

Austen Images

Jane Austen's *The History of England* & Cassandra's Portraits

Edited by Annette Upfal and Christine Alexander.
Juvenilia Press, 2009. iv + 73 pages.
24 illustrations. Paperback. \$12.00.

Review by Peter Sabor.

The History of England “by a partial, prejudiced, & ignorant Historian,” Jane Austen’s sparkling comedy which presents English history as the rise and fall of the Stuarts, has appeared in several modern editions. One, published by the British Library in 1993, includes a superbly crisp color facsimile of the manuscript in its possession and a brief introduction by Deirdre Le Faye, but no commentary. Two years later, the Juvenilia Press brought out an edition with an incisive introduction and notes by Jan Fergus and a team of Lehigh University students. That edition included Cassandra’s illustrations of the monarchs, but only in black and white reproductions. The new Juvenilia Press edition is edited by Annette Upfal, a doctoral student at the University of New South Wales, and her thesis director, Christine Alexander, who has also, since 2001, been the General Editor of the Press, succeeding its founding editor, Juliet McMaster. Like the British Library edition, it reproduces the illustrations in color, though without a facsimile of the manuscript; it also contains a 40-page introduction by Upfal, an ample commentary, running to 137 notes, and three appendices.

Drawing on both Fergus’s annotations and my own commentary in the Juvenilia volume of the *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen* (2006), Upfal and Alexander extend our understanding

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of the *History* and in particular its relationship to Oliver Goldsmith’s four-volume *History of England* (1771), the principal target of Austen’s satire. They also illuminate Austen’s mischievous use of Shakespeare as a historical source and explore her surprisingly risqué double entendres. Some of the notes, however, are unduly tendentious, such as one claiming that the *History* “was kept secret from Austen’s father;” there is no evidence for this assertion, and Mr. Austen might well have been among the work’s first readers.

As their title suggests, Upfal and Alexander are as concerned with Cassandra’s illustrations as with Austen’s text. Upfal’s introduction is primarily devoted to arguing a case: that many of the portraits are caricatures of Austen’s family and friends. Austen herself, she believes, served as model for Mary Queen of Scots, contradicting Fergus, who in her edition had suggested that Austen could be seen in Mary Tudor, “whose round face and red cheeks correspond to some traditional accounts of Austen’s looks” (*History of England*, ed. Fergus, p. iv). Other models proposed by Upfal are Austen’s brothers Henry, James, and Edward as Henry V, James I, and Edward VI; Mrs. Austen as Queen Elizabeth; Mary Lloyd as Mary Tudor; the Revd Edward Cooper as Edward IV; and Tom Fowle as Henry VI.

There are undoubtedly private jokes and allusions in both the text and the illustrations of the *History of England*, as in other of Austen’s early writings, and Upfal and Alexander have endeavored to uncover some of the mysteries. They have called on the services of Pamela Craig, “a forensic odontologist and so expert in facial structure” and Clifford Ogleby, an expert in “photogrammetry, the measurement of facial characteristics.” Craig and Ogleby endorse the edition’s claims in different ways. Ogleby, superimposing Cassandra’s famous sketch of her sister on the portrait of Mary Queen of Scots, finds a perfect

fit, leading Upfal to suggest that the composite produces “a new, softer image of the mature Jane Austen at the period when her novels were being published.” Craig, comparing scanned images with Adobe Photoshop, likewise supports the identification of Austen as Mary Queen of Scots, but is more cautious about some of the other proposals.

None of the hypotheses, in my view, is particularly convincing. When Fergus noted in her edition that Cassandra’s Edward IV was taken from a satirical print by Henry Bunbury, *The Recruits* (1780), her suggestion could be readily verified; the two faces, both strikingly oafish, are virtually identical. There is, in contrast, nothing obvious about the claims in Upfal and Alexander’s edition. To support the identification of Mary Lloyd as Mary Tudor, for example, Upfal has to use a daguerreotype of Lloyd’s sister Martha in old age. Not surprisingly, there is no discernible resemblance. Few of Cassandra’s illustrations can be compared with contemporary portraits or sketches of the putative model, since in most cases none exist, and for two of the proposed sitters, Mary Lloyd and Tom Fowle, no likeness at all is known.

After publishing their edition, Upfal and Alexander co-authored an article on the *History* in *Persuasions On-Line* (30, no. 2, Spring 2010), entitled “Are We Ready for New Directions?” Here they contend that “it is not unlikely that a lively fifteen-year-old might choose to parody her own family and friends as historical figures, or to persuade her artist sister to join in the joke.” They have, I believe, found a promising new direction for Austen scholars to pursue, but the evidence to date is slight, and the case remains to be made.

