'Jane Austen Meets Mary Shelley' Recap

Nearly 140 members and guests gathered at Chapman University for "Jane Austen Meets Mary Shelley" on September 14. Numerous students from both Chapman University and Azusa Pacific University joined JASNA Southwest members for this event, which featured speakers John Kessel, Anne Mellor and Victoria Shorr.

Following continental breakfast and a white elephant sale, John Kessel launched the day's presentations with his talk "Mary, Jane and Me."

Best known for his science fiction novels, including *Pride and Prometheus* -- a mashup of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Frankenstein* -- and numerous short stories, Kessel served as first director of the MFA program in creative writing at North Carolina State University, where he has taught since 1982. Observing that some people hold a narrow view of the genre, he noted that, for him, science fiction encompasses gender issues and other social concerns.

In describing his idea for *Pride and Prometheus*, he said, "I was unforgivably ignorant about the raft of novels and stories about Mary Bennet that have been written by Austen fans, and of the community of fan-fiction writers who have produced rules for such works." He
described those rules as including creation of a transformative work, being respectful of the material being "borrowed" and having an "HEA" (happily ever after) ending. He defines his work as not simply fan fiction, although he is a fan, but as critical fiction.

He referenced such works of critical fiction as Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (the backstory behind *Jane Eyre* from the perspective of Mr. Rochester's first wife) and John Gardner's *Grendel* (a retelling of *Beowulf* from the protagonist's viewpoint).

The challenge of "mating the disparate tales" of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Frankenstein* in *Pride and Prometheus* made for a fascinating project, he said. While Austen treated her characters with cool distance, irony and dry humor, Shelley's novel is full of humorless "histrionic excess, chases and murders." In Austen, he noted, "There's plenty of psychological distress but, by and large, the most violent thing that happens is an overheard conversation or someone getting caught in the rain. *Frankenstein*'s Creature does not belong in a Regency drawing room. The Bennet sisters do not belong in a gothic 19th century laboratory."

Next, UCLA Emeritus Distinguished Research Professor of English and Women's Studies Anne Mellor spoke on the topic of "Mothering Monsters: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Genetic Engineering." She is the author of books on Mary Shelley, Romantic women writers (including Jane Austen), William Blake and many other British Romantic poets.

Mellor began by pointing out that Mary Shelley and Jane Austen "had the same mother": Mary Wollstonecraft, author of *The Vindication of the Rights of Women*, was Mary Shelley's biological mother and Jane Austen's intellectual mother, according to Mellor. She argued that "Austen was a devout disciple of Mary Wollstonecraft to the extent that she takes characters from Wollstonecraft's writings, she quotes Wollstonecraft word for word but never with quotation marks because a respectable woman, in her day, could no longer openly identify with that radical, feminist, whore, atheist known as Mary Wollstonecraft."

Mellor's discussion primarily focused on Shelley and how she gave birth to *Frankenstein*, describing it as "a myth about a human being giving birth to another through mechanical processes." She added: "This narrative has become the myth of modern science -- the master narrative for the ways in which man's attempts to control and improve the workings of nature can have unintended and even monstrous consequences."

Jokingly, she offered an alternative description of the novel as "the narrative of what happens when a man tries to have a baby without a woman."

Mellor drew attention to the parallels between Mary Shelley's life and the Creature's life in *Frankenstein*. She suggests that for the first time in English literature a novel embodies the pregnancy anxieties of a very young and frequently pregnant woman. She also explained that Shelley read and was well-informed about the latest scientific advancements and experiments of the time, including Erasmus Darwin's theory of "single-sex propagation," in which the woman's role in giving birth is unnecessary.

For Shelley, "bad science" tries to intervene with, change or master nature. In the novel, nature pursues Victor with the very fire and electricity he stole to bring the Creature to life. The novel's violent storms also reflect the climate and extreme weather caused by the volcanic eruption of Tambora and represent a manifestation of mother nature's elemental powers.

For Mellor, the novel suggests that where there is no mother, monsters are created. She cautions against scientists who fail to take ethical responsibility for the predictable and even unintended consequences of their experiments and technological developments that can destroy life as we know it, describing the potential impact of today's CRISPR Cas9 gene-editing technologies.

After a boxed lunch and trivia contest, with prizes of books by the speakers, Victoria Shorr gave a presentation, "The Midnight Moment" based on her book *Midnight: Three Women at the Hour of Reckoning*. Published in March 2019, *Midnight* focuses on three women as they face their greatest challenge -- a homeless Jane Austen, Joan of Arc at the stake and Mary Shelley in Italy as she contemplates a potential future without her husband when he is lost at sea.

Shorr -- whose first novel, *Backlands*, was named one of Booklist's top 10 first novels of 2015 -- co-founded the Archer School for Girls and the Pine Ridge Girls' School in South Dakota, the first independent, culturally based, college-preparatory school for girls on a
Native reservation in America.

She read from the Austen segments of *Midnight*, which focus on Austen's acceptance of a brilliant marriage proposal just when she, her mother and sister most needed the independence her marriage to Harris Bigg-Wither would have brought them -- and the following morning, when she told him she had changed her mind. Shorr said she was drawn not to the witty, clever, superbly in control, intimidating Jane Austen but to the lesser-known Austen as the homeless woman, the unpublished author with no money and nowhere to live. If Austen had accepted the proposal, it would have altered the course of her life, and ours.

Austen would have been mistress of her own home, surrounded by comforts and children, and not dependent on her brothers and their wives -- but perhaps would not have become an author. In this midnight moment, Shorr explained, Austen "would have been forced to stand and gaze into the void and figure out who she was and what she did next."

Read more online on the [JASNA Southwest website](http://www.jasna.org).
and we'll be joined by two dynamic and popular Austen scholars, Janine Barchas and Devoney Looser. We have some special surprises in store for the day as well. You won't want to miss it!

Janine Barchas
Janine Barchas joined the University of Texas at Austin in 2002 after teaching at the University of Auckland in New Zealand for five years. She is the Luann and Larry Temple Centennial Professor in English Literature at UT Austin. She combines book history with literary criticism in both her research and teaching. She has twice been a fellow of the American Council of Learned Societies and has received the Alpha of Texas Award for Distinction in Teaching from the Phi Beta Kappa Society.


Barchas’ latest book project is The Lost Books of Jane Austen, forthcoming from Johns Hopkins University Press this month. It is an investigation into the early reception history of Jane Austen through the lens of her cheapest and most neglected reprintings. Years of book hunting revealed unknown versions of Austen's novels that never made it into academic libraries or official bibliographical records due to their intolerable cheapness. Starting with shilling versions sold at Victorian train stations and book stalls during the 1840s, Barchas democratizes Austen's reception with new data about unrecorded books targeted to working-class readers. She describes her project as "hard-core bibliography meets Antiques Roadshow."

She is also the creator behind "What Jane

Devoney Looser
Devoney Looser (pronounced DEV-oh-nee LOE-sir) is the author of The Making of Jane Austen. She is Foundation Professor of English at Arizona State University and author or editor of seven other books on literature by women. Her recent writing has appeared in The Atlantic, The New York Times, Salon, The TLS and Entertainment Weekly, and she's had the pleasure of talking about Austen on CNN twice.


In 2018, Looser was named a Guggenheim Fellow in English literature, and a National Endowment for the Humanities Public Scholar, in support of her biography of the sister novelists, Jane and Anna Maria Porter. Looser has previously held fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Humanities Center, the American Philosophical Society, the Huntington Library, the Newberry Library and the New York Public Library, among others. In 2012, she led a National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Seminar for College and University Teachers at the University of Missouri on "Jane Austen and her Contemporaries."

She earned her BA from Stanford University and her PhD from the University of Chicago.

Looser, a Minnesota native, traded in her ice skates for roller skates in middle age and has played roller derby under the name Stone Cold Jane Austen.

She's on Facebook and Twitter @devoneylooser & @Making_Jane. She posts patterned-legging selfies and super-serious Janeite content on Instagram at @devoneylooser & @makingjaneausten.

Looser earned her BA from Augsburg College in Minneapolis and her PhD in English from SUNY-Stony Brook, N.Y.

JASNA Southwest Photos and Memorabilia

We're putting together memorabilia to showcase JASNA Southwest's four decades. If you have photographs or other items we could scan/borrow for our display and potential slideshow, please contact our archivist Nancy Gallagher.

Save the Date: February 29, 2020
'Law in the Regency Era'

Our first JASNA Southwest meeting of 2020 will be at the UCLA Faculty Center exploring the topic "Law in the Regency Era." Our speakers at this half-day event will be lawyer and frequent JASNA AGM speaker James Nagle on "Inheritance in Jane Austen's Time" and historian Walter Nelson on "Crime and Punishment in the Regency Era."

Mark your calendars! More details will be shared in our November newsletter.
Young Filmmakers Contest Extended to Nov. 18

It’s not too late to encourage a student you know to enter our 2019 Young Filmmakers Contest for high school, undergraduate and graduate students. The program is designed to encourage study, interpretation of and appreciation for Jane Austen in younger generations.

Films must be five minutes or less and should be adapted from, or inspired by, Jane Austen’s writing or life.

Entry deadline has been extended to November 18, 2019. Our website has Young Filmmakers Contest entry forms and more information.

Emma Release Date Announced
The new feature-film version of *Emma*, with Johnny Flynn (Mr. Knightley) and Anna Taylor-Joy (Emma) (pictured above in a break on set), is scheduled for release on February 21, 2020. The film is directed by Autumn de Wilde with a script by Eleanor Catton. It also stars Bill Nighy as Mr. Woodhouse, Miranda Hart as Miss Bates, Mia Goth as Harriet Smith, Rupert Graves and Gemma Whelan as Mr. and Mrs. Weston, and Callum Turner and Amber Anderson as Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax.
Our JASNA Southwest "I'm a Jane Austen Fan" fans made an appearance at the Jane Austen Festival in Bath in September, thanks to member Marcee Chipman (middle, in blue).

Upcoming Talks and Performances

The University of California, Irvine's Claire Trevor School of the Arts is hosting Reading Frankenstein an intermedia performance about a 21st century artificial life scientist named Mary Shelley, who discovers that one of her experiments is running amok in her laboratory at the same time as the novel Frankenstein is haunting her imagination.

Admission is free, but reservations are required. Performances are at 8 p.m. on Oct. 31, November 1, 2, 7, 8 and 9, with a matinee at 2 p.m. on Nov. 9.

Co-created by Annie Loui, Antoinette LaFarge and Jim Fallon
Directed by Annie Loui
Visual Direction by Antoinette LaFarge

National Theatre Live screening
Frankenstein (with Benedict Cumberbatch and Jonny Lee Miller)
James R. Armstrong Theater, 3330 Civic Center Drive, Torrance
October 26, 2 p.m.

Long Beach Playhouse
**Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley**  
5021 E. Anaheim Street, Long Beach  
November 2-November 30, 2019

**Santa Barbara City College**  
Sense and Sensibility  
Jurkowitz Theater, 900 City Drive, Santa Barbara  
November 13-23, 2019

**The Broad Stage**  
Improv Theater's Jane Austen Unscripted  
1310 11th Street, Santa Monica  
December 21 only (performances at 4 and 8 p.m.)

**The New Vic Theater**  
Jane Austen's Emma (the musical)  
33 West Victoria, Santa Barbara  
February 6-23, 2020

**L.A. Theatre Works**  
Frankenstein staged reading  
James Bridges Theater/UCLA  
February 28-March 1, 2020

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**Members of the San Gabriel Valley Reading Group**

**Reading/Game Groups**

Saturday October 19, 2:30 p.m.  
**Jane Austen Game Group** (South Bay)  
Join fellow Janeites for attendee choice of Austen-related games.  
For more information, contact [David Poepoe](mailto:DavidPoepoe).
Saturday, October 19, 10 a.m.
**North Orange County Reading Group**
*Sanditon* by Jane Austen
Location: Panera Bread, 1028 S. Harbor Blvd., Fullerton
For more information, contact Melissa Buell or visit the group's Facebook page.

Saturday, October 19, 11 a.m.-1 p.m.
**Ventura County Reading Group**
*The Female Quixote* by Charlotte Lenox
For more information, contact Priscilla Diamond.
Location: E.P. Foster Library, 651 E. Main Street, Ventura

Sunday, October 20, 1:30-4 p.m.
**West Los Angeles Reading Group**
*Northanger Abbey* by Jane Austen
This group is at capacity and cannot accept new members. Current members may contact Clara Browda for more information.

Saturday, October 26, 2:30 p.m.
**Film Group**
*Northanger Abbey* (2007) with Felicity Jones and JJ Feild
For more information, contact Teresa Chien.

Sunday, October 27, 1 p.m.
**Riverside Reading Group**
*Northanger Abbey* by Jane Austen
Location: Home of Cristi Hendy
For more information, contact Vicki Broach.

Sunday, November 3
**Pasadena Area Reading Group**
*Belle: The Slave Daughter and the Lord Chief Justice* by Paula Byrne
This group is at capacity and cannot accept new members. Current members may contact Susan Ridgeway for more information.

Saturday, November 9, 12:30 p.m.
**Long Beach Reading Group**
*Cecilia* by Fanny Burney
For more information, contact Sherwood Smith.

Sunday, November 10, 2-4 p.m.
**San Fernando Valley Reading Group**
*Everybody's Jane* by Juliette Wells
For more information, contact Cheryl Cole.

Sunday, November 10, 5 p.m.
**Santa Monica Reading Group**
*Hester* by Ian McIntyre
For more information, contact Kathi Stafford.

Sunday, November 16, 10 a.m.
**North Orange County Reading Group**
*Holidays With Jane: Thankful Hearts*
Location: Panera Bread, 1028 S. Harbor Blvd., Fullerton
For more information, contact Melissa Buell or visit the group's Facebook page.

Saturday, November 16, 11 a.m.-1 p.m.
**Ventura County Reading Group**
*Jane Austen's England* by Roy and Lesley Adkins
For more information, contact Priscilla Diamond.
Location: E.P. Foster Library, 651 E. Main Street, Ventura

Sunday, November 17
**South Bay Reading Group**
*Jane Austen: A Life* by Claire Tomalin
For more information, contact Jeanine Holguin.

Wednesday, November 20
**Janeites Reading Trollope Group**

*The Last Chronicle of Barset* by Anthony Trollope
For more information, contact [Lora Walker](#).

**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](#).