

## “Jane Austen, Going Places”

### Jane Austen’s Journeys

By Hazel Jones.

Robert Hale, 2014. 272 pages.

14 color illustrations. Hardcover. £17.99.

Review by Kelly M. McDonald.

Beneath the old adage that the sun never set on the British Empire lies an undeniable truism: Britons never stayed home, including Jane Austen, and her characters. The dislocated moved away; the restless went to sea—or to Bath or London; and Darcy’s Pemberley awaited in the North. Jane Austen’s own travels are somewhat left to conjecture: family letters and memories give indications of seaside stays and estate visits, but, being scanty, provide an incomplete picture. Even were funds or companions available to her, wars precluded most tourists (Eliza de Feuillide aside) from crossing the channel during much of Austen’s adulthood. English travelers had the choice to rediscover Britain, and their diaries and letters enrich our knowledge of Austen’s milieu. Hazel Jones’s *Jane Austen’s Journeys* culls tales from travel writings and intersperses observations on selections from the novels, juvenilia, and unfinished manuscripts. The premise is rooted in Austen’s own movements, journeys of family or friends, and travels inherent to her fiction.

Jones employs a breezy, conversational style; she enjoys taking swipes at the curmudgeonly John Byng. Care should be taken, however, in differentiating between personal diaries (like Byng’s) and those edited for public consumption by the original author (like Johanna Schopenhauer’s). Chapters discuss modes of travel (private carriages, public coaches, horses, walking); stays at inns; tours of stately homes; various excursions, including to Derbyshire in the footsteps of Elizabeth and the Gardiners, and to Bath and London, where visitors typically enjoyed lengthier stays, are not neglected. The most successful chapters stay on-topic, pry into the vagaries of travel, introduce

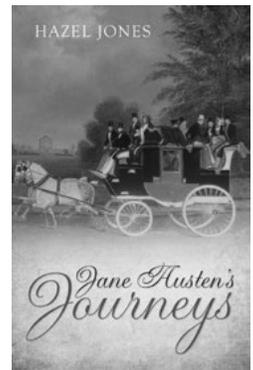
the “characters,” and relate how real-life miseries or concerns may be reflected in Austen’s understated prose.

Early on, Jones writes, “this was the age of the travel journal ... submitted ... to publishers, guides for future travellers.” Further sources and even local-archive material, therefore, should have been plentiful. Innovative interpretation could have raised her arguments above the level of merely entertaining readers. Certain generalizations feel as if they may have been introduced in order to engage younger readers; for instance, the opening of Chapter 4: “Horses were as familiar a sight on the roads of Georgian England as cars are today.” Dynamic arguments are more useful; for instance, the cavalier attitude of Henry Austen, whose own wife complained about “trust[ing] my neck to Henry’s Coachmanship,” helps us imagine the variety of drivers one would have encountered. Consideration of bad weather, of accidents, of highwaymen, of just staying home, all have their place. Specific book titles, like Gilpin’s *Northern Tour*, with which Jane Austen was familiar, augment traveler accounts, and hint at the library Austen herself had amassed or consulted. Most readers will already know that Jane Austen lived in Bath and advised her niece to write about what she knew. Equating carriages to flashy sports cars while enumerating which characters would have been likely to drive what is likewise found elsewhere. To have information all in one book may be handy, especially if one has no other treatise on travel, but it does not preclude a sense of familiarity.

Jones’s comprehensive knowledge of Austen was demonstrated in her earlier analysis, *Jane Austen and Marriage*. That book’s investigation broadened our understanding of what took place off-stage. Judged against this earlier monograph, the luster of *Jane Austen’s Journeys* slightly dims. Lacking opportunities to follow Jane Austen fully on her own journeys, the author sometimes resorts to a parade of the pitfalls of Austen-era travel. The tours that Austen

undertook are of course present, and Jones uses familial sources to illustrate those instances, but so have most biographers. Jones joins a number of recent authors who utilize diverse historical writings (Le Faye and Adkins readily come to mind). Each author is most successful at the instant where information presented is then probed. Locating material takes far less time than constructing solid analyses, and time is often in short supply when an author wants to produce a “next book.”

Jones has amassed an amalgam of travel-centric details, but travel-narrative is a crowded field, as is this type of micro-topical examination. While most readers will appreciate each and every new compendium, the greater the degree of elucidation (as opposed to presentation), the more welcome the addition. Jane Austen had no use for lengthy descriptions of daily-life occurrences. Her contemporary readers knew what she knew, experienced for themselves what she had experienced. Now, two hundred years into the future, few can realize the misadventures and dangers of Austen’s travels. Jones succeeds by providing a decent overview of late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century travel. She has gathered pertinent tales and spun them around Austen’s life and works. Readers with a penchant for travel memoirs will eagerly peruse the bibliography. For those wishing to become familiar with a bygone era, the nice selection of full-color illustrations, adequate notes, and a useful index rounds out the desirability of Hazel Jones’s easy-to-read *Jane Austen’s Journeys*.



Kelly M. McDonald has presented at the 2011 and 2015 AGMs and has published articles in *Persuasions*, *Persuasions Online*, and *Jane Austen’s Regency World*. Her latest publication is *Two Teens in the Time of Austen*, Random Jottings: 2008-2015.