old Philomena goes where Lizzy Bennet never would have gone, but her doing so offers the reader some sexy fun.

In an intriguing scene with a statue, for instance, Philomena has been drafted by her family artistically to mask a revealed breast, whereupon Inigo encounters her and tries to help—by breaking it. On their errand to replace the destroyed statue, Philomena feels the muscular thigh of a male statue in the shop, and Inigo is so aroused he needs to stand behind something until the matter subsides. There are many such titillating scenes in this text, and while Austen suggests the sexual tension between our matched pairs in a subtle manner, Mullany turns to Byron for more overt discussion of sex, and everything that leads to, and results from, sexual desire. Juxtaposing Philomena’s innocence with the wildness of everyone from local prostitutes and their pimps to Inigo’s aging mother, creates irresistible humor; the young woman, aware that she’s thinking thoughts society says she shouldn’t yet—donates money to charity every time she ponders a penis.

I must admit, for a few chapters, I was so engrossed in the tale I forgot to take notes for the review, which is probably just as well for those of my readers who resist Byronesque tales, and I will state clearly here that though the text consists of a lot of bonnets and virgins fiddling around in men’s pockets, I think Austen would like it—even if she had to read it under the covers with Cassandra.

The Lost Memoirs of Jane Austen by Syrie James
Reviewed by Natasha Zwick

This new book offers two premises similar to what fans of Jane have seen recently: first, it parallels Pride and Prejudice; the supposed missing sex scenes from Austen’s novels, in that it claims to be writing of Jane’s that has only recently come to scholarly attention. Second, it parallels Becoming Jane, the movie starring James McAvoy and Anne Hathaway in that it offers the missing “love story of Jane’s own life, explaining how she could come to know passion like that which she describes in her works.
James does a good job recapturing Austen’s voice. At one moment, in particular, following a formal
description of a view Jane obviously would have scorned, James’ Jane responds, “But to these
naysayers, I say pshaw.” The timing and the unexpected scorn of the line are flawless; James has
beautifully captured the spunk we assume Jane had and simultaneously reflected Jane’s happiness
in the moment and made us laugh. Jane blushes a lot in this memoir, and she is irritated with her
tendency to crimson. (I have the same tendency and the same irritation, so I liked this on a
personal level, but it also seemed to fit the character James creates).

James also successfully tugs on our heartstrings for Jane. As we did when a similar tale unfolded on
the silver screen, we cry again for Jane and for the injustice that her lack of fortune forced her to let
the man she loved go—to seek richer women. What, we imagine, might her happiness have been,
had she had more money?

On the other hand, what would all of our lives have been if she had? Notably poorer if the
demands of marriage had taken her from her writing (though the lover here, a fictional Mr.
Ashford, actually facilitates the publication of Sense and Sensibility and encourages Austen’s
writing, so maybe she could have had both?). Long periods of Mr. Ashford’s absence enable Jane
to focus on her work and to revise regularly—so much so that James hints at other memoirs, which
will emerge soon. A married woman would likely have had little time for such record keeping.

That being said, if Jane had been given this manuscript, she might have made some changes. The
footnotes, for instance, are a bit too basic for a reader quite familiar with Jane’s work. Much of the
fun in reading the “sequels” is figuring out the connections, here, for instance, that Edward and his
wife are models for the evil Dashwood couple, or that there will someday be a similar scene in
Northanger Abbey to what we’re reading now. I know! I don’t need a footnote to tell me what is
already obvious because I have read Austen’s work. That said, perhaps for a reader new to Austen,
these footnotes are helpful rather than patronizing, and for all levels of readers, the family tree at
the beginning is extremely useful in following which brother is doing what and whose kids are who.
Many of our heroines’ names were names of Jane’s nieces and nephews (maybe that’s just a result
of the seeming scarcity of British names, but I’ll imagine otherwise).

Another problem results from a comment Jane supposedly makes to her friend Alethea that, with
the exception of the model for Mr. Collins, she doesn’t use people in her own world as models for
people in her fiction. But throughout the text the reader naturally connects the characters we are
meeting to the characters in the novels (particularly Sense and Sensibility and Pride and Prejudice,
which have the most parallels here), and James seems to support that linking. This inconsistency
troubled me because it suggests Jane was unaware that she used people she knew to create people
we would all come to know, though she demonstrates complete awareness of such in a few choice
moments. Was the comment just to reassure her friend? In the scene in Lyme, a great rescue
occurs just where, as James reminds us in a footnote, Louisa Musgrove fell. But if Jane came up
with this idea from her own life experience, that would mean she had taken a moment that had
deep romantic significance to her and twisted it into a fake romance in Persuasion—Louisa is
irresponsible, and the feelings Anne observes are not real love. Why would Jane do that to her own
precious encounter? Worse, why would she tell Alethea she wouldn’t do that?

There are many very fun connections in this “missing text.” There is much Mrs. Bennet in Mrs.
Austen, and parallels between Jane and Elizabeth and Cassandra and Jane. At the same time, it is
tempting to read the three women as versions of the Dashwood ladies, particularly after the death of
the Reverend George Austen, when the Austen women are left to the mercy of their brothers.
Jane’s lover, whose estate’s description and name are too close to Pemberley to be accidental, and
who, like Darcy, has a little sister who plays the pianoforte very well, also functions as an Edward
Ferrars, and even a Willoughby model. One of Jane’s tales employs a melding of the Jane Eyre attac
with the general Northanger Abbey creepiness and A Winter’s Tale statue (was that combination
deliberate?)—and she tells it on a picnic Mr. Ashford arranges, which suggests a parallel to Mr.
Knightley in Emma. Jane meets a round clergyman who welcomes them to his “humble abode”
before boasting of a large piece of furniture and an attentive neighbor with the initials (Lady) CD.
Some of these clues are just too easy, but others pose a challenge, and either way, as long as there
was no footnote to ruin it, this reader enjoyed James’ linking of a thorough knowledge of Austen’s canon with Austen’s life.

One of the best moments of this work comes shortly after Jane meets the wealthy man whose presence makes her heart race. Mr. Ashford asks Jane to assess her worth based on how many people would miss her if she were gone. The reader appreciates the meaningful set-up: though Mr. Ashford probably means Jane’s family and friends, we, the people who miss Jane, are innumerable, and the real hero is the man who recognizes value of character, rather than value of inheritance. If only that were enough to live on, Jane Austen might have lived a very different life—and so would might her faithful readers.

*Mrs. Darcy’s Dilemma* by Diana Birchall
*Reviewed by Natasha Zwick*

When I first heard that Diana’s book was coming to Barnes and Noble, I was very excited—not only for her, but also for all of us. Though I had heard of the book for years, the expensive hardcover editions never quite found their way to my library, and I was left only to imagine what story remained untold to me.

So last week I gleefully found my copy at my local B&N. I started Diana’s book immediately, hoping I’d like it. By the end of chapter one, I was so engrossed I had temporarily forgotten that it was Diana’s book! Several parts of the story hooked me right away: the warm sibling bond between Henry and Jane (reminds me of my relationship with my own dear brother), the potential makings of Chloe (the “good” Wickham daughter who manages to develop moral character despite all odds), the doughty Kitty (who doesn’t fare so well, but whose gardener husband I found endearing), and the horribly bitchy “new” Lydia, Miss Wickham, who wants to trap Fitzwilliam, the eldest Darcy boy.

Diana is a master of dialogue. So vivid and so realistic, it immediately endeared me to Chloe and distanced me from Bettina. Even an occasional surprising phrase that may have more meaning that Diana intended—“their ability to give tongue”—that stopped me in my tracks, only did so momentarily. I soon recognized the depth of cleverness here: the Wickham sister we like is in a position similar to Elizabeth’s before Darcy saves her sister’s, and therefore her own, reputation. The Darcy son most like his father is the one who tries to save the shameful product of the Wickham union from self-immolation, just as Darcy and the Gardiners did years before for her ancestors. The parallels don’t end there. The powerful Elizabeth/Lady Catherine exchange when Lady Catherine suspects an alliance between Lizzy and Darcy is revived here in the Collins’ new home—the same place it occurred a generation earlier. Chloe, like her aunt Elizabeth, fights back, politely, and we admire her for it. This pride also keys us in—in case we were a bit slow before—to her appropriateness for Henry, just as Elizabeth’s zest proves her worthy of Darcy. And Mr. Collins once again gets to offend us, this time via Lady Catherine, with the suggestion that a heroine would be better off had her shamed relative died—Bettina standing in for her mother this time.

In addition to all the plot twists and clever parallels, Diana also has some fun in brief mentions. Kitty’s husband is a real gardener, or at least likes gardening. If we are to read the Gardiners as people who act in concert with nature, then this man, too, is morally wise. He calls his deity “the great Gardener;” thus Diana reminds us that our characters who enjoy the outdoors are the ones who understand what really matters. She also nicely gets revenge on Caroline Bingley; Caroline gets to marry at last, but her new surname is Babcock. Better to stay single, one might argue.

The only really sad moment in this story is Mr. Bennet’s passing, but even this moment, which brought me to tears, is done gently and calmly, to give as little pain as possible to all. I really think we could have missed this part (I didn’t want to see this!), but the plot wouldn’t work as well without Longbourne falling victim to the Collins, so I guess I can forgive Diana this one choice.

Especially because it’s so soon followed by Darcy’s laugh out loud comment to his son, about to “inherit” the Wickham family via his selected wife, that since Darcy has been burdened “this five an twenty years” by the Wickhams, he “shall be quite glad to pass them on to” his son. Since, as Elizabeth declares, “a good wife, you know, makes a good husband,” all Henry’s efforts—and all Darcy’s—are well worth their trouble.
Royal Oak Lecture

In October, the Royal Oak Foundation (the American affiliate of the National Trust for England, Wales and Northern Ireland) and JASNA-SW will be co-sponsoring a lecture by Lisa White, an English decorative arts scholar and curator. Lady White is a wonderful speaker who is adept at bringing the past to life through her study of historic houses and furnishings.

You must sign up through the Royal Oak website: www.royal-oak.org. Watch for registration information!

“All I Want is a Comfortable Home”: Jane Austen and the Regency Interior
Lisa White, Director of the Attingham Summer School
Monday, October 20, 2008
7:00 pm (reception at 6:30 pm)
UCLA Faculty Center
480 Charles E. Young Drive East

$25 Royal Oak and JASNA members
$35 non-members

The New Long Beach Reading Group

On Saturday, May 3 at 11 am, our Long Beach (Area) Reading Group had its first meeting — and what a wonderful occasion it was! I thought I’d let you all know how it went.

There were eight of us in attendance — seven ladies and one gentleman. We actually were reminded of The Jane Austen Book Club! Once we’d taken care of “business,” we shared how we came to appreciate Jane Austen and her legacy and, inevitably, also found ourselves commenting on various film and TV versions. Getting to know each other while enjoying tea sandwiches and scones at Margot’s home, we quickly agreed to start our literary journey with Pride and Prejudice. For the time being, we’ll be meeting every 4-6 weeks, on Saturdays at 11 am.

Attached is a photo I took at our first meeting. From left to right: Sherwood Smith, Margot Scheibe, Joan Hansen, Barbara Crane, Tanya Shinen, Jameson Stalanthas Yu, and Alice Villaseñor.

Warmest regards, Gerda Kilgore
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

The San Diego Reading Group
Contact Leila Dooley at 760.726.7815 • leila@ntimes.net or leila1@peoplepc.com

The San Fernando Valley Reading Group
Contact Gina Gualtieri at 818.788.4383 • gmgualtieri@yahoo.com

The Santa Monica Reading Group
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Contact Clara Browda at 310.278.8739
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310.394.2196
Email: birchalls@aol.com

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