Jane Austen Society of North America, Southwest Region

April 2020 Newsletter

As we stay safe at home, here are a few ideas to help keep you entertained:

1. The obvious first choice: Reread the Austen canon. If you're missing titles from your home library, Project Gutenberg has them all online, for free (and you can search for favorite passages).

2. Binge-watch Austen film adaptations. Check out our Austen Adaptations guide (recently updated).

3. Attend or create a Zoom meeting for your reading group (or a small group of friends) at no cost. The San Gabriel Valley and North Orange County reading groups are taking this

approach.

4. Watch Jennifer Ehle read *Pride and Prejudice*.

5. Enjoy a new *Pride and Prejudice* musical that's streaming for free on April 10.

6. Follow Janine Barchas' twitter feed on Will (Shakespeare) and Jane in quarantine, called "Pride and Plague." You don't have to be on twitter to check it out.

7. Watch free online productions from London's National Theatre or Broadway HD. National Theatre is putting up a new show every Thursday that you can watch for a week for free on YouTube. Broadway HD offers a seven-day free trial.

8. Do some armchair museum exploring.

9. Choose from some 300K books from the New York Public Library to download and read.

10. You can rent Focus Feature's new version of Emma and watch it in the security of your own home for less than $20 (with access to watch it repeatedly during a 48-hour period).

(below) Image received from JASNA Nebraska post

Postponed Events

As you know, nearly all events in California and much of the nation have been delayed or canceled to protect everyone's safety during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The new dates for the *Los Angeles Times* Festival of Books are October 3-4.

Our "Ms. Austen Goes to Washington" event at the Mission Inn (right) in Riverside has been moved to May 2, 2021.

We'll share additional updates on our JASNA Southwest website and in future newsletters.

Georgian Justice: Legal Matters in Jane Austen's Time

Walter Nelson

James Nagle

On Feb. 29 at the UCLA Faculty Center's California Room, 120 Janeites gathered to hear presentations on "Georgian Justice: Legal Matters in Jane Austen's Time." Claire and Bob Bellanti generously sponsored the event.

Historical consultant Walter Nelson -- who has appeared on the History Channel and A&E -- started the day with a discussion of "Crime and Punishment in the Regency Era."

Although Austen only hints at it in her novels, Nelson said that crime was widespread during her era. At the core of the Georgian justice system were magistrates, he noted.

Quoting *British History in the 19th Century* by George Macaulay Trevelyan, Nelson explained: "At the time George III came to the throne, the justices who did most of the work of rural districts were substantial squires, too rich to be corrupt or mean, too proud to truckle to the government, anxious to stand well with their neighbors, but filled with all the prejudices as well as the merits of their class ... and armed with such a combination of powers that the occasional tyrant among them became an irremovable curse to the countryside."

Nelson emphasized that the system served to reinforce the class structure of the time. He also referenced author Henry Fielding, himself a magistrate, who observed that country judges tended to be incorruptible as they were too wealthy to be bribed. "This was not the case in the city," Nelson added, "where justices tended to be from the merchant class and were generally wide open to 'contributions' that might in fact sway their opinion."

His presentation covered in detail the functions and differing powers of the court systems -- from the assizes to the ecclesiastical. The latter courts were originally set up to adjudicate the crimes of the clergy but ended up also handling divorce and probate cases, he said.

Jane Austen's England was "a world without professional police," Nelson explained, outlining the role and history of early law enforcement figures such as the Bow Street Runners, frequently considered London's first professional police force, who operated in pairs from the Brown Bear Tavern. The group was founded by Henry Fielding and his brother John in 1749.

Nelson humorously described several ways one could catch villains in Regency England, including the hue-and-cry method of shouting "Stop! Thief!" It was then every able-bodied man's duty to pursue the thief. However, Nelson added that, if you were robbed and the thief saw you opening your mouth to shout out, he would point at you first to preempt his

victim and escape in the confusion.

Because the police force was virtually nonexistent in Regency England, crime was met with the Bloody Code. The best way to prevent crime since so few were ever solved "was to make punishment extreme to make examples of those who were caught," Nelson said. Most crimes were punishable by hanging. However, he also described other forms of punishment of the era, such as workhouses, debtors' prison and Bridewell Prison, a "correctional" facility.

In the day's second presentation, semi-retired lawyer James Nagle engaged the room with a lively discussion on "Inheritance in Jane Austen's Time."

He began by referring to Nelson's comment that crime does not figure into Austen's plots. "Boy, that's not true about inheritance," he said. "Inheritance is really at the guts of so many, if not all, of Jane Austen's novels."

His talk focused on three pillars: the law, property and the family. The governing rules of the Regency era were based on case law that had evolved over the generations but was fairly settled by Austen's time, he noted. He quickly dispelled the myth that Regency women could not own real property. "That's not accurate," he said. "Mrs. Ferrars owned property. Catherine de Bourgh owned property." He clarified that married women could not own property. A married woman did not have a separate legal existence from her husband.

To illustrate his point, Nagle explained: "Man and woman walk into a marriage chapel. Legally only one walks out. For that reason, a rich widow had very little incentive to remarry."

If a woman was a minor, her father or other male relative held the property. To protect his daughters at the time of marriage, a wealthy father could put money for their sole benefit in a trust that "no husband could kiss or kick it out of them," Nagle said.

By 1870, married women could inherit real property and were entitled to money they earned. Until then, they were second-class citizens or worse, and could not own property in their own right beyond personal property, such as clothing and jewelry.

In the Regency's agricultural economy, land was a status symbol, which was why the Bingley sisters were so anxious that their brother buy property and join the landed aristocracy.

In a reference to *Downton Abbey*, Nagle quoted the Earl of Grantham in describing the fiduciary duty to protect inherited land: "Downton has been my third parent and my fourth child." Real property was viewed as a sacred trust that they received from their ancestors to preserve and hopefully improve for future generations.

Twin dangers to the estate were division and dissipation (and, later, divorce), Nagle added. If children shared equally in an estate, it could "demote the family from the aristocracy to the gentry in one fell swoop." He then described the role of primogeniture, in which the eldest son got everything, preserving the aristocracy for generations. That, however, was not the law, he explained. If you owned the property outright, in fee simple, for instance, you could change which son would inherit, as Mrs. Ferrars does in *Sense and Sensibility*. "But you wouldn't give land to a woman because it would go to her husband," he added.

Nagle went on to discuss marriage settlements, pin money and dower rights -- as well as the entail and how it was sometimes used to skip a generation when the eldest son was a wastrel.

The day concluded with raffle drawings for two wonderful *Sanditon*-themed baskets: Tea @ Sanditon and Spa @ Sanditon. The baskets were prepared and donated by Lynda Hall and Carolyn Howard. Swag from Focus Features' film *Emma.* -- including totebags, a script and mini-posters -- was also given away as part of the raffle drawing.

The event attracted a capacity crowd.

The white elephant sale was also a hit.

Tea @ Sanditon raffle basket

Spa @ Sanditon raffle basket

Young Filmmakers Contest 2020

YOUNG FILMMAKERS contest

JASNA Southwest's annual contest is underway, calling for original shorts of five minutes or less centered around Jane Austen. In addition to welcoming submissions from students, this year we invite all Jane Austen enthusiasts under the age of 30 to enter. Cash prizes and endless adulation await the top three. Deadline is October 30.

This year marks the anniversary of numerous important film adaptations of Austen's novels -- from the 25th anniversary of the 1995 *Pride and Prejudice*, *Persuasion* and *Sense and Sensibility* as well as *Clueless* to the 80th and 40th anniversaries respectively of the 1940 and 1980 versions of *Pride and Prejudice*. It is the perfect opportunity for us to nurture the future legacy of Austen on screen.

Help us spread the word by urging the young film enthusiasts you know to enter. Or try your own hand at writing/directing if you qualify.

Full details available by contacting youngfilm@jasnasw.org.

Reading/Film/Game Groups

The San Gabriel Valley Reading Group's recent Zoom meeting

Saturday, April 4, 10 a.m.
North Orange County Reading Group
The Jane Austen Project by Kathleen Flynn
The meeting will be held via Zoom.
https://zoom.us/j/8426851377
(Alternatively, you can enter the code 842-685-1377 in the "Join a Meeting" prompt.)
For more information, contact Melissa Buell.

Our reading, film and game groups are taking a pause from in-person meetings as we all stay at home to protect ourselves, each other, our loved ones and the community at large from the COVID-19 pandemic. Take care and stay safe everyone!

Visit our website!

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