Jane Austen Society of North America, Southwest Region

July 2019 Newsletter

'It's All Relative' Huntington Event Recap

Ted Scheinman and Deborah Knuth Klenck

Story by Karen Rueda, with photography by Deirdre Flanagan

More than 180 members and guests attended "It's All Relative: Relationships in Austen" on June 1 at The Huntington Library, Art Collections and Botanical Gardens, making this one of the largest turnouts ever for a JASNA Southwest regional meeting!

The opening presentation by Austen scholar Deborah Knuth Klenck, a professor of English at Colgate University, and her son, Ted Scheinman, author of *Camp Austen: My Life as an Accidental Jane Austen Superfan*, discussed "Those Who Chose to Be Idle Certainly Might: Mothers as Teachers in Jane Austen."

Knuth Klenck jokingly remarked that a better title might have been "Maria

Bertram's Agreement," referring to the *Mansfield Park* character who, when told by her aunt that there was a great deal more for her to learn, replied, "Yes, I know there is, till I am seventeen." Such muddled thinking, Knuth Klenck said, marked most conversations in Austen's works about what girls, in particular, should know as part of their preparation for adult life and the eventual acceptance of a proposal of marriage. It seems that education ended at marriage.

Scheinman charmed the audience with his amusing narrative rendition of Lady Catherine de Bourgh. This grand lady, noted his mother, was quite clear on what everybody else's daughters needed to know, while her own daughter was exempted from learning of any kind. In short, mothers in Austen's novels "did not have time for such cares" as the education of their daughters.

Austen's heroines were often "intellectual orphans, at least in regard to their mothers," Scheinman said. He noted that the heroines must undertake a kind of autodidacticism, seeking and sometimes finding temporary surrogate mothers in figures like Lady Russell and Mrs. Allen or else among books." For Austen, books were a sort of surrogate child; she referred to *Pride and Prejudice* as "my own darling child."

In *Mansfield Park*, Fanny becomes a surrogate for her sister Susan by taking an active interest in her education. Fanny had "longed to give her a share of her own first pleasure and inspire a taste for the biography and poetry which she delighted in herself" and, under her tutelage, Susan "became a most attentive, profitable, and thankful pupil." A happy ending, Scheinman said, as the talk came to a close.

The mother-son duo, were themselves, an ideal exemplar of the importance of mothers as teachers in Austen's works.

Lynn Batten

UCLA Professor Emeritus Charles Lynn Batten charmed and enlightened guests with his discussion of "Failed Marital Relationships: Causes and Solutions in Jane Austen's Novels."

He began by informing the audience of two prejudices that inform his reading of Austen. "Jane Austen emphatically does not write what we nowadays dismiss as chick lit," he said. He believes Austen wrote equally for male and female audiences and addressed concerns for both. Batten said she offers wise advice to both men and women concerning their choice of a suitable mate, often the most important choice they make in life.

He explained how Austen warns women to stay away from the "bad boys," like her male rakes Wickham, Willoughby and William Walter Elliot, and that she similarly warns her male readers to stay away from the female rakes like Lady Susan and Lucy Steele.

Although Austen wrote in the Romantic Age, Batten added that she wrote like 18th century neoclassical authors who held that the "business of the novelist is not to examine the particular individual the author knew but the species of individual that the character represents." To illustrate this point, he challenged the audience to make a list of Austen's characters and to check them off as each is encountered in real life. He added that it is through her expert characterization that Austen educates her readers.

Austen's novels, he asserted with some humor, suggest that, in aiming at a

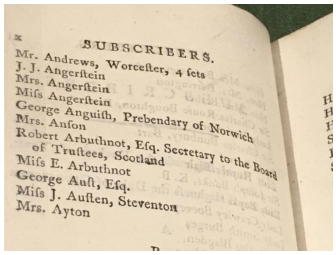
successful marital relationship, all her characters conduct two kinds of calculations: probability assessment and cost/benefit analysis. One must first ask: What is the probability of finding a more suitable mate than the one currently being considered? And then consider if marrying a less than suitable partner is better or worse than remaining without any mate at all? He counseled the audience to "think of the plight of the spinster, Miss Bates, against the plight of, Charlotte Collins, being married to a fool."

Austen's novels explore remedies to deal with less than suitable marriages, he said with a mischievous smile. Without the option of divorce, her characters developed "coping mechanisms." Charlotte Collins, for instance, "at times simply pretended not to hear what she didn't want to hear" and "best of all, she chose a sitting room on the far side of the parsonage where she was least likely to encounter her husband. In effect, she found a way to hide from her husband in her own house."

Throughout the day, members and guests were able to peruse specially chosen selections from The Huntington's extensive archival collection.

Author Ted Scheinman signed numerous copies of his book *Camp Austen: My Life as an Accidental Jane Austen Superfan*.

Among the archives on display during the event were this Cruikshank illustration of a Regency ball scene, and this fan that included reminders of the melodies of numerous popular dances.



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Miss J. Austen of Steventon is listed among the subscribers in this edition of Fanny Burney's *Camilla; or, a Picture of Youth*, from The Huntington's collection of Austen-related materials.

Karla Nielsen, curator of literary collections at The Huntington, spoke to the group about the selection of archival treasures assembled especially for JASNA Southwest's spring 2019 meeting.

In addition to scones and clotted cream, tea breads and other delicacies for breakfast, attendees enjoyed tea sandwiches and other savories and treats during the buffet lunch.

Lively Q&A sessions -- with both thought-provoking and humorous questions and responses -- followed each presentation. Attendees toured the gardens, library highlights and art collections on their own and in docent-led special tours after the event.

Docent-led tours included a visit to the Chinese Garden, led by The Huntington's incomparable Botanical Gardens Director James Folsom; a tour of the impressive Bonsai collection, one of the largest in the U.S., led by Ted Matson, including the trees dedicated to the memory of JASNA member William James; and a tour of the art collections (right), led by Jean Uffelman, including paintings Austen herself would have seen at an 1813 exhibition in London.

Attendees also had the chance to visit the bench JASNA Southwest and The Huntington dedicated to Austen in 2017.

Memorial Dedication to Jaye Scholl Bohlen

The meeting was dedicated to the memory of longtime JASNA Southwest board member Jaye Scholl Bohlen, who passed away unexpectedly in May after planning this wonderful event.

May she rest in peace.

'Jane Austen Meets Mary Shelley'

Saturday, September 14

Chapman University

Save the date for our fall meeting at Chapman University with the theme "Jane Austen Meets Mary Shelley" on Saturday, September 14.

The full-day event will include a light continental breakfast and a boxed lunch, and we will have three dynamic speakers: UCLA Distinguished Professor Anne Mellor; who has written extensively about Mary Shelley as well as Jane Austen; author and Professor John Kessel of North Carolina State University, whose works include a mashup of *Frankenstein* and *Pride and Prejudice*; and author Victoria Shorr, whose latest book explores three women -- Jane Austen, Mary Shelley and Joan of Arc -- as they face their greatest challenges.

The day's full schedule will be announced when registration opens toward the end of this month. Watch out for the email announcement!

John Kessel

John Kessel is the author of the novels *Pride and Prometheus*, *The Moon and the Other*, *Good News from Outer Space*, *Corrupting Dr. Nice* and, in collaboration with James Patrick Kelly, *Freedom Beach*. His short story collections are *Meeting in Infinity* (a *New York Times* Notable Book), *The Pure Product* and *The Baum Plan for Financial Independence and Other Stories*.

Kessel's stories have twice received the Nebula Award given by the Science Fiction and Fantasy

Anne K. Mellor

Anne K. Mellor is a Distinguished Professor of English and Women's Studies at UCLA and the author of books on Mary Shelley, Romantic women writers (including Jane Austen), William Blake and many other British Romantic poets.

Her book *Mothers of the Nation -- Women's Political Writing in England, 1780-1830* argues that women writers were instrumental in shaping public opinion during the Romantic era. She has authored numerous books, including *Mary Shelley: Her Fiction,*

Victoria Shorr

Victoria Shorr's first novel, *Backlands*, was named one of Booklist's top 10 first novels of 2015.

She co-founded the Archer School for Girls, and the Pine Ridge Girls' School in South Dakota, the first independent, culturally based, college-prep school for girls on a Native reservation in America.

Her most recent book, *Midnight: Three Women at the Hour of Reckoning*, was published in March 2019 and focuses on three women as they face their greatest challenge -- a

Writers of America, in addition to the Theodore Sturgeon Memorial Award, the Locus Poll and the James Tiptree Jr. Award.

In 2009, *Pride and Prometheus* received both the Nebula Award and the Shirley Jackson Award. In the novel, Mary Bennet falls for the enigmatic Victor Frankenstein and befriends his Creature, fusing Mary Shelley's gothic horror and Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.

Kessel holds a BA in Physics and English and a PhD in American Literature. He helped found and served as the first director of the MFA program in creative writing at North Carolina State University, where he has taught since 1982. He began teaching a survey course on science fiction that year and has taught *Frankenstein* as the first book in that course for most of that time.

He lives and works in Raleigh, N.C., with his wife, author Therese Anne Fowler.

Her Life, Her Monsters and *Romanticism and Gender*. She edited the first collection of feminist essays on *Romantic writing, Romanticism and Feminism* and is the co-editor of an anthology of canon-transforming Romantic writing, *British Literature 1780-1830*, as well as of *The Other Mary Shelley* and *Passionate Encounters in a Time of Sensibility*.

Her numerous awards and fellowships include the Keats-Shelley Association Distinguished Scholar Award, the UCLA Distinguished Teaching Award, two Guggenheim Fellowships and three National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Summer Seminar for College Teachers directorships.

She earned her BA summa cum laude from Brown University and her MA and PhD in English and Comparative Literature from Columbia University.

homeless Jane Austen, Joan of Arc at the stake and Mary Shelley in Italy as she contemplates a potential future without her husband.

Shorr lives in New York and California. She earned her bachelor's degree from Wellesley College.

A review of her new book:

"[A] gripping, imaginative foray into the lives of Austen, Shelley, and Joan of Arc, as each faced a life-altering event. This book gives us the compelling stories we've always wished they'd recorded: Austen accepting an eligible man's marriage proposal, only to withdraw it; Shelley writing Frankenstein as her life careened out of control; and Joan of Arc's thoughts, in and beyond the flames."
Devoney Looser, Foundation Professor of English at Arizona State University and author of *The Making of Jane Austen*

Filming for *Sanditon* Well Underway

The new ITV mini-series of *Sanditon*, written by Andrew Davies (of 1995 *Pride and Prejudice* adaptation fame) based on Austen's incomplete final novel, is currently being filmed in England and is expected to air in 2020.

Davies said: "Jane Austen managed to write only a fragment of her last novel before she died -- but what a fragment! *Sanditon* tells the story of the transformation of a sleepy fishing village into a fashionable seaside resort, with a spirited young heroine, a couple of entrepreneurial brothers, some dodgy financial dealings, a West Indian heiress and quite a bit of nude bathing. It's been a privilege and a thrill for me to develop *Sanditon* into a TV drama for a modern audience."

The above scene was filmed on Brean Beach at Burnham-on-Sea in Somerset in June.

Reading/Game Groups

Saturday, July 13
North Orange County Reading Group
Teri Kialia Barela will lead the group on a special day out to the L.A. Fabric District to select Regency materials.
The group will also begin its discussion of *Mansfield Park* by Jane Austen with an online discussion of part one in July.
For more information, contact Melissa Buell or visit the group's Facebook page.

Saturday, July 20, 11 a.m.-1 p.m.
Ventura County Reading Group
Pride and Prometheus by John Kessel
Location: E.P. Foster Library, 651 E. Main Street, Ventura
For more information, contact Priscilla Diamond.

Saturday, July 20, 11:30 a.m.-2 p.m.
San Gabriel Valley Reading Group
Jane Austen's Transatlantic Sister: The Life and Letters of Fanny Palmer Austen by Sheila Johnson Kindred
Location: Mt. San Antonio Gardens meeting room, Claremont
Please bring an item for the buffet.

For more information, contact Kelly Duir.

Sunday, July 21, 12:30-3:30 p.m.
Orange County Reading Group
Sisters of Fortune: America's Caton Sisters at Home and Abroad by Jehanne Wake
For more information, contact Maryann Pelensky.

Sunday, July 21
San Fernando Valley Reading Group
Barchester Towers by Anthony Trollope
For more information, contact Cheryl Cole.

Wednesday, July 24
Pasadena Area Reading Group
How Reading Changed My Life by Anna Quindlen
This group is at capacity and cannot accept new members. Current members may contact Susan Ridgeway for more information.

Wednesday, August 7, 6:30 p.m.
Janeites Reading Trollope
The Small House at Allington by Anthony Trollope
For more information, contact Lora Walker.

Sunday, August 11, 1 p.m.
Riverside Reading Group
The Real Jane Austen: A Life in Small Things by Paula Byrne
Pride and Prometheus by John Kessel
For more information, contact Vicki Broach.

Sunday, August 11, 5 p.m.
Santa Monica Reading Group
Summer by Edith Wharton
For more information, contact Kathi Stafford.

Sunday, August 11, 1:30-4 p.m.
West Los Angeles Reading Group
Frankenstein by Mary Shelley
This group is at capacity and cannot accept new members. Current members may contact Clara Browda for more information.

Saturday, August 17, 10 a.m.
North Orange County Reading Group
Mansfield Park by Jane Austen (part two)
Location: Panera Bread in Fullerton
For more information, contact Melissa Buell or visit the group's Facebook page.

Saturday, September 7
Long Beach Reading Group
Frankenstein by Mary Shelley
The Year Without a Summer, 1816 by William Klingaman and Nicholas Klingaman
For more information, contact Sherwood Smith.

Sunday, September 8
Pasadena Area Reading Group
Northanger Abbey by Jane Austen
This group is at capacity and cannot accept new members. Current members may contact Susan Ridgeway for more information.

Saturday, September 21, 10 a.m.
North Orange County Reading Group
Mansfield Park by Jane Austen (part three)
Location: Panera Bread in Fullerton
For more information, contact Melissa Buell or visit the group's Facebook page.

Saturday, September 21, 11 a.m.-1 p.m.
Ventura County Reading Group
Northanger Abbey by Jane Austen
Location: E.P. Foster Library, 651 E. Main Street, Ventura

For more information, contact Priscilla Diamond.

Date TBD
South Bay Reading Group
Pride and Prometheus by John Kessel
For more information, contact Jeanine Holguin.

San Diego Region
Although San Diego is a separate JASNA region, many JASNA Southwest members are interested in San Diego JASNA events and vice versa.
For information on, or to RSVP for, upcoming San Diego JASNA meetings, visit JASNA San Diego's Facebook page.

JANE AUSTEN SOCIETY OF NORTH AMERICA

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