



## ON AUSTEN AND ADAM SMITH

### *Pride and Profit: The Intersection of Jane Austen and Adam Smith*

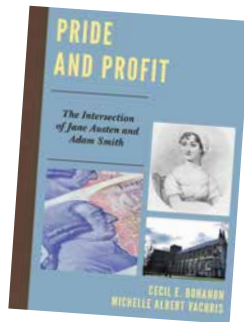
By Cecil E. Bohanon and Michelle Albert Vachris

Lexington Books (2015), ix + 195 pages

Paperback, \$42.99

Review by Michael D. Lewis

When Austen replaced Darwin on the British £10 note, responses were mixed. Some complained that a major scientist had given way to a mere novelist. Others were excited that the change represented a mainstream acknowledgment of what we've always known: Austen's significant place in British history. Economists Cecil E. Bohanon and Michelle Albert Vachris highlight her prominence in intellectual history by juxtaposing this major novelist with a major philosopher.



This book is organized in three parts: The first summarizes Smith's moral philosophy. The second reads Austen in light of this philosophy, analyzing virtue and vice in her fiction. The third describes economic life and transformation in Smith's and Austen's time.

The summary of Smith's philosophy is enlightening—with a capital “E,” as the authors stress how it is representative of the Scottish Enlightenment. They lucidly define and carefully distinguish between Smith's key terms, and helpfully offer an acronym for three central virtues: PB&J, for prudence, benevolence, and justice.

The catalog of Smithian concepts in Austen's fiction is exhaustive. Bohanon and Vachris discuss Elinor Dashwood's self-command and consideration for others; Elizabeth and Darcy's mutual humbling; General Tilney's greed that produces broken promises; and that “Mrs. Norris's attitude toward Fanny is not benevolent and is not consistent with justice” (62). The book's value lies not in revelations or novel interpretations but in situating what we already know in terms of Smith's philosophy.

The opening claim is that Austen “is channeling Adam Smith” (4), and later the authors contend that “Austen affirms and augments Smith's picture” (54). But simple affirmation often takes precedence over complex augmentation. So, Smith's analysis is “echoed in Austen” (22) or “Smithian moral theory rings loud and clear” (50).

Does Austen simply redirect Smithian sound waves? Such characterization, I worry, underestimates the dynamism and complexity of Austen's imagination and ethics.

Also, are there moments when Smithian thought rings, not loudly and clearly, but quietly and dissonantly? Bohanon and Vachris might have spent more time considering disharmony and subtlety.

One possible disharmony concerns gender. One of the book's best discussions analyzes Emma as a “man of system” (114). Smith deplores political leaders who do not rely on persuasion but simply move citizens like chess pieces. Emma's matchmaking resembles this political chess. This interpretation is exciting but it doesn't pursue the implications of reading *Emma* in terms of political leadership. What does it mean that Smith nearly always discusses virtue and vice in terms of men, but Austen depicts (im)moral women? Does Smith consider women to be moral agents, as Austen clearly does?

While the book misses some valuable opportunities, it provides important context for Austen's fiction and analyzes ideas and texts with clarity and enthusiasm.

*Michael D. Lewis is an assistant professor of English at Washington and Jefferson College, where he teaches 19th century British literature.*

## ‘EXTRAORDINARY BURSTS OF MIND’

### *Jane Austen and Sciences of the Mind*

Edited by Beth Lau

8 b/w illustrations, Routledge (2018)

238 pages, hardcover, \$155

Review by Michele Larrow

The essays in *Jane Austen and Sciences of the Mind* explore cognitive-science approaches to literary criticism: how we understand others' mental experiences; the importance of memory, imagination,

and attention; how social interaction shapes the mind; and how to represent mind-body interactions. The authors argue that Austen's works are perfect for engaging with modern mind sciences due to Austen's complex social exchanges and her astute portrayal of characters' inner lives.

Three essays focus on Theory of Mind—our ability to comprehend other people's thoughts, emotions, and motives. William Nelles explores how Austen's examples of free, indirect discourse in the early works reveal how some characters are oblivious to another's point of view. Beth Lau argues that, in *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine Morland has to learn to judge the validity of the source of her information to function well in society. Patrick Colm Hogan examines how characters in *Persuasion* can understand others' mental experiences through reasoning or imagination.

Different aspects of memory, attention, and imagination are explored in two essays. For instance, Alan Richardson looks at the memory-imagination link in Austen's works, describing how emotion-tinged memory becomes projected into imagined futures, as when Elinor imagines Edward's future married to Lucy.

Cognitive literary studies also investigate the social mind, the belief that the individual mind is constructed through interactions with others. Wendy S. Jones examines the neurobiology and psychology of attachment love, romantic love, and sexual desire in *Mansfield Park*. Matt Lorenz discusses group identity versus individuality in *Pride and Prejudice*, arguing that, although Elizabeth Bennett values her individuality and does not strongly identify with her family and social group, she defends her group from high-status outsiders such as Darcy and Lady Catherine.

A final theme addressed is the complexity of mind-body connections. Kate Singer discusses the challenges of representing bodily agitation that is preverbal emotion and the process of labeling a feeling, including how media such as letters, pictures, and even the letter blocks in *Emma* can help characters make sense of feelings. Kay Young explores Austen's term "elasticity of mind" or what she calls "resilience," which all the heroines possess and is a product of temperament and the heroine's ability to self-reflect.

This engaging collection applies cognitive science to offer new insights into Austen at a level understandable to a general reader of Austen criticism. A minor quibble: I wish there had been more on *Sense and Sensibility* and *Emma*, but the book contains a wealth of interesting analyses.

**Michele Larrow is a licensed psychologist. She helped found JASNA's Eastern Washington/Northern Idaho Region and serves as its co-regional coordinator.**



## KIND SISTER, TRUE FRIEND

### *The Austen Girls: The Story of Jane & Cassandra Austen: The Closest of Sisters*

By Helen Amy

Amberley Publishing (2019)

288 pages, 27 color + 17 b/w illustrations

Hardcover, \$32.95

Review by Laurie Kaplan

What information does Helen Amy's dual biography add to our knowledge about the lives of *The Austen Girls*? That Cassandra and Jane were the closest of sisters is a truism: Other biographers have explored the intensity of their sororal relationship, and Deirdre Le Faye's collection of Jane Austen's letters verifies how Jane wrote to Cassandra whenever they were separated. The difficulty for any Austen biographer is the fact that, after Jane's death, Cassandra censored some of her sister's letters and burned many others. Discreet Cassandra also destroyed her own letters to Jane.

For this biography, Amy draws on materials from George Holbert Tucker's *A History of Jane Austen's Family* and Park Honan's *Jane Austen: Her Life*, rather than from the more popular biographies—such as Claire Tomalin's *Jane Austen: A Life*. To create a composite portrait of the sisters, Amy incorporates letters from family members, excerpts from Jane's own letters, and anecdotes from the Austen-Leigh brothers' family records. Family recollections are often nonspecific. Although James Edward Austen-Leigh generalizes about the "differences" between the sisters, describing Cassandra as "colder and calmer; ... prudent and well judging," while Jane displays a "sunniness of temper" along with "sound sense and judgment" (167), these "differences" seem to indicate similarities, perhaps because details and examples went up in flames.

Amy notes that Jane's letters reveal how she depended on Cassandra's praise and approval, and how she honed her novelistic epistolary style for Cassandra's pleasure. Amy judges that Cassandra, acting as a

protective—and prudent—older sister, “did not want any family members who read the letters to know that her beloved sister was sometimes critical and unkind” (253).

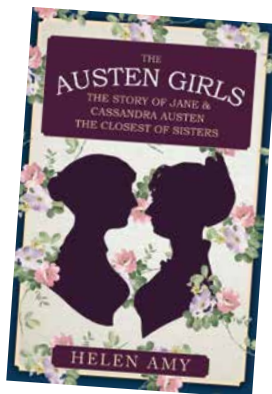
Building the case (and repeating the idea) that the Austen sisters were the best of friends, this biography also shows that they were the best of sisters-in-law and aunts. They attended the lying-ins; they befriended, taught, and nurtured their brothers’ numerous offspring. Amy wants to dispel the myth that Jane disliked children; as we know, she disliked badly behaved children—and depicts them in her fiction. Although Cassandra was “shrewd and sensible ... [and] easy to talk to,” and Jane was “demonstrative and less restrained than her sister” (62), both women were popular with their brothers’ extended families (two of the Austen brothers had 11 children each). Although the author does not say it, the unmarried Austen sisters functioned as excellent babysitters.

*The Austen Girls* is an accessible biography, replete with some lovely illustrations. The inclusion of a family tree would have clarified the complex relationships among the various Edwards and Cassandras and Henrys as well as the Austen brothers’ children from first and second marriages.

Caveat: Some readers may consider the word “girls” objectionable and would prefer “women” as the appropriate noun.

Interestingly, Lucy Worsley’s book of the same name as Amy’s is to be published in 2020.

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## ‘FAVoured BY NATURE’ *Sanditon*

**Miniseries based on Jane Austen’s unfinished novel, created and co-written by Andrew Davies, co-written by Justin Young and Andrea Gibb  
Premieres January 12 on MASTERPIECE on PBS**

*Review by Susan L. Wampler*

What Jane Austen envisioned for her unfinished novel *Sanditon* will forever remain a mystery. The 12-chapter fragment foretold a departure from her previous work, and Janeites have long speculated on her intentions. In 2020, *Sanditon* finally gets its screen treatment with an eight-part miniseries created by screenwriter Andrew Davies, famed for penning the 1995 BBC *Pride and Prejudice*, three other Austen adaptations, and countless other classics.

Only the first four episodes of *Sanditon* were available for review, so how the series ultimately fares will remain enigmatic in the U.S. until spring. It aired in the U.K. in fall 2019. Davies courts controversy with

certain scenes—from nude sea-bathing among male characters to “sexing up” some relationships.

Janet Todd in her introductory

essay to the 2019 Fentum Press edition of *Sanditon* suggests that “A gentleman could dip in the nude” (40). Some other choices seem to defy historical accuracy but make for good cinematic storytelling.

The adaptation imparts a distinct feminist undertone. For instance, it is Charlotte Heywood, not her father, who assists the Parkers after their carriage overturns. She later proves an able nurse as well as a budding architect. The plight of women, poor dependent relations, and the working class is central in the miniseries and feels appropriate from our modern lens. But it’s a little more soap than satire.

Mary Parker remains quietly supportive of her husband but has a real backbone, unlike in the novel. However, the hypochondriac wing of the Parker family remains as absurd as in Austen’s original. Sir Edward Denham and his sister are cartoonishly villainous, although the latter evokes some sympathy as the story progresses. Lady Denham is as imperious and uncouth as in Austen.

The adaptation evokes scenes from earlier works. For instance, a conversation between Charlotte and Sidney Parker at a ball harkens back to Elizabeth’s trying to make out Darcy’s character. Lady Denham’s impertinent questions recall Lady Catherine, and then some. And Charlotte opines that marriage should be based on mutual love and affection, again bringing to mind Elizabeth Bennet.

The miniseries is on less firm ground with Miss Lambe—the only black character in an Austen work—and Sidney Parker, both of whom are only briefly mentioned in Austen’s fragment but seemed destined for major roles. Their backstories were just beginning to develop in the first episodes. Rose Williams and Theo James have great chemistry as Charlotte and Sidney. The production values and the cast are excellent.

It will be fascinating to observe how the adaptation handles the issues of slavery and speculation, and I look forward to seeing how the story unfolds.

*Susan L. Wampler is editor of JASNA News.*



*Rose Williams as Charlotte Heywood*

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