

# Putting Jane Austen in Order

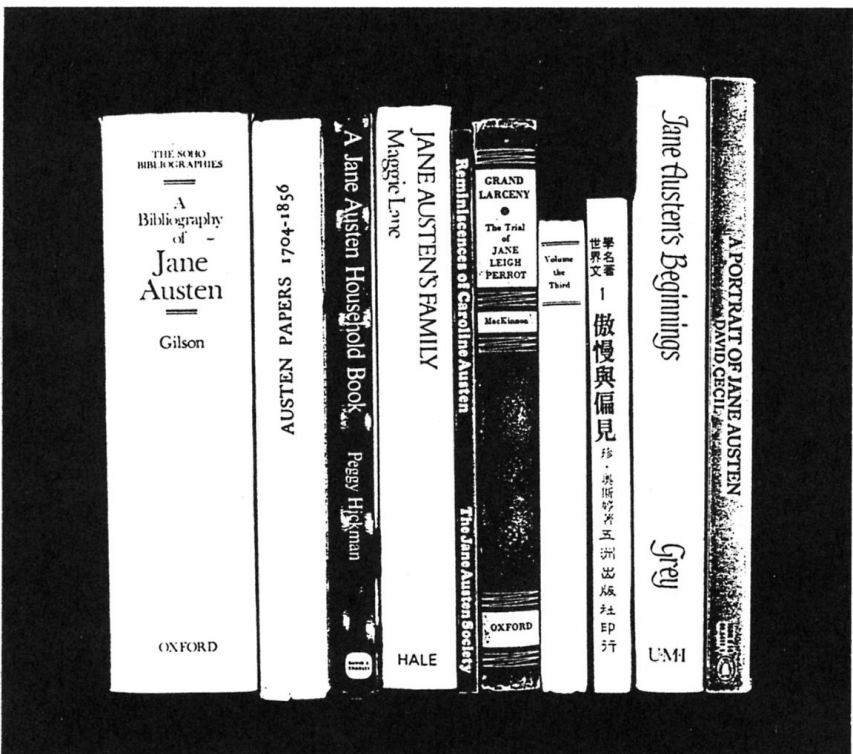
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When I was a librarian, one of my colleagues once asked me to explain why I possessed about forty copies of *Pride and Prejudice*. I easily explained that I needed these copies in connection with my bibliography of Jane Austen, since they were, bibliographically speaking, all different (as regards date of publication, publisher, editor, illustrator and so on). But if I had been asked how I *arranged* these forty copies, I might have found an answer more difficult.

Having lived for twenty-five years in the same house, with the arrangement of my books a constant for much of that time, I had not given very much thought to the rationale of that arrangement. But moving house, and striving to restore order to a collection of books which seemed to emerge in total chaos from the moving firm's boxes, may offer a good occasion for some consideration of the how and why of arranging books (and especially books relating to Jane Austen).

Obviously, the primary reason for arranging books in any particular way is convenience: to make it possible to find an individual book when wanted, with the minimum of delay. A shelf or two of books on a specific topic may call for no principle of arrangement, since the eye can quickly run along the spines and identify the volume required; but a larger collection calls for the



use of some system. At the other end of the spectrum, collections of thousands of books in libraries have led to the devising of elaborate schemes of classification, each equipped with a notation, a series of symbols (generally a combination of numerals or of letters and numerals) which indicate immediately the place of an individual book in the overall arrangement, and also serve as reference from a catalogue entry, enabling the book to be located. There cannot be many *private* collections of books which need such elaborate treatment, although modern developments in computer science may lead to the possession by more private individuals of the technology capable of producing catalogues of their collections (I am glad not to be in this category). I should stress that the arrangement of a private collection of books must remain a matter for the individual; it should be only what the individual owner finds convenient. No generally applicable rules can be laid down. I can only present the problems, set out the categories of material, and say what arrangement I have myself found workable, without attempting or wishing to impose this on others.

A collection of books relating to Jane Austen must comprise two basic categories of material: texts of the writer's works, and studies of the writer and her works. Texts will include collected editions (that is, sets of numbered volumes produced for sale as sets, of the novels alone or of the complete works) and separate editions (of individual novels, minor works—collectively or singly—letters, and adaptations of texts: dramatisations, continuations or completions). Studies will include bibliographies and reference works, periodical publications, exhibition catalogues &c., biographies, and critical studies (either general or of individual works, or of aspects such as music). I would exclude from any consideration of arrangement the ephemera (stamps, postcards, separate illustrations, newspaper cuttings &c.) which I feel are more usefully kept in albums or folders apart from the main collection. A collection may of course also include what librarians call “non-book media”: gramophone records, tape recordings, videos, objects (of art and otherwise: for example, china figures or other representations of the author or her characters), original drawings for illustrations to the novels, paintings and drawings by members of the Austen family and their descendants, and memorabilia of all kinds; for these no arrangement can be suggested.

Books in the first category, texts, may be arranged in a variety of ways. Some may prefer to keep collected editions distinct from separate editions; if collected editions are numerous, they may be arranged by date of publication or by publisher (not all will have an editor, so the editor's name is not a useful point of reference). Separate editions too may be arranged by date or by publisher, with individual novels in one indiscriminate series or in separate sequences (alphabetical by title or by order of first publication). Sub-categories are possible; if the collection contains many illustrated editions, these might be arranged by the name of the illustrator, or critical editions might be in order of the name of the editor.

Studies too may be arranged by author or by date of publication (if by date, those published in one year may be sub-arranged by author). Here, too,

variations are possible; bibliographies and reference works may be kept in one separate sequence, biographies in another, critical studies in another—although the enthusiastic collector will find all too soon, as does the librarian (I speak feelingly here from my own experience) that books just do not fit neatly into categories; there are, for example, too many books which contain both biography and criticism. Generally, I think a multiplicity of categories will prove to be unworkable.

Another overall problem is physical form. Most bookshelves are adapted for books of average size, so that those over a certain height may need to be kept in a separate outsize section (needing its own arrangement). Unbound books and pamphlets also present problems. Ideally they should be kept as separate items in the normal sequence, but protected by cases or envelopes; if this should be impracticable on grounds of expense, pamphlets in particular may be kept in boxes (possibly at the end of the sequence).

A further problem may be one of space. If a collection is too large to be kept in one room, should different categories of material be in different rooms, or should the whole collection run in one sequence from room to room?

Inconsistency must always be permitted, as expressing the individual character of a collection. There will always be books which, because of their value, associations, physical condition &c. it is not thought desirable to keep with the main collection (one notable collector of my acquaintance kept her first editions in a small bookcase by her bed, where she could touch them frequently, as, for example, when she woke up in the night).

To move from general principles to a particular case: my own collection. Here the main collection is arranged basically in the order of the sections of my bibliography (*A Bibliography of Jane Austen*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982). For those without access to a copy of this book, these sections are: A. Original editions. B. First American editions. C. Translations. D. Editions published by Richard Bentley. E. Later editions and selections. F. Minor works. G. Letters. H. Dramatisations. J. Continuations and completions. K. Books owned by Jane Austen. L. Miscellaneous. M. Biography and criticism. Books which in practice one would obviously not arrange in such a sequence would be those in Sections A, B and K, together with nineteenth-century translations from Section C; if one were fortunate enough to possess such books they would be too valuable to be placed on ordinary shelves. Modern translations, Section C, are arranged alphabetically by the English form of the name of the language, and then by the English titles of the novels in the order of first publication, and under individual novels by date. To keep separate the editions issued by one publisher, Richard Bentley, Section D, may seem surprising; but Bentley was the first to reissue the novels in England after 1818, and was probably responsible for printing more editions and issues of the novels in the United Kingdom than any other publisher, at least until the Dent and Macmillan editions in the 1890s and later. Bentley editions before 1870 are all now very uncommon, especially in their original bindings, so may again not be kept in the general sequence.

Section E. Later editions and selections, has a chronological arrangement, with collected editions and separate editions in one sequence (under each year collected editions come first, followed by separate titles, arranged for convenience in order of first publication).

It seemed useful to separate from the novels the minor works, juvenilia &c., Section F; these are arranged simply in order of date of publication. Section G. Letters, has again a chronological arrangement (whether complete or of partial texts).

In Section H. Dramatisations, I put first a few works containing dramatisations of more than one novel, by date of publication, then versions of individual titles in order of first publication, by date under each novel.

Similarly in section J. Continuations and completions, I originally placed after what was then the one novel (*Old friends and new fancies*, 1913) including characters from all six main novels, those based on individual novels, by title of the original, in order of first publication, and then by date. So many titles of this kind have been published since the appearance of my bibliography that revision of this section may prove necessary.

Section L. Miscellaneous, has sub-sections devoted to the trial of Mrs. Leigh Perrot, the anonymous "Mary Hamilton," verses addressed to Jane Austen (mostly not separately published, so unlikely to form part of a collection) and other miscellaneous (unclassifiable) items in a chronological sequence.

Section M. Biography and criticism, was the largest in the book. Books and articles (or parts of books), are arranged in one chronological sequence, alphabetically by author under each year. But inconsistency must come into play here. I have found that although a chronological sequence works well in the bibliography (where indeed it is essential, to illustrate the historical development of Jane Austen studies), since the index makes it a simple matter to trace the date of any publication, in an actual collection of books a chronological sequence is not practical; one does not necessarily remember the date of publication of a particular book, so that much time may be wasted in tracking it down (since books almost never—except sometimes when rebound by a private binder—carry their dates on the spines). In practice therefore I arrange studies in an alphabetical sequence by author, irrespective of the date of publication. Inconsistency may again arise with periodicals (although the private collector is perhaps less likely to own articles in periodicals); my own practice is to stick to the arrangement by author when the issue or volume contains only one article on Jane Austen, but to file under the title of the periodical when the issue or volume contains more than one such article. I also find it useful to keep bibliographies and reference material, and periodicals, separate from, and preceding, the main sequence, and I do have separate sequences for large books, and for some pamphlets (especially the numerous offprints of articles which generous authors have given to me over the years).

I should be interested to hear how other collectors arrange their own collections.