

The Declaration of Independents



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The Prince And The Author

by Mary Lydon Simonsen

In 1811, King George III was believed to be mad, as a result of a recurring malady that was later identified as porphyria. The British Parliament passed The Regency Act, which transferred power from George III to his son, the Prince of Wales, and declared that until such time as the monarch regained his wits the Prince of Wales would rule Britain and its expanding empire. Unfortunately for the King, George III never did recover and spent his remaining nine years in seclusion at Windsor Castle.

By the time of his ascendancy, the Prince had established himself as a mainstay of the tabloid press and a favorite of caricaturists who portrayed him as an elegantly dressed stuffed sausage. While he had been waiting in the wings for his father to either die or to be found insane, the Prince had been busy accumulating enormous debts, acquiring expensive mistresses, launching elaborate building projects and eating and drinking to excess.

When not planning or attending balls and fetes or being fitted for a new uniform to display his elaborate collection of unearned military decorations, the Prince did have his quiet moments. At the end of a long day of self-indulgence, he would kick back with a good book, and one of his favorite authors was a writer who identified herself in her first novel, *Sense & Sensibility*, simply as “A Lady,” and in her second novel, *Pride & Prejudice*, as “The Author of *Sense & Sensibility*.” Despite her desire to stay out of the public spotlight, she was to become known to posterity as Jane Austen.

One of Jane’s most ardent supporters was her brother, Henry, who could not help but brag about his younger sister’s success, especially when the

very popular *Pride & Prejudice* went into its third printing. It was Henry, from his sickbed, who successfully negotiated an agreement with a publisher for her fourth novel, *Emma*. After an agreement had been secured, Jane went up to London to



Portrait of Ms. Jane Austen, whose works are currently airing as a series of TV movies on PBS.

see if she could expedite the printing of her book. During her stay, His Royal Highness learned that Jane was in town and send his librarian, Rev. James Stanier Clarke, to contact her.

Although Jane was not a fan of the Prince because of his debauchery and ill treatment of his wife, Princess Caroline, she accepted Rev. Stanier’s invitation to tour the Regent’s opulent London residence. Stanier told Miss Austen that the Prince had a set of her novels in each of his many residences and that, “by permission of His Royal Highness,” she was “at liberty to dedicate any future novel to him.” Jane immediately recognized the commercial value of such a dedi-

cation, but she also used this information to get her printer to stop delaying her book. The printer was acquainted with the Prince Regent’s interest, and Jane had her proof-sheets.

On December 23, 1815, the *Morning Chronicle* announced that “*Emma: A Novel in three Volumes by the Author of *Pride and Prejudice*, Etc., Etc.*” was now available. Jane had written a simple dedication: “Dedicated by permission to HRH The Prince Regent.” But her publisher embellished it in unctuous prose worthy of Mr. Collins to read: “To His Royal Highness, The Prince Regent. This work is, by his Royal Highness’s permission, most respectfully dedicated by His Royal Highness’s dutiful and obedient humble servant, The Author.”

Did the Prince Regent’s notice of Jane Austen’s writings have any effect on the success of *Emma*? It is impossible to know. What we do know is that *Emma* sold more copies in its first run than any of her three previous novels.

Emma was the last novel to be published in Jane’s lifetime. The woman who gave the world *Pride & Prejudice* remained a relative unknown to the general public until a year after her death in 1817, when her brother Henry wrote a biographical preface to *Northanger Abbey and Persuasion*. Known or unknown, Jane Austen’s legacy is a body of work that has delighted hundreds of thousands of readers from all walks of life and at least one prince. ■

Mary Lydon Simonsen is the author of *Pemberley Remembered*, a love story which takes place in post-war London but whose main thread is the timeless tale of Jane Austen’s Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy and Miss Elizabeth Bennett.



The Ever Present Past

by Barry Yelton

It happened as I was skimming *The History of Old Tryon and Rutherford Counties*, by Clarence W. Griffin. I experienced one of those moments when the past reaches out and touches you like an old friend.

I scanned the roll of men who served during World War I, looking for familiar names when suddenly a name jumped off the page—Hardin, Brivet J. In an instant, years of memories came flooding back in a sort of hazy remembrance. Powerful emotions can be engendered by memories of a childhood, brought back in a rush by a word or sound or a smell.

It was 1954 and a skinny eight-year-old and his six-year-old brother wandered into the City Barber Shop in Forest City, North Carolina. Inside, the aroma of barbershop talc and aftershave filled the air. Clean-shaven working men filled the row of barber chairs, carefully attended by the three or four barbers who went about their work intently while exchanging homespun wisdom with their patrons. Among them was a wiry man with a David Niven mustache and neatly combed hair, gray-ing at the temples. Brivet Hardin.

He looked up from his work and smiled at the two of us. We dutifully took our seats on the church pews lining the wall opposite the chairs, waiting our turn. I have since wondered at the unique name my barber carried. Was it taken from the word *brevet*, which in military parlance means a temporary promotion? Or was it just a name that appealed to a proud mother or father at his birth in 1895? I knew of only one Brivet.

Our Dad gave us each a dollar for our traditional summer buzz cuts. The haircuts cost ninety cents. That meant afterwards we had ten whole cents to splurge at The Piedmont Drug Store or the Rose's Five and Dime. Mr. Hardin carefully covered me with the familiar barbershop bib and set to work on my head. Little clumps of hair tumbled across the front of the bib; the trimmer

hummed in my ear. The grown up talk filling the shop mostly escaped me. I remember individual words—Eisenhower, Truman, Korea, McCarthy. He swept my neck with a soft little brush and applied just a touch of the grown up aftershave.

1954. Only nine years removed from the greatest war the world ever saw. More than ten years distant from the frenetic mid-sixties when my generation would set about revolutionizing popular music and much of society along with it, and America would lose forever the innocence of the '50s.

Two small boys walked down Cherry Mountain Street by themselves, something unthinkable today, heading for the little white-shingled house on Flack Road. The root beer was cold in our hands; our heads were freshly shorn and ready for the perils of war fought with broomstick rifles on the wooded knolls that rose west of the Second Broad River.

In *The History of Old Tryon and Rutherford Counties*, a portion of the entry for Brivet Hardin says he had served with Company D, in the 120th Infantry Regiment. On October 10, 1918, at some faraway place like Ypres, Brancourt, or Busigny, he had been wounded severely while fighting the Kaiser's legions. I try to imagine those grim battlefields on which American soldiers first faced the terrors of mechanized war. The stinking trenches, the rumbling tanks, the rattling machine guns, and the choking mustard gas brought a new standard of horror to what we call war. I think of that and it makes me appreciate all the more the memory of a kindly man in 1954 who took the time for a smile, a friendly word, and a carefully administered haircut for a freckle-faced boy.



Barry D. Yelton is the author of *Scarecrow In Gray*, a tale of the Civil War. Additional information can be found on the author's website, www.scarecrows-dreams.blogspot.com

Read All About It: Why You Should Take Digital Fiction Seriously

by Julie Ann Shapiro

The book publishing world is a hard if not brutal business. I know fifty outstanding writers that don't stand a chance of getting published by the mainstream industry, and of this group each writer in turn probably knows another fifty, so exponentially we're looking at thousands of writers with books that under regular circumstances wouldn't stand a chance of making it. But the good news is there's a whole world of opportunities opening up in the digital publishing arena. Before I go into that I want to tell you the typical cycle from writer to literary agent to a mainstream publishing house.

The average literary agent gets 150 queries a day from writers hoping to get their book published. The agent chooses to represent roughly 1% of these books. Agents in turn pitch these books to the publishers, who get thousands of manuscripts a year to review. An editorial committee at the publishing house then decides what books to take, but that's not the end of the cycle. The committee still has to convince marketing that the book will earn its royalties and advances. One naysayer at a publishing house can literally kill a book's chances of getting published.

Novels by the established, the well known, the trendy, and celebrity types with ghost writers have a greater chance of getting a book published than many talented writers. Fortunately, digital publishing has arrived on the scene with the potential to revolutionize the publishing industry. This means every word, image, sound, animation, and movie can be delivered as a series of digital ones and zeros. In a word, digital publishing has changed our definition of books.

Today digital publishing encompasses anything from an electronic book (e-book), CD-ROM, to a paper-based book, or a hybrid with Internet inac-

tivity. Many of you have heard the term print on demand. This utilizes digital technology. It's a means many independent and small presses have adopted to get their books out there, and so have the likes of Harper Collins. Book stores often purchase books that have been printed on demand to keep costs of production down. It's a little-known cost saving secret and how the publishing industry is evolving.

What digital publishing has done for the book world is to level the playing field and give independent presses a chance to publish the kinds of books they want. More importantly, it gives readers a chance to read books beyond just what the mega-conglomerate publishing houses produce.

Most mainstream publishers go with what's safe and proven to make money. It's less and less about art and more and more about dollars. This is where small digital presses have a chance to offer readers something different, and in turn to give new generations of talented writers a chance.

Yes, talent, that's what you'll find in the digital realm in my not so humble opinion. It's fast becoming a home for bold fiction that's not afraid to take chances, much like independent films. As more and more legions of writers are shut out by the mainstream publishing conglomerates, they will have no choice but to seek out other avenues. For this reason some may liken digital publishing to self-publishing. While it's true that anyone can publish something digitally, it doesn't mean that by association digital book publishers are places to shun or disrespect.

This neglects the marketplace and the recognition that there are a plethora of well respected independent publishers such as Double Dragon Press, Zumaya, Mundania Press, SynergEbooks, New Concepts Publishing, Boson Books, C & M Online, Samhain Publishing, Echelon Press, Silk's Vault, and countless others who choose to offer books digitally. Not to mention the

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BOOK REVIEW

The following book review is by Nan Hawthorne, author of multiple books.

The Confession of Piers Gaveston by Brandy Purdy

With this first novel, author Brandy Purdy has accomplished more than an evocative tale of the early 14th century. She has broken some barriers in the genre of historical fiction and brought a compelling and thought-provoking character into the world of fiction as a whole.

The protagonist of the story, Piers Gaveston (c. 1284-1312), was one of the notorious and ill-fated favorites of English King Edward II. Though there is no historical proof for it, many authorities have concluded that Gaveston was in fact King Edward's lover.

Gaveston is a complex character: intelligent, crafty, but prone to putting others off with his sharp tongue and wit. Having been orphaned quite young, he is forced into prostitution at nine. His sad adolescence is the classroom where he learns how to play on the secret desires of others, both male and female. While a soldier fighting in King Edward I's army, he is assigned to make a man of the indolent Prince Edward. Gaveston believes he has found what he has been missing: a friend, a companion, a peer. But when he succumbs to Edward's seduction, he realizes that he has lost his chance. Edward worships him, but that worship objectifies Gaveston, making a prize possession of him instead of a real partner.

The largesse Edward ladles upon him proves to be the undoing of Gaveston—and, eventually, Edward himself. Gaveston flaunts the king's favoritism in the faces of the lords of the realm, then flirts incessantly with these men.

Though he insists that he did not ask for the riches and honors he receives, and even says he feels cheapened by them, nevertheless he accepts them and rubs the nobles' noses in them—including Edward's Queen. Rebellious against Edward's pathological possessiveness by



being unfaithful to him makes Gaveston's own sexuality more of a puzzle, not only to readers but to himself.

Purdy tells the story in the form of a journal. Through it you experience Gaveston's ambivalence about himself and the world he lives in. You have insight into his heart and into his impulsive actions. Purdy gives you Gaveston and lets you decide whether he is sympathetic or not.

The language is smooth and eloquent, presented in the historical period without being obscure. That her Gaveston can be frank and even coarse about sexuality is a contradiction that lends well to the understanding of his ambivalence about himself. There are some rough spots where Purdy seems to reveal an insecurity about her art, but most of her choices and language show literary instincts for when to shock and when to soothe.

The universality of this story is the give and take of joy and pain that two lovers experience. Although the two lovers both being men has discomfited some reviewers (whose personal squeamishness doesn't belong in a literary review), this cannot obscure the complexity and eloquence of the writing of this remarkable debut novel. Purdy does not balk at explicit scenes between Edward and Gaveston. As some of these scenes occur in public, my first reaction was that such open homosexuality was anachronistic, but who is to say a king in the 14th century could not do as he pleased? It was the other, lower classes that faced extreme condemnation for acts with which nobles could get away. Further, as history bears out, they did not go unpunished in their narrow world. The book posits something I have always thought, that gay men and women have always been part of humanity and have found ways to survive throughout.

Purdy is a fine writer, an insightful storyteller, and her work deserves serious consideration. Her new novel, *Vengeance Is Mine*, is a fictional memoir by Lady Rochford, the woman whose hate for Anne Boleyn led her to betray both the queen and Lady Rochford's own husband by accusing them of incest. Both of Ms. Purdy's books are available from iUniverse and major online booksellers.



Electronic forms of books have become much more popular in recent years.

major distribution channels established for ebooks, including Fictionwise and Mobipocket.

Even the mainstream publishers recognize the dynamic medium that digital books offer. Most of them now

have ebook divisions and are seeking to capitalize on the vast Internet audience, the massive amounts of people using PDAs, and other mobile devices that support e-book readers. Last fall, Harlequin announced that 40% of its new titles would be issued as ebooks.

Amazon.com recently unveiled the Kindle, an electronic book reader which can wirelessly connect to an e-book store on Amazon's site. This is a significant advance over older e-book devices, which must be connected to a computer to download books or articles.

Google also has plans to start charging users for digital copies of books in their database. Despite these two major Internet leaders' plans to fur-

ther their reach in the digital publishing market, along with the respected publishers in the e-book marketplace, legions of consumers still don't view digital books as *real* books. Many consumers in turn are hesitant to purchase e-books, even though they are vastly cheaper than their paperback counterparts, not to mention the environmental factor of saving trees. In turn many traditional book reviewers will not consider reviewing a digital book. The authors of e-books, digitally produced print on demand books, and even e-publishers at times feel like Rodney Dangerfield uttering his famous refrain, "I don't get no respect."

It's time to recognize digital books as real books and applaud digital publishers for giving talented authors a chance. Let's recognize that they are entrepreneurs living out the American Dream and carving a niche in a difficult market. After all, thousands of very good books are turned down by the mainstream publishers every year for the basic reason that they are not commercial enough ... i.e. they won't generate enough cash.

If you love books, support a digital literary writer by reading and reviewing their books. Good books deserve to be given a chance. This is your literary future, your legacy.

BOOK REVIEW

The following book review is by Dianne Salerni, author of *High Spirits: A Tale of Ghostly Rapping and Romance*.

Mozart's Wife by Juliet Waldron

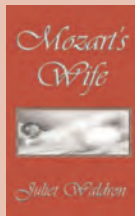
Many a romance novel ends with marriage. The courtship, the chase, the first declarations of love ... these things provide the backbone of the novel, and in the end there is marriage and, presumably, a happy ever-after.

In Juliet Waldron's historical novel *Mozart's Wife*, however, the courtship and marriage of Konstanze Weber and Wolfgang Mozart is only the beginning. The true story begins with the wedded life that follows, when romance and love are truly tested. Konstanze begins the novel as a self-conscious young maiden, overlooked in favor of her more talented sisters. She falls in love with Mozart and can hardly believe that the astonishing young composer has chosen her for his one true soulmate. But marriage to the musical genius turns out to be a tumultuous existence for Konstanze, who quickly must mature into a wife, a mother, and household accountant. Konstanze, who grew up in a musical family, is not unappreciative of Mozart's genius, but reality dictates that music be treated as a business,

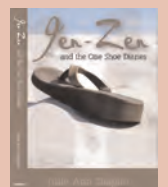
rather than an art. While Wolfgang Mozart follows his muse, creating the music he loves—whether there is a market for it or not—Konstanze tries to prevent them from falling into poverty.

Mozart is flighty, unpredictable, and easily swayed by his friends. Konstanze has to wrest control of the household accounts from him just to keep their family from ruin. Like many women of her day, she finds herself constantly pregnant; every childbirth is a life-endangering horror, and the precious infants are easily carried off by disease. Grief for her children and scandalous rumors of her husband's infidelity test the limits of her love, but Mozart's emotional bond with his wife proves strong enough to last beyond his death—surprising even Konstanze.

Juliet Waldron has created a believable, multi-faceted portrait of a wife loved but betrayed, adoring and yet resentful, capricious and sometimes spiteful. *Mozart's Wife* is a memorable historical novel about a woman who has been long overlooked and often maligned by historians, but without whose intervention Mozart's music might have been lost to the world forever.



Julie Ann Shapiro is a prolific author, her most recent book being *Jen-Zen and the One Shoe Diaries*. Information on her writing can be found at www.julieannshapiro.com.



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