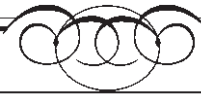


The Female Spectator

CHAWTON HOUSE LIBRARY



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CHAWTON HOUSE LIBRARY VISITING FELLOWSHIPS IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

In October 2007, our first Visiting Fellows arrived at Chawton House Library to take up their fellowships. We can now count over sixty 'alumni' from Europe, North America, Japan, Australia and, soon, India: our first Visiting Fellow from the country takes up her position later this year. Readers of *The Female Spectator* will have read many accounts of the varied and innovative research our Fellows have undertaken in recent years. This issue is no exception: Meghan Parker, a Visiting Fellow in 2010, demonstrates the importance of the Chawton House Library collection in her article about a 'mysterious note-writer' in the edition of Aphra Behn's *Love Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister* she consulted whilst in residence here.

As the doctoral dissertations and books start to come in to the collection, acknowledging the support offered by the Chawton House Library Visiting Fellowship scheme, it is clear that former Fellows found their time in the library invaluable. As the programme grows, it is a particular pleasure to see friendships forged at Chawton continuing to provide mutual support as colleagues meet again at international conferences such as the British and North American Societies for Eighteenth-Century Studies.

For the past two years, the Visiting Fellowships have been run in partnership with the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Southampton. Visiting Fellows have benefited enormously from the electronic resources offered by the Hartley Library at the University. Unfortunately, Chawton House Library is unable to subscribe to expensive, yet essential, resources for eighteenth-century scholars such as *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online*. Accessing the Hartley Library resources means that Visiting Fellows can consult digital editions of works that the library does not (yet!) hold a copy of. We are therefore delighted that this support will continue for 2011-12.

We are now inviting applications for the forthcoming academic year. This year, we have taken the decision to offer fellowships of no more than one month. This seems to be the best way of dealing with an increasing volume of applications, as the programme goes from strength to strength. To help us with the administration of the scheme, we are inviting hard copy applications only, and they must reach me at the University of Southampton (along with a confidential letter of reference, to be sent separately) by 9 May 2011.

As ever, the aim of our Fellowships is to enable individuals to undertake significant research in the long eighteenth century. In keeping with the mission of the CHL and the special qualities of the Library's collection, projects that focus on women's writing or lives during the period are warmly welcomed. Any proposal, however, that promises significant research on the long eighteenth century will be given careful consideration. We would also welcome applications from groups of up to four scholars who wish to pursue a joint project while in residence – this is a new move for 2011-12, and one suggested by the wonderfully collegiate atmosphere that most of our Fellows find when they are on site.

For further details about the Fellowships, and how to apply, please see our website: <http://www.chawton.org/education/fellowship.html> More information about the University of Southampton Centre for Eighteenth-Century Studies can be found here: <http://www.soton.ac.uk/scecs/index.html>

Gillian Dow



The Stables, Chawton House

The Female Spectator

Winter 2011

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THE JOHN ROCQUE MAP OF LONDON

By Jacqui Grainger, Librarian

The Map Room at Chawton House Library is dominated by a massive map of London which has been mounted onto a folding screen. It captivates visitors, who compare its record to their own knowledge of London – even the locations of the homes of eighteenth-century writers and publishers get identified. It is one of the collection of maps from the long eighteenth century at the library that focus on London and Hampshire, found in the appropriately named Map Room, but also in other locations around the house.

The map is one of John Rocque's 'Plan of the Cities of London and Westminster and borough of Southwark' and it measures six-and-a-half feet by thirteen. It is the result of the first thorough survey since William Morgan's 'London survey'd' which had probably first been issued in 1692, and was followed by three reprints up to 1732. As London had grown rapidly because of its expanding population, and the development of the West End, there was a need for a new and more thorough map.

John Rocque was born of Huguenot parents and had arrived in England, via Geneva, at some point before 1734. He worked as a garden surveyor for the London élite before taking on the challenge of surveying what was the largest city in the world. He began the work on the survey in 1739 and, with the engraver John Pine, sought the patronage of the Corporation of London.



Detail from the John Rocque map, 1746, in the collections at Chawton House Library.

Seven years later in 1746 the 24-sheet map was advertised in the *General Advertiser* and the map's subscribers had all received their copies by November 1747. The map then became available to non-subscribers. Contemporary advice to purchasers was to join the twenty-four sheets together as one map, either backed on canvas for a roller and pulley that may be let down for examination, or made into a beautiful and useful screen, such as we have at Chawton.

Far more details of the map's history can be found in *The A-Z of Georgian London*, with introductory notes by Ralph Hyde (London, Harry Margary, 1981).

ON-SITE ACCOMMODATION AT CHAWTON HOUSE LIBRARY NOW AVAILABLE

One never thinks of the south of England as being an isolated part of the world, and yet, on a cold and dark winter evening, the walk from Chawton to the train station in Alton does not seem like a very easy distance. I often feel myself that Chawton may have claims to being the darkest village in Hampshire, eschewing street lights for the most part. And although this adds to the charm, it can be an inconvenience for the visitor reliant on public transport.

We are delighted, therefore, to announce that we are now able to offer on-site accommodation for those who would like to come and visit the library. Perhaps you need to consult one of the texts in our library collection, but you cannot apply for a visiting fellowship for a longer stay. Perhaps you would like to come and hear one of our evening lectures, but you live too far away to do the return trip in a day. Perhaps you would like to explore the estate, and see the snowdrops, or the roses, in full glory.



A bedroom in the Stables

Whatever your reason for a visit, we can assure you of a very warm welcome. And we can offer bed and a self-service breakfast accommodation in a room with a private bathroom at the rate of £50 per room per night; £65 for a couple.

This accommodation will be available Monday to Thursday, with the possibility of some weekends too. For evening meals, you will share kitchen facilities with our Visiting Fellows, and with other guests in residence. Or you may prefer to eat in the local pub, The Greyfriars (torch provided!)

To enquire about availability, and to book, please contact Paul Dearn, Operations Manager: paul.dearn@chawton.net

We look forward to seeing you at Chawton House Library.

Gillian Dow



The Stables kitchen

A MYSTERIOUS NOTE-WRITER AND APHRA BEHN'S LOVE LETTERS BETWEEN A NOBLEMAN AND HIS SISTER

By Meghan Parker

I arrived at Chawton House Library to examine the paratextual materials several female authors, particularly Aphra Behn, used in their publications printed during the latter half of the seventeenth century. Since my project focuses upon paratextual materials, I concentrated upon the writings that preface the text proper. I was primarily interested in any differences I might find among printed editions. It was not, however, the printed pages of a particular text that would end up catching and holding my attention.

I wanted to explore how Behn, as a commercial author, carefully selected and utilised particular types of paratexts, and how those uses compared with contemporary and near-contemporary women writers. Behn's writings are of particular concern to me because she seems so much more self-conscious than some of her female contemporaries when writing her various introductions. One of the first texts I encountered was a 1721 edition of Aphra Behn's *Love Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister*.¹ Chawton houses several versions and editions of the Love Letters, and I wanted to conduct a thorough examination of the ways in which they differed in terms of the types, number, and formatting of the paratexts.

Upon opening the book, I first encountered a small scrap of paper, folded in half, and tucked just inside the front cover. In slightly faded ink, the handwritten note reads:

The Author of these letters was Mrs. Manley a celebrated writer of her time: her pen was most licentiously prostituted to the abuse of many noble personages, for the truth of w^{ch} these letters are founded, see an account in the Gentleman's Magazine for Sept^r 1764, in w^{ch} some of the characters appear to correspond wth others in this book as follows:

Philander	Ford L ^d Grey of Work
Beralti	George Earl of Berkley
Brilliard	Mr Turner
Cesario	Duke of Monmouth
Sylvia	Lady Henrietta Berkley
Myetilla the wife of Philander	Lady Mary own sister to Lady Henrietta wife to Lord Grey

¹ The first volume of this story appeared in print in 1684. The edition to which I refer here is *Love Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister; with the history of their adventures. In three parts. The sixth edition.* London: Printed for D. Brown, J. Tonson, B. Tooke, G. Strahan, S. Ballard, W. Mears, and F. Clay. 1721.

On the first and second flyleaves are the following notes, written in the same hand:

The only work besides the present * of this author, is 'The Secret History of the Rye-house Plot and of Monmouth's Rebellion, written by Ford, Lord Grey, in 1685.^x Now first published from a Manuscript signed by himself, before the Earl of Sunderland.' 1754. — * Which may admit of much doubt. ^x of this rebellion another account was published by Dr. Thomas Spratt, bishop of Rochester. Printed Folio Lond: 1685. "a book," says dr [sic]: Johnson, "which he thought convenient, after the Revolution, to etc. and excuse."²

A note on the verso of the second flyleaf reads "In the Harleian catalogue this is ascribed to Lord Grey. The copy in that collection was of the present edition, 1721. Bill: Hart: III. no: 19588."

Who, I wondered, could have written these notes? And why was this person so careful to preserve what she or he thought was the true history of the text by noting the (presumed) author's name and the true identities of the book's characters? Thus began my adventure to determine the identity of the person dubbed the "Unknown Writer."

First, Jacqui Grainger, Chawton's Librarian, and I discovered that Chawton had purchased the book containing the notes in 2004 from a Sotheby's auction of holdings belonging to the late John Brett-Smith. Jacqui and I tracked down some sales brochures for Mr. Brett-Smith's collection and followed them to several libraries and universities throughout the United Kingdom. I contacted these institutions, hoping to find other texts that had once been included either in the Harleian catalogue or that had once belonged to the same unknown writer I was chasing. I was not certain whether the writer, who had taken special care to ensure posterity, remained aware of the back-story connected to Behn's novel or whether the writer simply tended to write in his or her books. I wanted to ascertain whether there might be available some other texts from the Brett-Smith collection or from an earlier collection that contained notes from the same person's hand. Such a discovery was not to be, however, since none of the institutions and individuals I spoke with had any records of the sort I needed.

² I have included here the original punctuation, including the asterisk and the superscripted x, and the order of the footnotes as they appear in the hand-written note.

It was time to try another approach. At this point, I had two solid leads: the first was the date of the notes on the flyleaf, 1754, and the second was the provenance of the slender volume at the time the writer was recording his or her thoughts. Cambridge University's Brett-Smith Collection contains, at least in part, "[P]olitical plays, and coronation or city pageants and processions with theatrical interludes....[and] has as its main emphasis the original dramatic works of the period 1641-1715, mainly in quarto format extending in a more selective way to 1750."³ It seemed likely that Chawton's slender volume was once part of this same collection, but, in the end, it proved impossible to substantiate this suspicion since the collections and libraries contacted had insufficient information about earlier owners. This meant that the next best clues from the notes were the date they were written and the (apparently) personal connection the writer had to Behn's story.

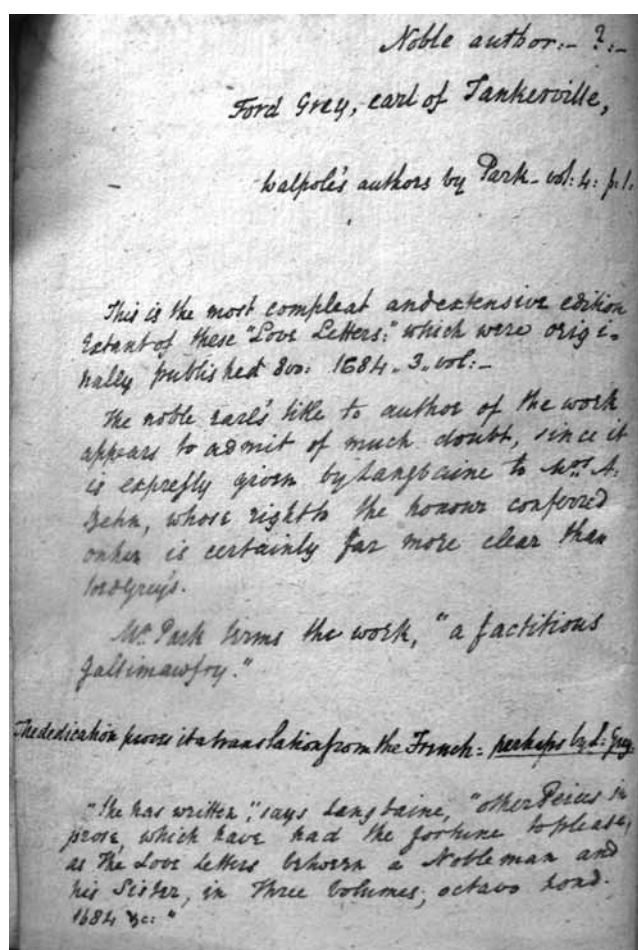
The writer of the notes in Behn's book seemed to be particularly well informed about the socio-political history of the events that contributed so materially to text. The writer was, then, in all likelihood, connected to the events personally, if from the comfortable distance of a few years' remove; and so the date of 1754 became of singular importance. Interestingly, Behn, who only started publishing her fiction in the last years of her life, chose not to put her name on the *Love Letters*, and signed it using only her initials, A.B. While the attribution today is not in question, and it may well be that her original readers recognized her work and her initials immediately, by the time the note writer was reading her fiction, that immediate recognition may well have been lost. It is unsurprising, then, that the unknown writer misidentifies the book's author first as Mrs. Manley and later as Ford Lord Grey, earl of Tankerville himself. The question then became who, even from the remove of more than 50 years from the initial publication date of 1684, might stand to gain from the notes' clarifications and none-too-flattering finger pointing.

The most obvious answer is a later earl of Tankerville. Because the date of the notes is 1754, the likeliest candidate is the third earl of Tankerville, Charles Bennet (1716-1767). The National Archives did not have any available examples of his handwriting, but the Northumberland Archives did. The documents held at the Northumberland Archive include letters with signatures and a Captain's commission into the army signed by Tankerville. The letter provides the most significant basis for comparison. The various signatures from several documents match the handwriting in the letter, proving (as does the Archival attribution) that the letter itself is in Bennet's hand, rather than having been written by a secretary and simply signed by Bennet. The letter itself provides a great many words, phrases, and individual letters, both capital and lower-case, which allowed careful comparison between many of those same words, phrases, and letters, as they exist in the Behn notes. Thus, an extensive comparison of the known handwriting samples of Charles Bennet with that of the unknown note-writer proves that the two sets of writing match.

And so it is my great pleasure to say that scholars and other interested persons can now discuss the notes in Behn's book not as those of the "Un-

known Writer," but as those of Charles Bennet, third earl of Tankerville. The larger issues here, of course, are that these notes and their writer ask us to consider how Behn's texts have spoken to, and about, their readers for centuries, and how they have asked us all to question both our role as the audience and the larger status of fiction in everyday life. Bennet's efforts to illuminate the *Love Letters'* factual basis indicate his belief that the written word, even such "licentiously prostituted" words as Behn's, would live on and influence later readers, when history itself might be at a loss to do so.

I would like to add a special thank you to Jacqui Grainger for her knowledge, her ongoing help, and her eternal patience.



One of several handwritten notes in Chawton's 1721 copy of *Love Letters Between a Nobleman and his Sister*, referring to the attribution of the work to Ford Grey

³ <http://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/deptserv/rarebooks/brett-smith.html>

HOUSE AND ESTATE NEWS

THE PUMP HOUSE

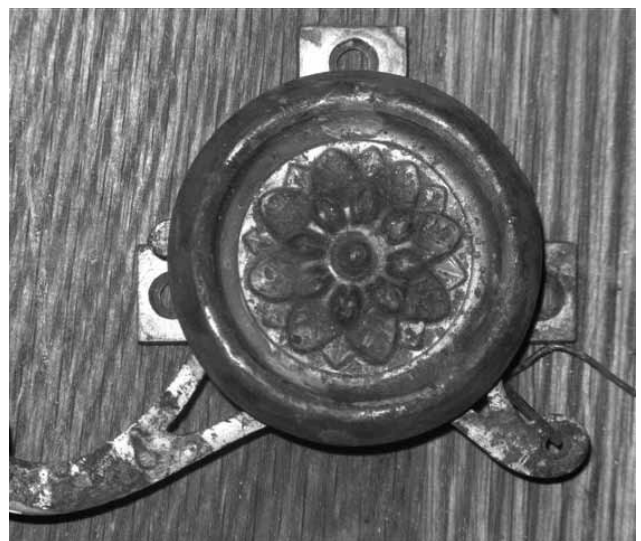
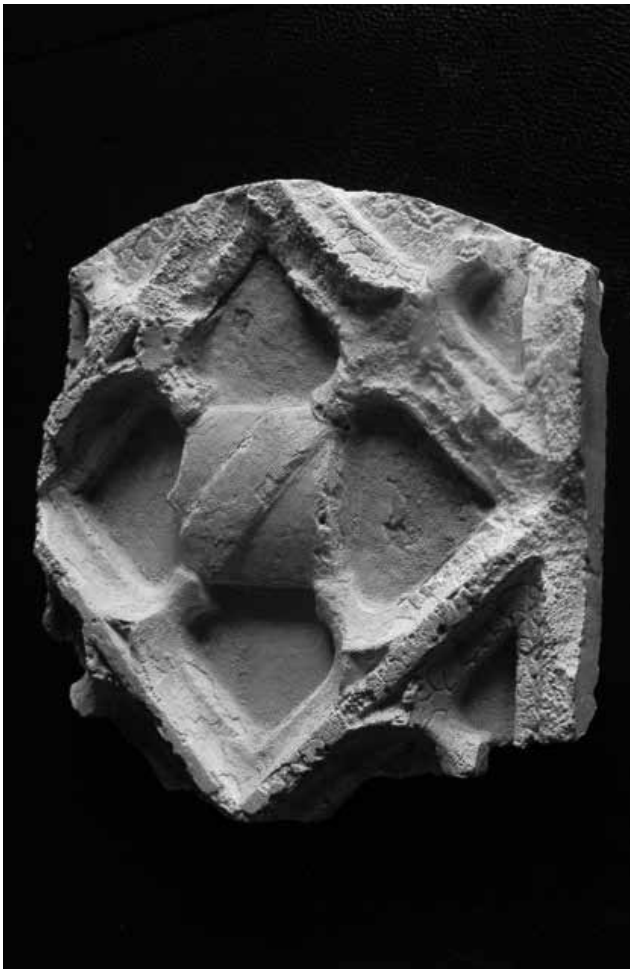
By Paul Dearn, Operations Manager

As part of our ongoing conservation work at Chawton House Library a review of the storage areas has been conducted in the main house and the immediate outbuildings. One of the areas being reviewed at the moment is an outbuilding known as the Pump House, which traditionally supplied water to the main house and estate but is now a store room. Part of the review is aimed at identifying items that may be of importance to Chawton House Library and cataloging them with the potential that these items may be placed on display.

Some of the items found so far in the Pump House have been fascinating, including some decorated plaster which had initially been found in the dell. (The dell is the dip to the right of the drive as you are walking from Chawton House to The Old Stables.) The theory is that perhaps the plaster was the remains of a decorated ceiling or a fireplace and that it might have come from the Dining Room. This is definitely a case for further research.

Among the finds is a late-Victorian or early-Edwardian push button flag board, the type that was used in many of the larger houses to call for the assistance of the staff in service. Equally fascinating is a push button mechanism of ornately decorated, gilt metal that would have been placed somewhere in the main house. A particularly nice soda siphon was found with the name Aylward & Sons Winchester & Southampton etched on the body. This firm was known as a beer, wine and spirits merchant and traded out of Jewry Street, Winchester as early as 1859 through to the 1960s. Just as interesting was a small collection of brown glazed jars, the type that was used in the kitchens of larger houses.

These items offer us a small insight into the social history and fabric of Chawton House which can, if displayed, offer a different peek into another fascinating side of this wonderful property.



CHAWTON CHRONICLES: A LETTER FROM THE CEO

It is a truth universally acknowledged that whilst individual and national differences are important, it is the common and shared knowledge of people that enables real progress. Increasing and exchanging that knowledge will be crucial to enhancing social, cultural and economic wealth over the coming decades. In this context, Chawton House Library is already playing a part since it has enjoyed, from its inception, an international scope. However, in 2011 this is set to grow substantially with the expansion of existing overseas links and through the setting up of new partnerships. Particularly exciting is a Visiting Scholarship Programme in Literature and Creative Writing for academic staff from universities in China. The project, which has been developed in association with colleagues from the Department for Continuing Education at the University of Oxford, is scheduled to welcome its first participants in September. The Library has greatly benefited, in the past, from the intellectual and social vitality that international visitors bring with them and we are looking forward to the extra dimension that this initiative will bring.

The China programme is, however, just one of a number of schemes that promise to make 2011 a memorable year. Another involves the reconstruction of an eighteenth-century barn on the Chawton House Estate. The barn has already been of great interest to the local community as it was previously on land owned by Sainsbury's at their store in nearby Alton. The structure was the last remaining element of the Dyer family's building yard which was established in the early 1780s. Interestingly, Edward Austen Knight's account records show that the firm worked on Jane Austen's House. For example – '1809 Nov 9 Paid John Dyer a Bill for work and materials at Mrs Austen's House £45/19/0'.

The historic and architectural interest generated by the barn led to a preservation order being served. Subsequently it was agreed that CHL would take the main timbers with a view to re-erecting and restoring them on the site of an earlier barn (evidenced in the Adam Callender painting of

Chawton House dated 1780 which now hangs in the Oak Room). The good news is that, subject to full planning permission, we intend to commence the project in the summer.

Once up, the barn will not only provide functional agricultural space for horses and cattle but will form part of our growing educational service; through talks, demonstrations and exhibits, groups will learn about farming history, sustainable agriculture, organic production and the importance of nature conservation and ecology.

Another notable development is the acquisition of a wonderful collection of books about the Brontës that has been generously donated by Mr Tony Yablon. Readers of *The Female Spectator* can look forward to hearing more about this collection in our next issue.

In the meantime, I have one final initiative that I wish to mention, namely the CHL short story competition. In 2009 the inaugural competition was a huge success, attracting over 300 submissions. The final judging was undertaken by Sarah Waters who gave up time in her very busy schedule to help us. The winning entries were later published by Honno in the UK under the title *Dancing with Mr Darcy*. Such was the success of the volume that the North American rights were acquired by Harper Collins and in October 2010 it appeared with a run of 30,000 copies under its William Morrow imprint.

As a result of this success, it was decided to repeat the competition and entries are now being accepted with a closing date of 31 March. This year we are inviting stories inspired by the heroes and villains in Jane Austen's novels. The Chair of Judges will be award-winning author Michèle Roberts. Full details, including rules and guidelines, can be found on the CHL website homepage www.chawtonhouse.org

Good luck to those of you who decide to enter.

Stephen
Lawrence



Adam Callender gouache, a prospect of Chawton House in the County of Hampshire, Circa 1780. Copyright Richard Knight

'WHAT SIGNIFIES A THEATRE?'

PRIVATE THEATRICALS, 1780-1820

By Judith Hawley and Elaine McGirr

Braving the inclement weather, a group of students, scholars and theatre practitioners came together at Chawton House to analyse and celebrate the old art of private theatricals. As we know from *Mansfield Park*, private theatricals were a popular but potentially disruptive pastime in Jane Austen's day. 'What signifies a theatre?' asks Henry Crawford, with an apparent lack of guile, 'We shall only be amusing ourselves.' Participants in this event destroyed neither the fabric of the house nor personal relationships; rather they explored the history and significance of private theatricals through performance, literary analysis and scholarly research.

For the evening of the 10th December, Chawton House was imaginatively transformed into Brandenburgh House, the west London residence of the Margrave and Margravine of Ansbach, formerly Lady Elizabeth Craven. Infected with 'theatro-mania' from an early age, Lady Craven was the author and director of a number of private theatricals. The evening's performance used the 1803 performance of *The History of Nourjahad* – and the rest of Elizabeth Craven's remarkable career – to explore the genre and its inherent tensions, especially those between public and private, professional and amateur, men and women, experience and youth, France and England, and the neo-classical and Romantic.

The performance began in the kitchen, where the actors, in character as friends and dependents of the Margravine, mingled with guests and prepared them for the evening's main event: a rehearsal of their hostess's latest theatrical. The Margravine, performed by Louise Parker, controlled the evening from her front-row seat, directing her actors, correcting her prompter, and arguing with the professional actress Frances Abingdon (played by Kayleigh Tremaine), who felt her talents were wasted in a small part and unflattering costume. The rehearsal ran into problems

and interruptions, from the discovery of an uncast role, which was quickly taken up by the Margravine's humble companion, Miss Graves, played by Katie Harrison, to an intrusion from the Margrave, played by Felix Clutson, in search of his slippers, which had been appropriated as props.

Each student researched and adopted their own '1803 character,' who then took on an additional role in *Nourjahad*. James Potter performed as William Beckford, who brought the spirit of his scandalous *Vathek* to his performance as Nourjahad. Celine Hawkes was fascinated by Lady Craven's pre-Revolution visits to Versailles and her subsequent support of aristocratic émigrés: she performed as the Duchesse d'Armagnac, whose *froideur* made her displeasure at being cast as Cadiga, the 'withered beauty' of Nourjahad's harem, abundantly clear. The harem was played by a quartet of young, single women enjoying the chance to display their talents and costumes. Special mention should also go to Caroline Icke, who performed the part of the Margravine's friend and rival, Lady Catherine Grey, who was only meant to serve as a narrator, but more than once tried to transform the theatrical into a one-woman show, and to Lexi Hatziharalambous, who, as

Lady Sibyl Damer, took on the roles of Mandana and the Genie – parts that, as the Margravine reminded audiences at the start of the rehearsal, she would normally perform herself.

The rehearsal format thus dramatised the blurring of boundaries that was to be theorised by several papers the next day. Not only did students develop their understanding of a historical period and genre often ignored in theatre studies, but they also used their '1803' knowledge to interrogate and reflect upon the present.

On the second day, scholars presented papers on both the literary representation of private theatricals and historical evidence of amateur performance. Gillian Skinner and Janine Haugen detailed Frances Burney's personal experience of drama and



Katie Harrison as Miss Emily Graves; Caroline Icke as Lady Catherine Grey; and Louise Parker as Lady Elizabeth Craven, the Margravine of Ansbach.

analysed her representation of theatricals in *The Wanderer*. After Meechal Hoffman's paper on *Mansfield Park*, a lively discussion about Austen's and Burney's supposedly anti-theatrical prejudice ensued. Two panels presented archival research and fresh interpretations of 'actual theatricals'. Michael Dobson discussed the friction between public and private theatre and showed how the two worlds sometimes came together. Helen Brooks presented further evidence of two-way traffic between professional and amateur drama. Some speakers focused on individuals: Chrisy



James Potter as William Beckford as Nourjahad with Lexi Hatsiharilambous as Lady Sibyl Damer as Mandana.

Dennis spoke on Elizabeth Farren, Countess of Derby and her contribution to the theatricals at Richmond House. Lady Elizabeth Harcourt was the subject of Carly Watson's paper, which opened up a view of the political importance of domestic engagement with the theatre. The role of women in private theatres was crucial both to the success of the endeavours and to the personal satisfaction they gave. Sometimes 'theatro-mania' infected several generations, as Anna Fitzer demonstrated in her paper on the Sheridans and the Le Fanus. It was also not confined to social élites or country houses, as Mary Isbell proved in her account of plays staged by members of the Royal Navy and by prisoners of war on board ship or in dock.

Our attention then shifted from the past to the present and future of amateur performance. Two panels addressed ways in which private theatricals, historical re-enactments and heritage sites might work together. Elaine McGirr enthused about how, in working towards their production, the cast of *Nourjahad* developed an insight into and affection for Elizabeth Craven and her era. Speakers were also alert to the possible drawbacks of staging the past: Stuart Andrew explored the disappointing amateurism of family heritage days. Jane Milling teased out the theoretical and methodological difficulties of historic re-enactments: the performance might be authentically historical, but the audience is always in the present. Helen Nicholson urged us to be more alive to the material properties of the physical space we currently occupied – the atmospheric oak-panelled dining room of Chawton House. Two theatre directors,

Abigail Anderson from the Theatre Royal, Bury St Edmunds and Kate Napier who runs the theatre company, Artifice, eloquently demonstrated ways in which performances in historic venues can create a zone of vibration – both stimulating and challenging – between the past and present. They achieved this effect in their contribution to discussion and in the final event of day. After the papers, we repaired to the Great Hall where, in front of a festive log fire, Abigail directed actors from Artifice in a rehearsed reading of a selection of dialogues and playlets. Introduced by Deirdre Le Faye, this lively reading of rarely-performed works by Jane Austen was a particular treat.

What emerged from the fascinating papers and well-informed debate which followed them was, first, that private theatricals, so often pushed to the margins of theatre history, constitute a significant feature of the cultural landscape of the period. Second, that enough people are working in this field now to constitute it as a productive area of scholarly research. Third, that much work remains to be done, both in recovering evidence of private performance and in interpreting its artistic and ideological resonances.

To build on the success of this event, we are organizing a second conference at Royal Holloway, University of London, 17-18 June 2011. This event will pursue the subject into the nineteenth century when amateur drama was no longer exclusively the preserve of the social élite. It will also explore further ways of bringing historic houses to life through theatre.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST IN 1790s LONDON

Helen Cole is researching the illustration of early eighteenth-century English novels for her PhD, using the collection at Chawton House Library as her principal resource. Here she looks not at fiction but at an illustrated account of a later eighteenth-century trial.

My work focuses on fiction in the eighteenth century, but here I've decided to dip into other territory in order to look at some rather different illustrated material at Chawton House Library. Throughout the period I'm working on, the novel constituted just a tiny fraction of the printed material issuing from English presses; historian James Raven estimates that in 1770, fiction amounted to no more than about 4% of total book and pamphlet production.¹ If people weren't reading novels, what *were* they reading? From a modern perspective, the answers can be surprising: we no longer share the eighteenth-century thirst for printed sermons, for instance! But one type of reading material entices readers now just as it did then: people are, and always have been, eager for details of sensational legal trials.

If you followed the BBC TV series 'Garrow's Law' last year, you might remember the early episodes in which eighteenth-century rookie barrister William Garrow experiments with unorthodox courtroom strategies. As the programme-makers tell it, he hones his technique in defence of a man dubbed 'the Monster', who has been accused of assaulting women on the streets of London. Garrow is a real historical figure whose skill in cross-examination was widely admired in the 1780s and 1790s, and who rose to

the position of Attorney-General in 1813. Equally real is the case of 'the Monster' – although I can find no evidence that Garrow played any part in it.

Newspapers in the year 1789 closely followed the

Monster's activities as he approached a series of fashionable young women in the London streets, typically striking up a conversation with his victim before stabbing her with a small knife. Pleasurably alarmed, the public flocked to the theatre to see a 'new musical piece' called *The Monster, or, the Wounded Ladies*.² Countless false reports of assaults by 'the Monster' began to appear, and anyone intent on making mischief could simply point the finger at a passer-by: 'Yesterday evening...a gentleman of family and fortune was surrounded in Holborn by a number of Pick-Pockets...who called out "That is the Monster, he has just cut a woman"...till at length he was knocked down'.³ When a young woman called Ann Porter was stabbed outside her home in St James's in January 1790, Rhynewick (or Renwick) Williams, a 30-year-old who crafted artificial flowers for a living, was identified as the perpetrator and brought to trial.



The portrait of Rhynewick Williams from Chawton's copy of the report of his trial, 1790

In court, Williams protested mistaken identity and produced numerous witnesses to corroborate his alibi, but the jury, expertly steered, preferred the evidence of Ann Porter, as well they might: 'the

¹ James Raven, *British Fiction, 1750-1770: A Chronological Check-list of Prose Fiction printed in Britain and Ireland* (New Haven: University of Delaware Press, 1987), 10.

² *The World*, (London, 8 May 1790), issue 1044

³ *The World*, (London, 11 May 1790), issue 1046

prisoner at the bar has made a wanton, wilful, cruel, and inhuman attack upon the most beautiful! the most innocent! the most lovely! and perhaps I shall not trespass upon the truth, when I say the best work of nature!’, breathed prosecuting counsel in his opening address.⁴ The temperature continued to rise as Miss Porter’s slashed pink silk dress and shift were exhibited to the gentlemen of the jury, who then listened as the doctor who attended her testified that ‘the blow must have been with great violence; part of the blow was below the bow of the stays; if not, it would probably have pierced even the abdomen’.⁵ Williams was sent to Newgate for six years, convicted on three counts of assault, but continuing to protest his innocence. He then disappears from view.

Chawton House Library has a report of the trial compiled and published in 1790 by the short-hand writer to the Old Bailey. Its fifty-five closely-typed pages cost 1s 6d at the time. The pamphlet is fronted by two engravings, one of the defendant and one of Ann Porter. They may have been an integral part of the published account, but it’s also possible that they were sold separately as free-standing prints which were then collated with the account by its original owner.

⁴ The Proceedings of the Old Bailey online, www.oldbaileyonline.org, reference number t17900708-1. Interestingly, the account given in *The Trial at Large of Rhynwick Williams* uses exactly the same words but omits the repeated exclamation marks, so that the address by the prosecuting counsel comes across far less dramatically.

⁵ Hodgson, *The Trial at Large of Rhynwick Williams*, 25.

The engravings work hard to ensure that the reader is in no doubt where his or her sympathies should lie, even before the drama of the trial begins to unfold. In what seems to be an impression taken from the life in the manner of modern-day court sketches, Williams is shown corralled behind



The portrait of assault victim Ann Porter from Chawton's report of Williams's trial

a spiked barrier, the teeth of which are (literally!) a pointed reminder of the vicious blade he is supposed to have wielded. We are invited to find his level gaze and collected demeanour chilling: ‘THE MONSTER’, proclaims the caption unequivocally, in capitals. For those of us not caught up in the media frenzy of the time, there are nagging doubts: the slight figure hedged about with spikes looks mild-mannered and even dignified. Ann Porter, in contrast, is not portrayed in a courtroom setting, as if it would be unfeeling to fix her forever in the ordeal of the witness-box. For a woman to address the public (whether in the theatre, concert hall or courtroom) was to play dangerously with cultural mores that valorised feminine reticence. Instead, Miss Porter’s winsome face is presented in the semblance of a painted miniature – the kind of likeness

that parents, siblings or lover might keep for private view, and the antithesis of a public portrait. Ann’s father kept a tavern and ‘cold-bath’ in St James’s, but here she is every inch the fine lady. In case we hesitate to draw the ‘correct’ conclusion about the respective parties, Miss Porter is described in a caption that approximates the flow of contemporary script as ‘Miss Ann Porter, who was so Barbarously treated by the Monster’.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Friday 4th March – Chawton House Library London

Lecture co-hosted with the University of Notre Dame

Professor Cora Kaplan (Honorary Professor of English, Queen Mary, University of London; Emeritus Professor of English, University of Southampton).

'I am black': Aesthetics, race and politics in women's anti-slavery writing from Hannah More to Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

Venue: University of Notre Dame's London Centre, 1 Suffolk Street, London SW1Y 4HG. 6.00 pm Reception with drinks. 7.00 pm Lecture. Free entry, but please reserve a place by contacting Chawton House Library – details below.

7th April – Chawton House Library Evening Lecture

Dr Sarah Haggarty (Newcastle University)

William Blake's *Songs*.

14th April – Chawton House Library Open Day

The house and grounds will be open to the public from 10:30 am and last entry will be 4:30 pm. Library exhibition, Hampshire Regency dancers, shire horse demonstra-

tions, children's house trail & garden trail plus children's activities. Refreshments & light lunches available in the Old Kitchen. Entrance fee: £5 for adults, £3 children.

Wednesday 20th April - Estate Walk

Visit the Shire Horses and take a guided walk through the beautiful and historic parkland and gardens of Chawton House, followed by tea and cake in the Old Kitchen. Stout footwear required. Tickets: £10.

Thursday 12th May - Evening Lecture

Dr Françoise Carter (Independent Scholar)

Jane Austen, *Dancing and the Marriage Market*.

All evening lectures begin with a wine reception and canapés at 6:30 and the lectures begin at 7 pm. Tickets: £10.00 (£7.50 for Friends and students). Tickets for other events may be priced differently.

To book tickets for any of the above events please telephone Corrine Saint on 01420-541010.

The Female Spectator

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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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