

The Female Spectator

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FRANCES BROOKE & THE CONTESTED ORIGINS OF THE CANADIAN NOVEL: A NARRATIVE IN MANY PARTS

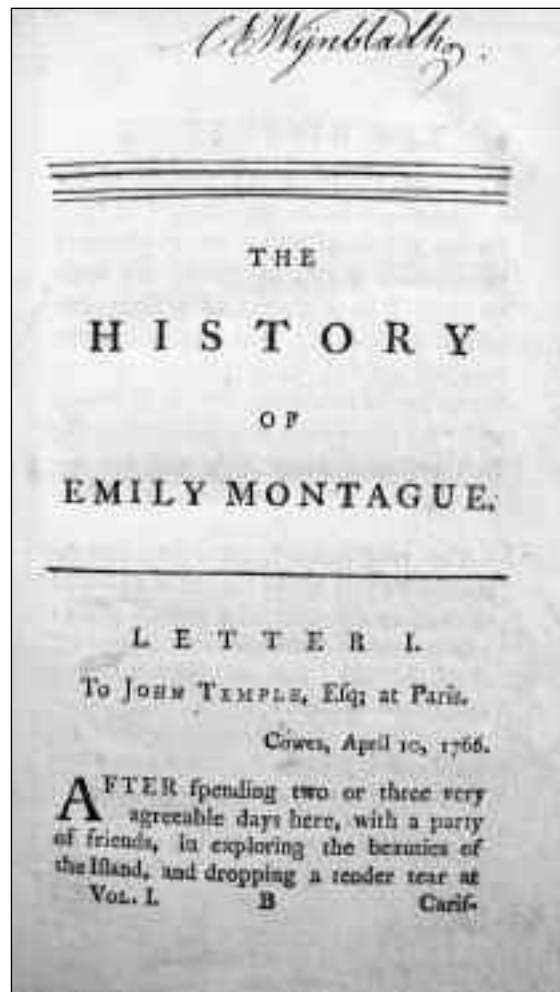
Richard J. Lane is Professor of English at Vancouver Island University, Canada. He was a Visiting Fellow at Chawton House Library in April and May this year, when he continued work on his forthcoming book for the Routledge Concise Histories Series.

I came to Chawton House Library to study an eighteenth-century British author – Frances Brooke – who wrote the first Canadian novel, called *The History of Emily Montague* (1769). My intention was to show how Brooke’s writing is highly innovative and conceptually complex, and that awareness of this should lead to a re-assessment of her place within the history of Canadian literature. How, then, has Brooke been more traditionally situated within the various histories of Canadian literature? Logan and French, writing in *Highways of Canadian Literature* in 1924, place Brooke in their chapter on Incidental Pioneer Literature, or, the type of writing ‘whether it be literature or not’ which had no ‘real influence in developing a Canadian sentiment or in awakening a Canadian literary spirit.’ They argue that *The History of Emily Montague* is ‘strictly in imitation of the first English novelist, Samuel Richardson.’ Thus: ‘...Canadian fiction, in any real sense, did not begin with Mrs. Brooke. It began with a native-born Canadian, John Richardson, who wrote historical romance, notably *Wacousta* [in 1832], after the manner of, though not in imitation of, Fenimore Cooper.’² While this is quite an out-of-date history, its rhetorical strategies are still interesting and relevant. Brooke’s fiction is considered an ‘imitation’ whereas Richardson’s is considered to be in ‘the manner of’, not imitative, of its source. Several years later, Lorne Pierce, in 1927, devotes more space to Brooke, recognising her talent in a number of literary genres, including her periodical writing

as ‘Mary Singleton’, her poetry, her novel *The History of Lady Julia Mandeville* (1763), and her plays. But still her writing is considered ‘imitative’ and ‘racy’, and while *Emily Montague* is ‘an important record of the social life in and around Quebec at the time’,³ her work is considered to have had no real influence upon the formation of a Canadian canon. Pierce’s account of *Emily Montague* is worth examining in more detail, and I have given his entire section on the novel:

The History of Emily Montague was the first so-called Canadian novel. In method it was imitative of the first English novel, *Pamela*, by Samuel Richardson, consisting of a series of letters, most of which were dated from Sillery, near Quebec. In these she records many interesting descriptions of nature and early colonial life, together with racy accounts of mild

scandals and flirtations, retailed from both the royal court of England and the life of the garrison at Quebec. Frances was a colonial; she lived in Canada, but her heart was in England, her standards of taste, her literary models. This work is now excessively rare. It had no influence upon subsequent Canadian literature, and is only sought by collectors. It is, however, an important record of the social life in and around Quebec at the time. There are many interesting descriptions of Canadian landscape, as well as lively accounts of parties, balls and garrison dinners. Short, fat and with a squint, the chaplain’s wife was nevertheless an attractive figure as she dashed about with sables and scarlet hood in her cariole. She was called by some “Little Red Riding Hood,” and by others, “Queen of the Blue Stockings.”⁴



First edition of *The History of Emily Montague* by Frances Brooke (1769)

The Female Spectator

Summer 2009

This summer issue of *The Female Spectator* includes articles by two recent Visiting Fellows to the Library, writing respectively on Frances Brooke and her novel *The History of Emily Montague*, and on Jane Austen's piece of juvenilia 'The Beautifull Cassandra'. News on the Library's activities comes in the form of a look at the 'New Directions in Austen' conference which was held in July, as well as information about a brand new series of publications from Chawton House Library.

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This is quite a remarkable passage, which mixes damnation with praise, and reduces Brooke to a mythological figure from a folk tale, or worse still, a *bluestocking*. As a critic, I hardly know where to start with such fascinating stuff. Actually I think that the most interesting critical move made in this quotation is to say that the first Canadian novel was just the first 'so-called' novel, that it was imitative, and 'had no influence', but to then go on and describe an important novel of depth and breadth, wit and style, which also presented an important social, and historical, account of Canadian life. We mustn't forget, though, that Frances Brooke was short and fat with a squint, which is actually a quotation from Frances Burney.

My reader may be worried that I am going to tediously drag her through numerous obscure and out-of-print histories of Canadian literature, to make the same point over and over again. Luckily, Frances Brooke is simply left out of most of the other early histories. Jumping then to more recent scholarship, important new critical work – especially that of feminist critics – was produced in the 1970s and 1980s, leading to a reassessment of Brooke's role in the beginnings of Canadian literature. For example, in the second volume of a critical anthology dedicated to the Canadian novel, editor John Moss includes key essays on Brooke by Mary Jane Edwards and Linda Shoheit. In his introduction, he argues that: '*The History of Emily Montague...* can no more be excluded from the Canadian tradition than can the *Quebec garrison*, to which her husband was assigned as chaplain, can be denied from our history.'⁵ In the 1980s and 1990s, two histories dominated the market: Bill New's and W. J. Keith's;⁶ both have been re-printed, and both are considered standard texts. Turning to Keith, and his *Canadian Literature in English*, we can get a sense of some rhetorical shifts in the reception and understanding of Brooke, as well as some problematic notions concerning her work and her place at the beginnings of Canadian literature. The biographical understanding of her has certainly improved; she is now situated as 'A literary inhabitant of the Augustan world of Dr Johnson, David Garrick, and Fanny Burney'.⁷ *The History of Emily Montague* is no longer imitative, but written according to Keith in the less pejorative 'in the manner of'. The plot is 'unremarkable' and 'inevitable' and its observations are 'generalizations'; if we read the novel, we apparently do so for 'its non-fiction, documentary qualities',⁸ and Keith, after some other faint praise, concludes with the following:

Brooke is a clear, accomplished, often witty, but not particularly original writer, and her single 'Canadian' work is best described as an English novel that happens to exploit Canadian subject matter. It is essentially an outsider's view, but no less valuable for that. Its author is, however, Canada's first but no means last literary bird of passage. Within the Canadian tradition her book represents an interesting beginning but also a dead end.⁹

With this statement, we can safely say that none of the feminist research into Brooke and her role in the history of Canadian literature has had any effect on more traditional

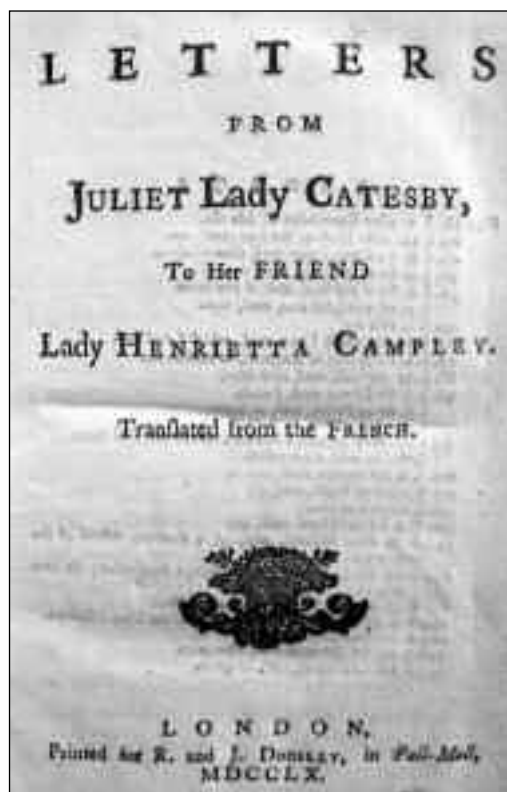
critics whatsoever.

Let's abandon these negative accounts then, and enjoy the more subversive material, those alternative perspectives and voices without which we would have a monocultural view of literary history and indeed society in general. Marta Dvorak, writing in *The Cambridge Companion to Canadian Literature*, suggests that *The History of Emily Montague* is 'considered to be the seminal work of Canadian English-language fiction, because it concerns itself with issues inescapable to the situation of British North America after the conquest of what is today Quebec, issues fundamental moreover to colonial/postcolonial literatures in general.'¹⁰ These include 'the relations between the Native populations and the new settlers, the ambivalent relations of the latter with both the European imperial center and the more established Thirteen colonies, and finally the friction of the English/French relations that has haunted the country to the present day.'¹¹ But Dvorak notices something far more subtle than this, and here we can begin to unravel the charge that Brooke was a 'literary bird of passage'; Dvorak notices that Major Richardson – other critics' preferential author of the other 'first' Canadian novel (and they are ignoring Quebec literature in positing *Wacousta* as this 'first') – 'spent little time in Canada, moving instead from American military posts and colonies such as the West Indies, to England, France, and Spain, where he fought as a mercenary.'¹² Incredibly, Richardson, that son of the soil, published *Wacousta* in London, where he was residing as a half-pay officer! And even though *Wacousta* is a historical romance, 'its sensational descriptions of violence and savagery, targeted the European appetite for exoticist discourse, and the taste for the abnormal and monstrous that can be traced as a constant feature from the Jacobean revenge tragedy to the Gothic novel and Romanticism.'¹³ To put this more plainly, the early Canadian novels catered to an international market, just as the best-selling contemporary canonical Canadian novelists such as Margaret Atwood do today. In terms of movement through territories and cultural domains, Brooke and Richardson follow the figure of the chiasmus, crossing-over from one country to the other, marketing Canada in England, and in effect utilising a British and European sensibility in *figuring* Canada. This national-international chiasmus continues to the present day, with Canadian writers such as Michael Ondaatje or Joy Kogawa.

A brief biographical narrative can help the reader acquire a sense of what Brooke might have thought of all this historical

denial and more recent feminist re-positioning. Born 24 January 1724, in Claypoole, Lincolnshire, Frances Moore as she was then called, grew up mainly in Peterborough, where her family moved after the death of her father. Coming into her inheritance of one thousand pounds, Frances moved a few years later to London (in 1748), where she rapidly became part of the literary and theatrical scene, also following in the family tradition by marrying a clergyman, the Reverend John Brooke, in 1756. Before she had married, Frances had been busy writing poetry, drama, and journalism. She had written a play called *Virginia*, and she edited and wrote much of a weekly periodical called *The Old Maid*, published in 1755 and 1756, modelled partly upon Eliza Haywood's *Female Spectator*. Brooke edited *The Old Maid* under a pseudonym, 'Mary Singleton, Spinster'. As Lorraine McMullen suggests: 'In Mary Singleton, Mrs. Brooke had taken on the role of a single woman of independent mind, and very early, in the second issue, while asserting her right to speak on any topic, as she saw fit, established her mandate to speak for and of her

own sex.'¹⁴ So from the beginnings of her literary success, Brooke wrote with a strong feminist voice, however framed and fragmented by the multiple perspectives of the periodical format. For example, she favoured romantic choice over arranged marriages, or love rather than expediency, and she often wrote about the importance of education, for young women.¹⁵ While *The Old Maid* suffered from critical attack, this was in the spirit of the intellectual exchanges within the culture of which Brooke was a part. She knew Samuel Johnson, David Garrick, the actors James Quin and Peg Woffington, as well as some of Samuel Richardson's circle, in particular Thomas Edwards and John Duncombe. Brooke would later become friends with Frances Burney. Brooke's journey to the novel form took place via her translation of one of the most popular French epistolary novels of sensibility, Madame Riccoboni's *Letters from Juliette Catesby, to her*



The first English edition of Marie Jeanne Riccoboni's Letters from Juliette Catesby ... (1760), which was translated by Frances Brooke

friend, Lady Henrietta Campley (1760); this provided Brooke with the model for her own highly successful epistolary novel, *The History of Lady Julia Mandeville*, published in 1763. During this period, Brooke's husband John had been away working, without pay, as a chaplain in America with the British army. From 1757 until his official appointment as the Quebec garrison chaplain in 1761, John's ministry was to the Gospel, rather than mammon. Nonetheless, even with a newly acquired salary, the Brookes waited until the settlement of the Treaty of Paris in 1763, when Canada was formally ceded to Britain, before Frances travelled to Canada to be once more with her husband. She would live there for five years, with one visit back to England in this period, and

it is during this time that she wrote *The History of Emily Montague*. To conclude this biographical sketch, upon her return to England, Brooke had twenty highly productive years, with two more translations, a tragedy, two comic operas, and two novels to her name. Her comic opera *Rosina* (1783), was immensely popular, as were her translations. Her last novel, *The History of Charles Mandeville*, was published in 1790, one year after her death.

I want to conclude by thinking about the feminist re-assessment of Brooke, and how I am re-staging her in my forthcoming history of Canadian literature. This ties in with something Keith says in his preface to his history: that he hasn't included an account of 'the popular' or 'the avant-garde'. For the former, his main example is Lucy Maud Montgomery, the author of *Anne of Green Gables*. Ironically, to exclude 'the avant-garde' is also to deny a role for some of the more experimental women authors! For example, Daphne Marlatt's poem 'Steveston' is included in Keith's history, but none of her lesbian-feminist works. Of course any literary history is necessarily selective, but to efface entire categories of writing goes beyond selectivity. I think of Frances Brooke as being an author who managed to combine popular appeal with avant-garde writing, and it is precisely the articulation of a strong, independent, feminist voice or sensibility that makes Brooke's work avant-garde. For example, I once heard a colleague say that Brooke's *The Excursion* (1777) reminded him of Frances Burney's *Evelina*; in fact, *The Excursion* was published one year before *Evelina*. Brooke's *The History of Lady Julia Mandeville*, to take another example, develops a hybrid discourse, not just in the synthesis of the novel of sensibility and the emerging gothic, but also the theatricality echoed in references to *Romeo and Juliet*, the critique of conduct books, and indeed the gruesome and macho practice of duelling. So what of *The History of Emily Montague*? The novel works primarily with a courtship plot to create an extended period whereby men are subordinate to women. A key character here is the coquette Arabella Fermor. As critics have noted, the coquette 'extends' or tries 'to extend the time of her power and postpone or avoid her subjection' to patriarchy.¹⁶ The coquette controls the duration of the interregnum in male power, which Arabella ponders in letter 31: 'I congratulate you, my dear; you will at least have six months longer your own mistress; which, in my opinion, when one is not violently in love, is a consideration worth attending to.' Arabella's advice to Emily Montague is straightforward: create the boundaries of the interregnum: 'Send him [her fiancé] up to his regiment at Montreal with the Melmoths, stay the winder with me, flirt with somebody else to try the strength of your passion ...'.¹⁷ Of course Brooke does not endorse the values of the coquette, rather, she frames – or brackets – the coquette's focalization via the literary device of the 'double image' which Lorraine McMullen calls 'an adroit manipulation of opposing yet complementary women characters, which provides the author with the opportunity both to endorse and to question the values of her age.'¹⁸ So the coquette creates a space in the novel which Brooke herself is distanced from, just as her pseudonymous voice as 'Mary Singleton' gave her a prior distancing device. Yet it would be a mistake to see this distance – and the double image – as a

straightforward alternative subjectivity, because within the strictures of a patriarchal society, these positions are also abject: in-between, neither inside nor outside of patriarchy, which we can understand via a quote from Kristeva's book on the abject: 'We may call it a border; abjection is above all ambiguity. Because, while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it – on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger. But also because abjection itself is a composite of judgment and affect, of condemnation and yearning, of signs and drives.'¹⁹ My argument is that not only is the extended period of female power the dynamic space of the abject within the novel, but that *The History of Emily Montague* is in itself *abjected* within the history of Canadian literature.

¹ J. D. Logan & D. G. French, *Highways of Canadian Literature* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1924), p. 46.

² Logan & French, p. 46.

³ Lorne Pierce, *An Outline of Canadian Literature* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1927), p. 24.

⁴ Pierce, p. 24.

⁵ *The Canadian Novel, Volume II: Beginnings, A Critical Anthology*, John Moss, ed. (Toronto: New Canada Publications, 1980), p. 7.

⁶ W. H. New, *A History of Canadian Literature* (Ontario: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003); W. J. Keith, *Canadian Literature in English* (Ontario: Porcupine's Quill, 2006).

⁷ Keith, p. 69.

⁸ Keith, p. 69.

⁹ Keith, p. 70.

¹⁰ Marta Dvorak, 'Fiction' in *The Cambridge Companion to Canadian Literature*, Eva-Marie Kröller, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 155-176; p. 156.

¹¹ Dvorak, p. 156.

¹² Dvorak, p. 156.

¹³ Dvorak, p. 156.

¹⁴ Lorraine McMullen, *Frances Brooke and Her Works* (Ontario: ECW Press, 1983), p. 17.

¹⁵ McMullen, p. 18.

¹⁶ Spencer, quoted in Jane Sellwood, "'A Little Acid Is Absolutely Necessary': Narrative as Coquette in Frances Brooke's 'The History of Emily Montague'", *Canadian Literature*, 136 (Spring 1993), pp. 60-79; p. 68.

¹⁷ Frances Brooke, *The History of Emily Montague* (first published 1769); The New Canadian Library Edition (Toronto, McClelland & Stewart, 1995), pp. 156-157, p. 157.

¹⁸ McMullen, quoted in Sellwood, p. 66.

¹⁹ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Leon Roudiez, trans. (NY: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 8-9.

JANE AUSTEN'S BAD GIRL:

'THE BEAUTIFULL CASSANDRA' VS THE CONDUCT BOOKS

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In her very short story 'The beautiful Cassandra', included in *Volume the First*, Jane Austen recasts the popular eighteenth-century picaresque hero as a woman, and its wonderfully overblown dedication to Cassandra Austen suggests that this was a game shared between the two sisters. The beautiful Cassandra's bad behaviour – or rather the overwhelmingly positive way in which the narrative supports and rewards her for it – calls into question the legitimacy of the constraints suffered to turn a late eighteenth-century child into a 'good' girl.

The story was most likely written at some point between 1787 and 1790.¹ Deirdre Le Faye suggests that the Austen's 'family trip to Kent in July and August 1788, with its return via London, probably inspired the London setting of "The beautiful Cassandra", as well as teasing Cassandra with a description of how she had *not* behaved whilst there'.² The story's twelve chapters (each approximately 30 words in length) catalogue various forms of unfeminine behaviour, which nonetheless meet with success and narrative approval, making the story a kind of cheeky *misconduct* book. There are three aspects of Cassandra's behaviour that have particular significance for their relationship to the etiquette prescribed in contemporary fiction and the conduct books which were designed as a crucial part of girls' education: her dress, her participation in fashionable consumption, and her independence.

The action of 'The beautiful Cassandra' commences once Cassandra herself has 'attained her 16th year', at which time she – like a good heroine – falls 'in love'. Her affections are

captivated not by a young man, however, but by a hat: as the 'Daughter of a celebrated Millener', Cassandra falls in love with, and subsequently appropriates, a bonnet 'bespoke by the Countess of —'.³

In addition to committing the common law tort of conversion, by taking and wearing the bonnet Cassandra perpetrates a serious breach of social codes. The offensiveness of wearing class-inappropriate clothing is alluded to in *Persuasion*, where Mrs Musgrove complains about her daughter-in-law's nursery-maid being 'such a fine-dressing lady, that she is enough to ruin any servants she comes near'.⁴ Ellen E. Martin argues that Cassandra's 'theft of this status symbol recalls her father's claims to nobility through illegitimate descent' – he is the 'near relation of the Dutchess of —'s Butler'.⁵ Despite her father's pretensions to 'noble Birth', as a mere milliner's daughter, Cassandra has no right to parade about town in a bonnet fit for a countess.⁶

Cassandra and her bonnet, however, have more barriers to transgress than merely those of class. Well-behaved eighteenth-century heroines, regardless of their class, inevitably cleave to plain dress. Richardson's heroines Pamela Andrews, Clarissa Harlowe and Harriet Byron – despite their different social situations – unite in a detestation of 'finery', and the vexed notion of appropriate dress is

frequently recurred to in non-fiction conduct literature. Sarah Pennington, for instance, in *An Unfortunate Mother's Advice to her Absent Daughters*, writes that

[w]hatever time is taken up in dress beyond what is necessary to decency and cleanliness, may be looked upon, to say no worse, as a vacuum in life. By decency, I mean such a habit as is suitable to your rank and fortune: an ill-placed finery, inconsistent with either,



Title page of an 1808 edition of John Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters* (published together with another conduct work by Hester Chapone)

is not ornamental but ridiculous.⁷

In *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters*, John Gregory is even more explicit in his emphasis on the importance of dress. Gregory claims a Rousseauistic 'natural' authority for female behaviour, deploying a discursive strategy common in conduct literature that is, as Vivien Jones argues, 'internally contradictory'. In eighteenth-century conduct books, Jones writes, 'women are presented as both naturally virtuous, and in particular need of instruction'.⁸ Indeed, femininity itself is presented as both natural and as requiring constant effort – and discipline! – to maintain. So Gregory writes that the 'love of dress is natural to you [i.e., women], and therefore it is proper and reasonable'. An innate 'good sense will regulate your expence in it, and good taste will direct you to dress in such a way as to conceal any blemishes, and set off your beauties, if you have any, to the greatest advantage'.

Despite this natural 'good sense' and 'good taste', however, 'much delicacy and judgment are required in the application of this rule'. There is a great deal at stake, because men are watching:

You will not easily believe how much we [i.e., men] consider your dress as expressive of your characters. Vanity, levity, slovenliness, folly, appear through it. An elegant simplicity is an equal proof of taste and delicacy.

Here, Gregory's instructions again reveal their tendency to internal contradiction. Despite his hints to his daughters to be conscious of the effect which their appearance will, it seems, inevitably have on men, he also insists that one of the 'chief beauties in a female character, is that modest reserve, that retiring delicacy, which avoids the public eye, and is disconcerted even at the gaze of admiration'.⁹ By walking out in her bonnet, Cassandra creates a public spectacle of herself, thereby embodying a contentious issue of late eighteenth-century feminine deportment. For young women are required to display themselves in order to attract the 'gaze of admiration', which they are nonetheless simultaneously expected to shun. In her moral and educational treatise of 1799, Hannah More unsympathetically examined the young woman's predicament:

To attract admiration is the great principle sedulously inculcated into her young heart; and is considered as the fundamental maxim; and, perhaps, if we were required to condense the reigning system of the brilliant education of a lady into an aphorism, it might be comprised in this short sentence, *To allure and to shine*. This system however is the fruitful germ, from which a thousand yet unborn vanities, with all their multiplied ramifications will spring.¹⁰

The self-satisfied Cassandra, however, is untroubled by the political controversy which attaches to her actions.

In taking the countess's bonnet, Cassandra simply and silently refuses to abide by the restrictions which society – or at least

the conduct literature seeking to regulate society – would impose on her because of her rank and her status as a young woman. When she places the bonnet 'on her gentle Head', Austen's narrator colludes in Cassandra's rebellion.¹¹ The word 'gentle' is highly charged, denoting both the social status of gentlewoman, which Cassandra is not, and of that 'natural softness' in young women that John Gregory repeatedly praises. This is a softness, which – as her decisive behaviour clearly shows – the 'beautiful' Cassandra lacks.

Cassandra's bad behaviour extends much further than her appropriation of a countess's bonnet. Claudia Johnson has written that the 'portions of the juvenilia likely to appear to us variously as the most cute, slight, and precocious are often, in fact, the most laden with controversy', because at the time of their composition, 'there were few subjects *more* anxiously debated as central to national well-being than female manners'.¹² It is in this light that we should regard Cassandra's conspicuous consumption. In 'Chapter the 4th', for instance, the bonneted Cassandra goes to a 'Pastry-cooks where she devoured six ices, refused to pay for them, knocked down the Pastry Cook and walked away'.¹³

Eating ices was a fashionable pastime, indulged in by the Thorpes and James Morland in *Northanger Abbey*, while in *Emma* Mrs Elton complains about 'there being no ice in the Highbury card parties'.¹⁴ Cassandra's six ices are also a rejection of the meagre appetite considered appropriately feminine: as Claudia Johnson succinctly puts it, '[p]roper women can like to cook, but must not under any circumstances like to eat'.¹⁵ Frances Burney's unworldly heroine Evelina is shocked and 'disgusted' by the obsession of fashionable men with food. The conversation at dinner turns 'wholly upon eating':

a subject which was discussed with the utmost delight; and, had I not known they were men of rank and fashion, I should have imagined that Lord Merton, Mr. Lovel, and Mr. Coverley, had all been professed cooks; for they displayed so much knowledge of sauces and made dishes, and of the various methods of dressing the same things, that I am persuaded they must have given much time, and much study, to make themselves such adepts in this *art*. It would be very difficult to determine, whether they were most to be distinguished as *gluttons*, or *epicures*; for they were, at once, dainty and voracious, understood the right and wrong of every dish, and alike emptied the one and the other.¹⁶

Gregory cautions against the 'luxury of eating', which he says is 'a despicable selfish vice in men, but in your sex it is beyond expression indelicate and disgusting'.¹⁷ For the young Jane Austen, women's excessive consumption was a continuing source of grotesque humour. Cassandra's six ices share literary kinship with Alice Johnson's love of the bottle in 'Jack and Alice', and look forward to a rare resurgence in Dr Grant's 'apoplexy and death, by three great institutionary dinners in one week' in *Mansfield Park*.¹⁸ Austen also burlesques the function of food in literature elsewhere in her juvenilia – for

instance, with the anorexic heroines of 'Love and Freindship', and the obsessive cook Charlotte Lutterell of 'Lesley Castle'.

Cassandra is too committed an anti-heroine to restrict her deliberately unfeminine behaviour to ices alone. Dr Gregory would also have objected to Cassandra's activities in 'Chapter the 5th':

She next ascended a Hackney Coach & ordered it to Hampstead, where she was no sooner arrived than she ordered the Coachman to turn round & drive her back again.¹⁹

As well as the frivolous expense, Cassandra's hackney coach ride is doubly objectionable from her dissipated enjoyment of a 'luxury' whose overuse is harmful in itself. Gregory writes,

If you accustom yourselves to go abroad always in chairs and carriages, you will soon become so enervated, as to be unable to go out of doors without them. They are like most articles of luxury, useful and agreeable when judiciously used; but when made habitual, they become both insipid and pernicious.²⁰

Cassandra's circular journey, however, is more than a 'lampoon on picaresque romantic quests', as Laurie Kaplan phrases it.²¹ In her exaggeratedly rapid progress through London's fashionable entertainments, Cassandra resembles one of Burney's heroines. Rather than agonize over the difficulties of navigating the ethical morass of London Society with propriety, however, Cassandra turns etiquette into anarchy with her outrageous behaviour.

One aspect of Cassandra's behaviour that particularly relates to Burney's *Cecilia* is the payment of debts. Having returned her to 'the same spot of the same Street she had sate out from', Cassandra's Coachman demands payment. Cassandra has already 'refused to pay' for her six ices, and 'knocked down the Pastry Cook' before walking out of his shop.²² When confronted by the Coachman, Cassandra stalls:

She searched her pockets over again & again; but every search was unsuccessful. No money could she find. The man grew peremptory. She placed her bonnet on his head & ran away.²³

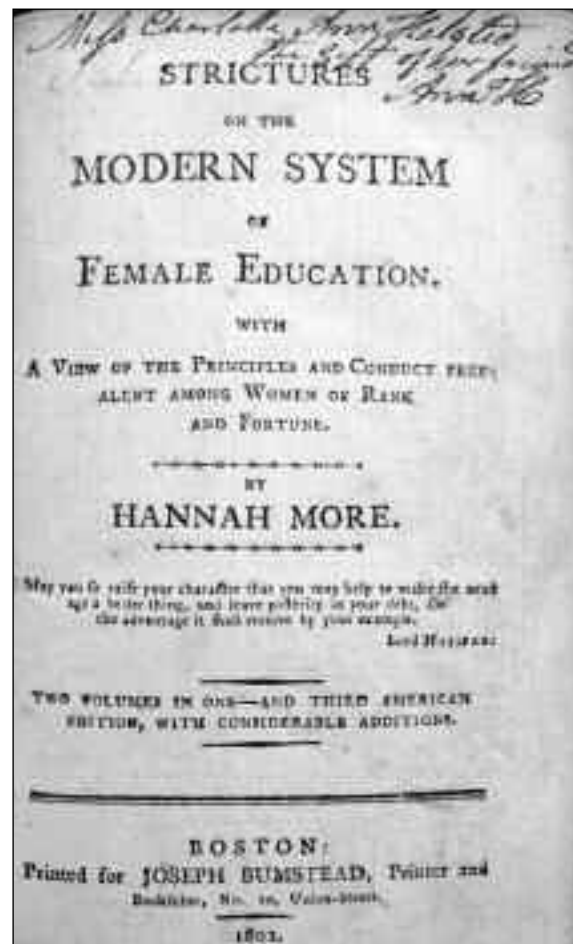
What to a modern reader's perspective might appear as comically effected fare evasion in a story lacking seriousness, a contemporary readership would recognise as engaging with an important social issue. For Hannah More, such behaviour threatened the stability of the nation, by encouraging the discontented to attack the 'disproportion of ranks', which is the 'dispensation of God'. She asks:

Would it not be turning those political doctrines, which are now so warmly agitating, to a truly moral account, and give the best practical answer to the popular declamations on the inequality of human conditions, were the rich carefully to instruct their children to soften that inevitable inequality by the mildness and tenderness of their behaviour to their inferiors?

For More, the solution lies in the hands, and the purses, of young ladies, and to 'check the growth of inconsiderateness, young ladies should early be taught to discharge their little debts with punctuality'.²⁴ It is a lesson learned by Cecilia, whose chance meeting with Mrs Hill, a carpenter's wife and creditor of one of Cecilia's guardians, eventually leads to the unravelling of that guardian's finances, and his suicide. Having promised the 'half starved' Mrs Hill the twenty pounds she is owed, Cecilia is stunned to find her seemingly affluent guardian unsympathetic:

hitherto she had supposed that the dissipation of his life kept him ignorant of his own injustice; but when she found he was so well informed of it yet, with such total indifference, could suffer a poor woman to claim a just debt every day for nine months together, she was shocked and astonished beyond measure.²⁵

More calls it a 'cruelty' to oblige 'trades-people to call often for the money due to them' and this cruelty is not softened in 'The beautiful Cassandra'.²⁶ What is important to recognise is the casual violence of Austen's comedy and the total absence of any penalty as a result of Cassandra's actions. There is no distant hint of 'a juster appointment hereafter';²⁷ after following her escape from the Coachman Cassandra meets not the 'least Adventure'.²⁸



*A Boston 1802 edition of Hannah More's
Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*

It is, of course, Cassandra's

adventures themselves that constitute the greatest snub to conduct-book prescriptions. The ‘nearly 7 hours’ of Cassandra’s unsanctioned absence from her ‘paternal roof’ can be construed as an unforgivable breach of propriety. By ‘gadding abroad in search of amusement’ as Dr Gregory puts it, Cassandra – setting out to ‘make her Fortune’ – courts the dreadful accusation of independence.²⁹ Elizabeth Bennet, walking alone to Netherfield, faces the contempt of Mrs Hurst and Miss Bingley; to them her actions ‘shew an abominable sort of conceited independence, a most country town indifference to decorum’.³⁰ Burney’s Cecilia is taught to find her independence ‘burdensome’,³¹ and it is Sir Thomas Bertram’s harshest criticism of Fanny Price that she is not, as he had hoped,

peculiarly free from that wilfulness of temper, self-conceit, and every tendency to that independence of spirit, which prevails so much in modern days, even in young women, and which in young women is offensive and disgusting beyond all common offence.³²

The ‘beautiful’ Cassandra is blithely indifferent to such accusations. She takes great pleasure in her independence and with characteristic black humour Austen ensures that Cassandra’s delinquency goes wholly unpunished and unregretted. Returning home in ‘Chapter the 12th’, she is ‘pressed to her Mother’s bosom’, where she smiles and whispers ‘to herself “This is a day well spent”’.³³

‘The beautiful Cassandra’, in its antagonistic engagement with conduct book etiquette, looks forward to Austen’s later representations of propriety. Heroines like Elizabeth Bennet evaluate their moral choices for themselves, without regard to standardised forms of decorum. Their behaviour is not, of course, as ridiculously anarchic as Cassandra’s, but they do share with her their determination to make their own decisions, their conviction of their ethical and intellectual independence, and the support of a complicit narratorial voice. In this, one of her earliest pieces, Austen demonstrates her keen understanding of the slippage between what young women are told they are and what they are, and between what they are told to do and what they want to do. The triumphs of Austen’s mature young ladies have their roots in the capricious, violent, self-satisfied and above all, comically fascinating, beautiful Cassandra.

¹ B. C. Southam, ‘Chronology’ in Jane Austen, *Minor Works*, R. W. Chapman, ed., B. C. Southam, rev. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 1. References to other Austen works are also to volumes in Chapman’s edition of Austen’s works.

² Deirdre Le Faye, *Jane Austen: A Family Record*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 56.

³ Austen, *Minor Works*, pp. 44–5.

⁴ *Persuasion*, p. 45.

⁵ Ellen E. Martin, ‘The Madness of Jane Austen: Metonymic Style and Literature’s Resistance to Interpretation’, in *Jane Austen’s Beginnings: The Juvenilia and Lady Susan*, J. David Grey, ed. (Ann Arbor, Mich. and London: University of

Michigan Research Press, 1989), pp. 83–94; p. 86; Austen, *Minor Works*, p. 44.

⁶ Austen, *Minor Works*, p. 45.

⁷ Sarah Pennington, *An Unfortunate Mother’s Advice to her Absent Daughters, in a Letter to Miss Pennington* (first published 1761) in *The Young Lady’s Pocket Library, or Parental Monitor* (first published 1790), introd. Vivien Jones (Bristol, Thoemmes Press, 1995), p. 82.

⁸ Vivien Jones, ‘Introduction’ in *The Young Lady’s Pocket Library*, p. vii.

⁹ John Gregory, *A Father’s Legacy to His Daughters*, in *The Young Lady’s Pocket Library*, p. 23, p. 11.

¹⁰ Hannah More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (first published 1799), 2 vols. (Oxford and New York: Woodstock Books, 1995), vol. 1, p. 93. More’s emphasis.

¹¹ Austen, *Minor Works*, p. 45.

¹² Claudia L. Johnson, ‘“The Kingdom at Sixes and Sevens”: Politics and the Juvenilia’, in *Jane Austen’s Beginnings*: pp. 45–58; p. 51. Johnson’s emphasis.

¹³ Austen, *Minor Works*, p. 45.

¹⁴ *Emma*, p. 290.

¹⁵ Johnson, p. 56.

¹⁶ Frances Burney, *Evelina: or the History of a Young Lady’s Entrance Into the World* (first published 1778), Edward A. Bloom, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 288.

¹⁷ Gregory, *Legacy*, p. 16.

¹⁸ *Mansfield Park*, p. 469.

¹⁹ Austen, *Minor Works*, p. 45.

²⁰ Gregory, *Legacy*, p. 19.

²¹ Laurie Kaplan, ‘Jane Austen and the Uncommon Reader’, in *Jane Austen’s Beginnings*, pp. 73–82; p. 78.

²² Austen, *Minor Works*, p. 45.

²³ Austen, *Minor Works*, p. 46.

²⁴ More, *Strictures*, pp. 132–133, p. 131.

²⁵ Frances Burney, *Cecilia, or Memoirs of an Heiress* (first published 1782), Peter Sabor and Margaret Anne Doody, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 69, p. 73.

²⁶ More, *Strictures*, p. 131.

²⁷ *Mansfield Park*, p. 468.

²⁸ Austen, *Minor Works*, p. 46.

²⁹ Austen, *Minor Works*, p. 45; Gregory, *Legacy*, p. 21.

³⁰ *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 36.

³¹ Burney, *Cecilia*, p. 607.

³² *Mansfield Park*, p. 318.

³³ Austen, *Minor Works*, p. 47.

REPRINTING THE DOMESTIC: NEW PUBLICATIONS FROM THE CHAWTON COLLECTION

One fascinating section of the Chawton House Library collection offers literature pertaining to women's lives in the long eighteenth century: cookery books, guides on how to manage domestic servants and setting down exactly what is required of a lady's maid, how to dress and educate one's children, instructions on how to behave and what to read to improve oneself. It is this area of the collection that will be celebrated by a new series of republished texts from the library. The first in the series is Elizabeth Smith's *The Compleat Housewife* (originally published in 1753), an eighteenth-century manual for domestic life which includes recipes, medical advice and insights into the work of the mistress of an eighteenth-century house. Books such as *The Compleat Housewife* can give a fascinating insight into everyday household life in the long eighteenth century.

Jane Austen's interest in the domestic in her letters to her sister Cassandra has enchanted generations of her readers. Writing from Chawton, Austen rejoices in a great crop of Orleans plumbs, whilst lamenting the wretched appearance of Cassandra's mignonette, and relating that Miss Benn has a new maid from nearby Alton; she tells her sister that they will have ducks next week, and enquires after 'peices for the Patchwork'; she says of their cook that she is 'tolerable' and that 'her pastry is the only deficiency'; she approves Fanny and Cassandra's bonnets, and tells of her pleasure in 'receiving, unpacking & approving our Wedgwood ware'.

Austen's letters to Cassandra are a rich source for piecing together female domesticity in the early nineteenth century. One can, however, have too much of a good thing: Austen famously writes, after a visit from her brother Edward to Chawton in September 1816, 'Composition seems to me Impossible, with a head full of Mutton Joint and Rhubarb'. Austen's major preoccupation at Chawton was, after all, not the running of a household, but rather the publication, revision and composition of her six novels, all of which were sent out from Chawton to be published between 1811 and 1818. In these classic works of English literature, the way in which the domestic informs the narrative intrigues a twenty-first century reader. Would Betty's sister, an excellent

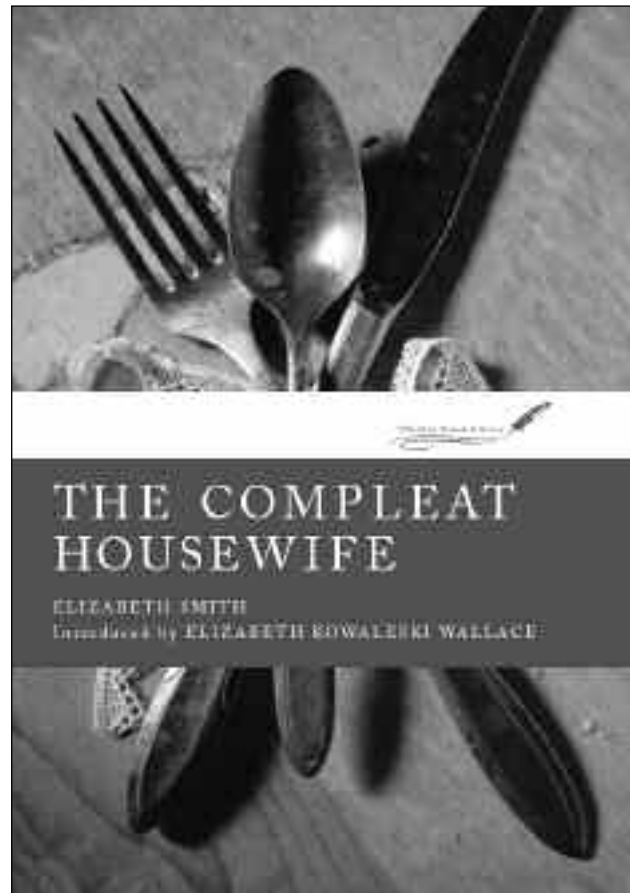
housemaid who works very well with her needle, have done well as a lady's maid for the Dashwoods in *Sense and Sensibility*? Can we ever have such an intricate understanding of the variety and merits of strawberries as the party at Donwell Abbey in *Emma*?

It is to the literature of Austen's own period that we must turn for answers to these, and many other, vexing questions. For those who wish to understand Mr Woodhouse's discourses in praise of gruel in *Emma*, Mrs Bennet's anxiety when there is not a bit of fish to be got and Lizzie Bennet's preference for a plain dish over a ragout in *Pride and Prejudice*, the reprinting of *The Compleat Housewife* and other rare texts from the Chawton House Library collection will have much to offer. What precisely were the 'usual stock of accomplishments' taught to Henrietta and Louisa Musgrove at school in Exeter in *Persuasion*, and why does Lydia gape at Mr Collins's reading of Fordyce's *Sermons* in *Pride and Prejudice*? Some answers will be found in Chawton House Library reprints of conduct literature. And for a true understanding of what it might mean for Fanny Price to be scorned by her better-dressed cousins for having only two sashes in *Mansfield Park*, for Henry Tilney to understand muslins particularly well in

Northanger Abbey, and indeed just how Lucy Steele might have gone about trimming up a new bonnet, with pink ribbons and a feather, in *Sense and Sensibility*, instruction will come from reprints of works on eighteenth-century dress and fashion.

The Compleat Housewife is now available from Chawton House Library, for £18 plus post & packing. To purchase a copy, contact the Library on 01420 541010 or sales@chawton.net or visit the Library's new online shop at www.chawtonhouse.org/shop/index.html. Next year will see the publication of the next title in the series, James Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women*. All profits from this series of reprints will go directly towards the Chawton House Library acquisitions fund, helping us to improve and expand the library collection for generations of future readers.

Gillian Dow



'NEW DIRECTIONS IN AUSTEN STUDIES', 9-11 JULY 2009

A conference of the size and diversity of 'New Directions in Austen Studies', held at Chawton House Library between 9 and 11 July, is difficult to summarise. Readers of The Female Spectator who were not able to attend will be pleased to hear that selected papers will be published in a special issue of Persuasions On-Line, to appear in Spring 2010. The following article is taken from Gillian Dow's introduction to the conference and welcome to delegates. The panels presented in the three days that followed showed the remarkable vibrancy of Austen studies in 2009, and were punctuated by stimulating keynote addresses by established scholars who work on Austen, gender theory and eighteenth and early nineteenth-century literature and culture more generally. Our sincere thanks go to Linda Bree, Emma Clery, Isobel Grundy, Deirdre Le Faye, Juliet McMaster, Kathryn Sutherland and John Wiltshire, and to all speakers, panel chairs and those who contributed to discussions, and the musicians who provided a splendid closing concert with music selected from the Austen family music books.

Last week, as the dreadful hot weather kept me in a continual state of inelegance, I took time to reflect on our conference title 'New Directions in Austen Studies', and what that might mean to our work here this week. When I first broached the topic over eighteen months ago to a speaker I wanted very much to attend, but who shall remain nameless, she warned me, darkly, 'nothing, Gillian, dates more quickly than titles like 'New Directions''. In many ways, of course, she was right. And yet I stuck with it nonetheless, because it seemed to me to be a very inclusive way of attracting as many scholars as possible who are working on Austen now, and whose work

Delegates registering at the start of the three day conference

makes Austen scholarship the vibrant place we all inhabit.

The key motivation for this conference was to celebrate Austen's move to the village of Chawton in 1809. This bicentenary is an important one for the entire village. The Austen House Museum has recently reopened with a newly restored kitchen, and a custom designed education centre. It is an important bicentenary, too, for us here at Chawton House Library. It was because Edward Austen owned this Great House and the surrounding estate that he was able to offer his mother and sisters a home in the village, and the move in 1809 signaled for Austen the return to writing, and the most productive part of her literary career, at least as far as publication was concerned.

When thinking of anniversaries like this one, it is important to take stock of what has happened in scholarship since the last commemoration. In Austen's case, the last bicentenary was of course the anniversary of her birth in 1975, a bicentenary that led, naturally, to several commemorative publications of edited collections and special issues of journals. In his introduction to one such collection, John Halperin stressed that 'what follows in this book represents much of what is going on in Jane Austen studies now'. An initial glance down the list of chapters in that collection does not, however, suggest a radically different scholarly landscape from 1975: titles of individual essays are Jane Austen and her publishers, Jane Austen's nineteenth-century critics, Jane Austen and the novel. And perhaps one of the most influential monographs on Jane Austen from 1975, Marilyn Butler's *Jane Austen and*



the War of Ideas, is still essential reading for the Austen scholar, if only to provoke a different critical stance. Just as in 1975, we are still editing Austen, reexamining manuscripts and first editions, rereading published novels and fragments, thinking about the juvenilia.

In many crucial ways, however, the scholarly landscape has changed immeasurably, and I do think the papers that will be presented at this conference provide a useful snapshot of both 'new' and 'recent' directions. Since 1975, reader-response and reception theories have led us to examine Austen's reading and Austen's readers in closer detail: the exhibition of Austen's reading during her time at Chawton will highlight the diversity of the works both Austen and her family read and had direct access to. Translation studies have brought us back to those early translations, and led us to examine Austen in France, Austen in Japan, Austen in Italy, and the transformations and transmutations of the writer who, for some, epitomises all that is English. Work by book historians on the rise of the novel means that we understand a great deal more about the literary marketplace in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries than we did 34 years ago, and we are therefore in a position to understand more clearly Austen's place within that literary marketplace. Similarly, work on the Enlightenment and Romantic canon has allowed us to situate Austen more clearly within both, as an author with roots in the Augustan tradition, certainly, but looking forward too to a new European sense of the novel. Anglo-American feminists have brought to light countless other important women writers, and those who work on gender and queer theories are fruitfully bringing their research to their readings of Austen. Cultural historians and scholars of film studies have given us the critical apparatus to talk about Austen's appeal to the broader reading public, and to engage with the numerous recent sequels, prequels and adaptations in all genres. New media – those databases of reading experiences and of production and reception, online editions of novels and manuscripts – have affected how we research Austen, just as they have every author of her period. And importantly, postcolonial criticism has had a lasting effect on our reading of Austen – one needs only scan down the conference programme to see that explorations of *Mansfield Park* and studies of Fanny Price are still preoccupying scholars at this bicentenary celebration.

And of course this conference also commemorates another anniversary: it is six years since Chawton House Library opened its doors to the reading public, and six years since the first conference, on British Women's Writing, attracted an international audience of scholars. Many delegates have returned today, to my great pleasure. In her closing paragraph to the collection of essays that resulted from that inaugural conference organised by the University of Southampton back in 2003, Isobel Grundy wrote of the work Chawton House Library does to situate Austen within a community of women writers. She wrote:

Austen in *Northanger Abbey* [... claims] novels as works of genius: women's genius. In her brother's house she commanded wide-ranging and intricate prospects of books written before and all around her: both the ones on the shelves here and those other she probably carried in the circulating-library copies as she walked up from her cottage in the village. She focused her eyes particularly on books by women, and in them she saw not only the absence of harm, but the presence of great value. The opening of Chawton House Library promises to scholars and students hours and days of reading which will be not only productive but also deeply enjoyable, not only enjoyable but also highly educative.

Six years on, we have seen many hundreds of students and scholars come up the drive and through the library doors, in search of Austen and her contemporaries. It is my great pleasure to welcome you all to Chawton House Library today.

The conference concluded with a concert of music from the Austen family music books, performed in Chawton Church





DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Thursday 10 September

Heritage Open Day

As part of the Heritage Open Day 'Free entry for all' scheme, Chawton House opens its doors again. Light refreshments will be available. The House and Gardens will be open from 10.30am until 4.30pm.

Friday 18 September

Conference: Setting Agendas: text-setting and the libretto in contemporary British music.

This unique conference explores how practical and aesthetic considerations inform leading British composers in their use of the written word. The conference will conclude with a short chamber performance.

Friday 16 October

Fellow's Lecture: Professor Robert Crawford, University of St Andrews, 'Writing Burns' Biography'.

Thursday 19 November

Fellow's Lecture: Professor Ros Ballaster, Mansfield College, University of Oxford, speaking on Eliza Haywood.

Wednesday 9 December

Fellow's Lecture: Dr Fiona Price, University of Chichester, speaking on Sarah Green and the historical novel.

Saturday 5 December

Chawton House Library Book Fair

We are currently accepting donations of second-hand books in every genre, and published at any time. We ask only that they are in reasonable condition. All donations will be offered for resale at the Book Fair with all proceeds going directly into our acquisitions budget, to enable us to expand our collection of early women's writing, and improve our secondary collection.

All Fellow's Lectures follow the same format and are the same price:

Fellow's Lecture tickets: £10.00 (£7.50 for Friends & Students)
6.30pm Reception with complimentary wine
7.00pm Lecture

Please note: these prices are for Fellow's Lectures only, other events may be priced differently.

For further information or to book tickets for any of the above events, please call the events manager, Sarah Cross, on 01420 541010.



The Female Spectator

The Female Spectator is the newsletter of Chawton House Library, a British company limited by guarantee (number 2851718) and a registered charity (number 1026921).

MISSION

The Library's mission is to promote study and research in early English women's writing; to protect and preserve Chawton House, an English manor house dating from the Elizabethan period; and to maintain a rural English working manor farm of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

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