



Letter from the Regional Coordinator
By Lynn Slowden



I'm looking forward to spring. Even mud and rain cannot dampen my enthusiasm for longer days, new green leaves and the promise of spring flowers.

Thank you to everyone who participated in the Valentine's Day survey about your current plans for the Annual General Meeting (AGM) in Chicago. Mary Ann Gasior has volunteered to take charge of JASNA Dayton's space at the Emporium, and more details will follow in the coming months.

I've found the availability of a wide variety of Austen programming on-line, both through our Regions and from others, has been a blessing in the pandemic. Here are two upcoming opportunities out of many: The first is the wonderful work of www.janeaustenandco.org. Their current program, *Race & the Regency*, explores the role of race in the Regency from Austen to *Bridgerton*. Our own Damianne Scott, of *Black Girl Loves Jane*, is part of this series with her presentation on Tuesday, April 13.

The second interesting virtual event is *Jane Austen's French Connection*, the Supra-Regional Conference of JASNA-NY and JASNA-NJ, to be held April 17 and 18. There are so many presentations and programs in those two days I suggest you go to their website, www.jasnany.org and see for yourself! The entire conference is one low fee.

Were you wondering about our 2020 Regional fundraiser, our exclusive Jane Austen quilt fabric mask? We raised \$482, much more than anticipated! Thank you, thank you! Your donations allow us to improve our programming, expand our reach and update technologies. I am so grateful to have this opportunity to meet and share our love of Austen.

If you'd like to reach out to me with questions, please do! Email is best; you can use rc@jasnadayton.org or lmslowden@aol.com. I am still collecting birthday information. Would you like to receive greetings on your special day from JASNA? Just let me know!

A note from the JASNA Dayton Program committee:



We love hearing your ideas! We are thrilled that recently we've been getting more feedback, recommendations, and suggestions for future programming from our members! To make sure any ideas you have get the promptest attention, please email our program coordinators, Cynthia Manship and Mary Ann Gasior, and use the heading: JASNA Dayton Program Idea. This will guarantee the quickest response. We'll then be sure to present any ideas at the next Program Committee meeting and do our best to make them happen!

Reading Group Update

By Wilson Palmer

Mariah Busher ably led twelve of us in a lively discussion of the ending chapters of Volume I and the first five of Volume II of *Emma*. The delight or annoyance of Emma's character was a common theme again in this discussion. Her very real flaws make her a familiar and approachable character to some, and her overweening snobbery makes her obnoxious to others. The heartlessness with which she manages Harriet's 14 minute visit with the Martins, her prejudice and casting of Miss Hawkins in the worst possible light before she even meets her and her feeble attempt to befriend Jane Fairfax, are dark spots, indeed. Emma is disgusted by Mr. Elton's attempt to marry above his station, while attempting to promote Harriet to do the same, and the delight with which Mrs. Weston's social climb is greeted all tumbles together into confusion and hypocrisy. The whole novel is filled with people rising and sinking on the social ladder while Emma tries alternatively to nail everyone in their place, while trying to pick her own winners (Harriet) and losers (Robert Martin and the Eltons). Mr. Knightley mixes with everyone and tries to treat them fairly. The topsy-turvy novel seems to be more about building community instead of adhering to Emma's rigid views of social order. It was pointed out, however, that women in general did not have the freedom to mix too freely and were required to avoid any hint of impropriety.



We do see the skill of Austen's writings as Emma slowly moves from disgust at Mr. Elton's proposal, to starting to admit she owned some part of the failure. She realizes she should not toy with other people's romantic lives, and we chuckle with the author as Emma, only a few paragraphs later, catches herself trying to find Harriet a new beau. In a later chapter Emma even contemplates who would make a good romantic catch for Jane Fairfax. Emma even can start to understand that her own behavior did indeed seem like encouragement to Mr. Elton. There is real understanding of human nature here as Emma learns to understand herself in flashes of wisdom and then easily falls back into old patterns.

In the discussion of Miss Bates, Jane Fairfax and Austen's use of dashes and italics, we were reminded of Jane Austen's genius. For instance, a dash is an absence of words, yet its

presence in the following is full of meaning: "Miss Hawkins was the youngest of the two daughters of a Bristol---merchant, of course, he must be called; but..." Is the man not even as respectable as a merchant? Is he, perhaps, involved in the slave trade? Surely not something that is respectable. One participant compared Austen with Shakespeare with her skill with both the main characters and the full personalities of the minor players. You can feel the rapidity of Miss Bates' speech both in the sentence strings she utters and when she has to pause to take a breath. Like another fictional orphan, Jane Eyre, Jane Fairfax's reserve could be due to being an introvert, but she also has everything to lose with one false step, so she attempts to keep all her thoughts and feelings hidden. Emma is used to imagining she knows everyone's thoughts and is unwilling to do the work of being an attentive friend to Jane. So, she misses the chance to befriend the one other person in Highbury who could match her in conversation, other than Mr. Knightley and Mrs. Weston, who are less available to Emma's free time. Emma takes the easy route of gathering "yes men" around her like Harriet and Mrs. Weston. Speaking of fictional Janes: Is there a family joke going on here that two of Austen's most mild mannered and non-judgmental characters (Bennett and Fairfax) have the author's name? I suspect Jane Austen's personality was the reverse.

The next meeting is April 11, 2021, where we will get to know Frank Churchill better and talk more about French versus English sensibilities. Our introduction to the last new character, Mrs. Elton, will have to wait until next fall.

Welcome Spring! Cocktails & Conversation: *The Garden Edition*
By Lynn Slowden

The Dayton and Ohio North Coast Regions team up for a special *Garden Edition* of Cocktails & Conversation, Sunday, April 25 at 7:30 pm on Zoom. Mixologist Tori Manship will whip up a fresh, botanical cocktail and we will enjoy four presenters, with plenty of time for conversation:



Joanne Podis will talk about the symbolic meaning of "wilderness" in Mansfield Park.

Charla Coatoam will lead discussion on Regency roses, including varieties available today for our own gardens.

Carrie Bebris will discuss historical and medicinal uses of herbs.

Deb Bentley will talk about herbal uses in the home and show us a lavender craft.

Cocktails & Conversation is a fun, casual event and we welcome everyone to join us. More details and ingredients for the Spring cocktail will follow in April.

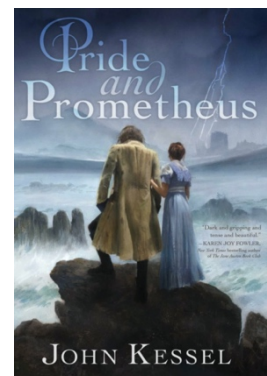
Pride and Prometheus: A Book Review

Lisa Tyler

Imagine, for a moment, an older, wiser Mary Bennett, one who has (like many of us, I hope) fortunately outgrown the worst characteristics of her teenage self. She has polished her musical skills and developed an abiding interest in the natural sciences. Thirteen years after the events recounted in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, thirty-two-year-old Mary attends a London ball, where she encounters a young Swiss scientist she finds attractive. His name is Victor Frankenstein, and only later does Mary discover that he is being hounded by the lonely, misbegotten creature he has unwisely brought to life.

That's the premise of *Pride and Prometheus*, John Kessel's 2018 mashup of *Pride and Prejudice* and Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's 1818 novel *Frankenstein, or, the Modern Prometheus*. Mary meets Victor as he is desperately casting about for ways to avoid acceding to the creature's demand that Victor bring to life a female companion for him. The creature, whom Mary names Adam, has already murdered Victor's younger brother and allowed the Frankenstein family's ward, Justine, to hang for the crime. Yet Kessel's novel, like Shelley's, proves sympathetic to Adam's unhappiness and isolation; like Shelley, Kessel, too, critiques the society that would cast out a human being simply for his untoward appearance.

The structure of the 367-page novel is unusual; some chapters are narrated in third person with Mary as the focal character, while others are narrated in first person by Victor and his hapless creature. The book owes its unrelentingly Gothic tone to Shelley's dark imaginings, not Austen's light, bright, and sparkling irony and wit. Compulsively readable, Kessel's eerie and unsettling story deserves the attention of those who, like Isabella Thorpe of Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, enjoy and appreciate "horrid" Gothic fiction.



JASNA Dayton Executive Committee

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