Jane Austen and applying them to Adam Buck’s numerous portraits: “Anything energetic, poignant, heartfelt, is utterly out of place in commending these works” (Letter of 12 April 1850).

I supply these connections between Austen and Adam Buck’s works myself, since I write for JASNA News; for though the book’s author, Peter Darvall, mentions her only once, and then with a spelling error: “Mrs. Bennett’s daughters, the young heroines of Jane Austen’s Pride and Prejudice, would have worn similar gowns.”

Yes, these elegant portraits of the gentry of the day have an irresistible feel of the period, and a charm of their own. Skating Lovers (below left), with its finely controlled motion, has an Austenesque appeal. One could play a game of re-naming the sitters: The Duke of York (figure 26) could be Admiral Croft; Vice-Admiral Robert Plampin (figure 96) for me has a look of Captain Harville; a beautifully-touched “portrait of a young girl by a river” (figure 15) might be Harriet as Emma initially sees her.

Adam Buck was an Irishman from Cork who came to England to make his fortune. Judging from the status of many of his subjects—including the Edgeworth family, the Duke of York, Edmund Burke, and many other familiar names—he was highly successful. He was certainly prolific. But the palmy days of the Victorian art scene had not yet arrived, and the status of the artist, particularly such as worked in watercolor, aquatint, and other graphic media rather than in the more prestigious oils, was not high; nor were the prices he could ask. Buck worked hard not only on individual portraits, but also on prints that could be sold in large numbers. He was one of the stable of designers kept busy by Ackerman’s printing house. He had to resort to pot-boilers, like the many designs of mothers and children, with titles like Mamma at Romps and The Dancing Darling. And we are told that for all his extraordinary competence in what he did, he died in poverty.

The book, like the portraits in it, is meticulously put together, with beautifully reproduced images and many of them, and conscientious attention to matters like provenance. The letterpress is informative and exact. One gets no gossipy biographical details, no anecdotes or quotations from letters that might acquaint us with Adam Buck’s voice or personality. And the punning title, A Regency Buck, is irritatingly misleading. For me, expecting from the title to learn about Beau Brummel and his ilk, the first words of the Preface, “Adam Buck was in many ways the quintessential miniaturist” were a severe anti-climax. Not that I don’t want to hear about Beau Brummel and his ilk, the first words of the Preface, “Adam Buck was in many ways the quintessential miniaturist” were a severe anti-climax. Not that I don’t want to hear about it. And see the work of, one who

And yet … I find myself veering towards Charlotte Brontë’s reservations about

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