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Welcome to SANTA MONICA READS. 2015 marks the thirteenth year of this community reading program, one of the longest-running programs of its kind in the United States. SANTA MONICA READS encourages people who live, work in, or visit Santa Monica to read and discuss the same book at the same time in discussion groups and other special events held around the city.

This year's featured book is *Longbourn* by Jo Baker. *Longbourn* is the below stairs story of the servants working in the Bennet household made famous in Jane Austen's Regency Period classic *Pride and Prejudice*. While Austen's novels have entertained readers for over two centuries and inspired countless prequels, sequels and imitations by other writers, they never acknowledged the existence of those who endured the backbreaking work required to keep estates like Longbourn and Pemberley running. Now, with *Longbourn*, author Jo Baker gives those largely unseen characters a voice, fleshing out their stories with care and great heart, while also raising issues of class, gender, sexuality and race that still resonate today.

Longbourn is available from the Santa Monica Public Library or your local bookstore. Please plan on attending one or all of the many free, public events being held around the city from February 14 to March 21.

I hope that your participation in SANTA MONICA READS is a rewarding experience that brings us together as a community through literature.

Maria Carpenter

Maria Taesil Hudson Carpenter
City Librarian / Santa Monica Public Library

about the book

"What praise is more valuable than the praise of an intelligent servant?" – *Pride and Prejudice*, Chapter I, Volume III



When Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* was first published in 1813, it was credited anonymously to "A Lady." Indeed, each of the four novels published in her lifetime bore no credit for Austen, a literary life forced into the margins of polite society. In some ways, Austen's anonymity as an author bore parallels to the life of the servants working in the households populated by characters like Elizabeth Bennet. Aside from passing references, the servants in Austen's world were seldom ever seen. It was in that notable absence that contemporary writer Jo Baker found inspiration for a new story situated within Austen's familiar world, a story that became the novel *Longbourn*.

Set in the Bennet household from *Pride and Prejudice*, *Longbourn* takes readers below stairs into the equally compelling lives of the servants working there. We meet longtime butler and housekeeper Mr. and Mrs. Hill and learn the secrets that keep them tied to the Longbourn estate. We also meet impressionable young housemaid Polly and fret as she ends up being tempted by a threat most Austen readers will find familiar. But just as *Pride and Prejudice* is the story of strong-willed Elizabeth Bennet and her proud suitor Fitzwilliam Darcy, *Longbourn* is the story of headstrong young housemaid Sarah and a mysterious new footman named James. Their budding romance and gripping backstories offer one of the most respectful extensions of Jane Austen's world yet written.



about the author

"Which of all my important nothings shall I tell you first"

– Jane Austen, *Jane Austen's Letters*, June 15, 1808

Jo Baker was born in Lancashire, England. At eighteen, she went to Oxford to study English Literature, but her study of "the greats" knocked the creative winds out of her and she quickly abandoned her plans to pursue a career as a writer. In 1994, she moved on to Queen's University in Belfast, Ireland to complete an MA in Irish Writing. During this time, Belfast became a hotbed of

creative activity. As she explains on her website, Baker began meeting writers everywhere, "novelists in the street, poets in the cinema, playwrights in the pub." One of those writers was playwright Daragh Carville, a man she would marry in 2000, who said to her, "The way you speak, the way you use words, it's clear you're a writer. Why aren't you writing?"

Prodded by his words, Baker quickly returned to her intended field, writing short stories and novels. Her first novel *Offcomer* was published in 2002, followed by *The Mermaid's Child* in 2004, *The Telling* in 2008, and *The Undertow* in 2011. But it was *Longbourn*, her fifth novel, published in 2013, that served as her breakthrough. Coming from a family of maids, including her maternal grandmother and sisters, Baker grew up sensitive to the scant few mentions of servants in her literary hero Jane Austen's work. As she observed in an interview with the Austenprose Blog, "I found myself noticing events that took place which required human agency – a message delivered, a meal served, a carriage brought round – but where no mention was made of the persons performing the tasks." It was from this frustrating lack of information that Baker's imagination took flight, and thus she began to write *Longbourn*.

Jo Baker is currently at work on her sixth novel. She lives in Lancashire with her husband Daragh Carville and their son Daniel.

discussion questions

- 1: *Longbourn* is based on *Pride and Prejudice*. What parallels in structure, plot and tone do you see from book to book? What differences do you see?
- 2: For her time, *Pride and Prejudice*'s Elizabeth Bennet was a proto-feminist heroine. Are she and *Longbourn*'s Sarah similar in any way? Who is the stronger character, and why?
- 3: Compare and contrast the story arcs for Sarah and James from *Longbourn*, and Elizabeth and Darcy from *Pride and Prejudice*.
- 4: *Longbourn* wades more deeply into issues of class, gender, sexuality and race than Jane Austen could have in her time. How successful was Jo Baker in exploring these issues?
- 5: Each chapter begins with a quote from *Pride and Prejudice*. Does this enhance or detract from the story Jo Baker is telling? Is she successful in allowing *Longbourn* to stand on its own?
- 6: The whipping that Sarah witnesses is also referenced in *Pride and Prejudice*. What is the significance of this scene?
- 7: In *Longbourn*, Jo Baker extends the storylines of several *Pride and Prejudice* characters, such as Wickham, Mr. Bennet, and Lizzie Bennet. How successful was she? Did she pay due respect to Austen's portrayals?
- 8: What are your thoughts on the way James' story unfolds?
- 9: Jo Baker feels that *Longbourn* is to *Pride and Prejudice* as Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* is to *Jane Eyre* or Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are Dead* is to *Hamlet*. What is your take on this comparison?
- 10: Focus Features has optioned *Longbourn* for a movie adaptation. Who would you cast in the film's primary roles?

recommended reads

***Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen**

A previous reading of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is not necessary to fully enjoy *Longbourn*, but doing so definitely provides a richer experience. It is the story of Elizabeth Bennet, the second daughter of five, and her family's efforts to marry the daughters off to men of better means. While not a portrait of the servant class, Austen's novel of manners is still a trenchant view of the rigid class system that dominated Regency England.

***The Colour of Milk* by Nell Layshon**

Set in the waning days of the Georgian Era in England, Nell Layshon's critically-acclaimed novel is the story of a teenage farmgirl, sent by her abusive father to serve as housemaid to the local vicar and his ailing wife. The girl's life is an everyday struggle, brightened by her dream of learning to read and write. But her newly-acquired skills come at a tragic price.

***What the Butler Saw: Two Hundred and Fifty Years of the Servant Problem* by E.S. Turner**

Originally published in Britain in 1962, E.S. Turner's exhaustive nonfiction book chronicles the largely unseen lives of the servant class in Britain in the 18th and 19th centuries. Drawing on extensive research gleaned from literary sources, contemporary accounts and household manuals, *What the Butler Saw* offers arguably the most complete look ever compiled on the lives of British domestic servants through the Victorian Era.

resources

Jo Baker Author Website

Jo Baker's website includes a biography of the author, information on her five previous novels, and reviews of her work by literary journals, though it was never updated to reflect the release of *Longbourn*, her breakthrough novel. For more timely information on Baker and her work, readers should check out her Facebook page, which she posts to frequently.

www.jobakerwriter.com | www.facebook.com/jobakerwriter

Follow the author on Twitter @JoBakerWriter

The Jane Austen Society of North America

A rich resource in all things Austen, The Jane Austen Society of North America is a nonprofit organization "dedicated to the appreciation and enjoyment of Jane Austen and her writing." JASNA is not only the umbrella organization for numerous smaller chapters, including the very active, local Southwest chapter JASNA-SW, it serves as a clearinghouse for many thoughtful and peer-reviewed studies on Austen and her work. In particular, check out the "Seen and Not Heard" article by Judith Terry on servants in Austen's work and other Regency Period writing in issue #10 of *Persuasions*, found on JASNA's Publications page on their website.

www.jasna.org/ | www.jasnasw.org/

The Domestic Servant in Art

Despite the current craze for the upstairs/downstairs story on *Downton Abbey*, the full story of servants and their lives has seldom been told in literature, but art is a different story. As with the gorgeous painting by Jean-Étienne Liotard seen on the cover of *Longbourn*, portrait painters offered some of the best glimpses into the lives of domestic servants in the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries. The blog cited below offers a beautiful look at more than three dozen of those portraits.

www.artistsandart.org/2011/05/being-in-service-in-victorian-england

timeline

- The Regency Period in the United Kingdom is the period between 1811 and 1820, when King George III was deemed unfit to rule and his son, the Prince of Wales, ruled as his proxy as Prince Regent. In 1820, the Prince Regent became King George IV on the death of his father.
- Jane Austen was born on December 16, 1775 and died on July 18, 1817 at the age of 41. Four of her novels, *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814) and *Emma* (1815), were published during her lifetime. *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey* were published shortly after her death in 1817, and the unfinished novel *Sanditon* in 1925.
- The Napoleonic Wars were a series of wars between Napoleon Bonaparte's French Empire and a series of opposing coalitions, running from 1803-1815. Great Britain's military forces participated in both the First and Second Coalitions, running the span of both wars.

special events

Kickoff Celebration

Saturday, February 14 at 2:00pm | Main Library, North Entry Courtyard
Celebrate the launch of this new year of Santa Monica Reads with Regency Period music, English country dancing, and refreshments. While there, pick up a copy of *Longbourn* and start reading!

Petals and Pages

Saturday, February 14 at 3:00pm
Main Library, Auditorium Anteroom & Reception Courtyard
Angharad Jones leads this craft workshop on making paper flowers and Valentines. Supplies provided.

Bookmaking with Lace

Tuesday, February 24 at 6:30pm | Pico Branch Library, 2201 Pico Blvd.
Crafting expert Debra Disman teaches this bookmaking workshop using lace.

The Lizzie Bennet Diaries: Cast & Crew

Saturday, February 28 at 3:00pm | Main Library, MLK Jr. Auditorium
Cast and crew from the multimedia online sensation, produced by Santa Monica-based Pemberley Digital, discuss their contemporary variation on *Pride and Prejudice*.

The World of Longbourn

Sunday, March 1 at 2:00pm | Main Library, MLK Jr. Auditorium
Join us for a panel presentation and discussion about what life was like in the Regency Period. Fashion Historian Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell is joined by Janet Fahey from the Jane Austen Society, and Richard Foss, California curator for the Museum of the American Cocktail.

Nickel & Dimed with Cheryl Spector

Tuesday, March 3 at 7:00pm | Main Library, MLK Jr. Auditorium
The storyline of *Longbourn* evokes questions of class and the ways in which those in the service professions struggle to get by even today. CSUN Professor Cheryl Spector presents this lecture tying *Longbourn* together with Barbara Ehrenreich's timely portrait of minimum wage workers, *Nickel and Dimed*.

book discussions

Trained volunteer facilitators lead these free public book discussions. No registration required. Discussions are open to readers of all ages, but the Teen Discussion will be led by and focused on teen readers.

Wednesday, February 18 at 7:00pm | Montana Branch Library, 1704 Montana Avenue*

Saturday, February 21 at 2:00pm | Barnes & Noble, 1201 Third Street Promenade

Monday, February 23 at 5:30pm | Teen Discussion, Main Library, 601 Santa Monica Boulevard*

Saturday, February 28 at 11:00am | Fairview Branch Library, 2101 Ocean Park Boulevard*

Thursday, March 5 at 4:00pm | Ken Edwards Center, 1527 4th Street*

Monday, March 9 at 2:30pm | Ye Olde King's Head Restaurant, 116 Santa Monica Boulevard

Saturday, March 14 at 11:00am | Ocean Park Branch Library, 2601 Main Street*

Thursday, March 19 at 7:00pm | Pico Branch Library, 2201 Pico Boulevard*

Saturday, March 21 at 11:00am | Main Library, 601 Santa Monica Boulevard*

Austen Variations Author Panel

Saturday, March 7 at 2:00pm | Main Library, MLK Jr. Auditorium
A panel of authors – including Syrie James, Diana Birchall and others who have expanded on the world of Jane Austen in various prequels, sequels and alternate takes – discusses the fertile world of Austen's characters and settings.

A Jane Austen Education with William Deresiewicz

Thursday, March 12 at 7:00pm | Main Library, MLK Jr. Auditorium
William Deresiewicz, a former English professor at Yale, discusses his recent book which answers the question of how Jane Austen and her literary work taught Deresiewicz to be a man.

An Afternoon with Jo Baker

Saturday, March 21 at 2:00pm | Main Library, MLK Jr. Auditorium
Author Jo Baker presents an engaging discussion of *Longbourn*, followed by a book sale and signing.

movie screenings

A series of screenings of films based on Jane Austen's works or on the theme of domestic workers.

Gosford Park (2001) | Thursday, February 19, 6:00pm
Ocean Park Branch Library, 2601 Main Street

Austenland (2013) | Wednesday, February 25, 6:30pm
Montana Branch Library, 1704 Montana Avenue

Pride & Prejudice (2005) | Thursday, March 5, 6:30pm
Fairview Branch, 2101 Ocean Park Boulevard

Bride & Prejudice (2004) | Tuesday, March 17, 6:00pm
Pico Branch Library, 2201 Pico Boulevard

Sense & Sensibility (1995) | Thursday, March 19, 6:30pm
Fairview Branch Library, 2101 Ocean Park Boulevard

* City of Santa Monica facilities are wheelchair accessible. To request a disability-related accommodation, call Library Administration 310-458-8606 (TDD 395-8499) at least one week prior to event.

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THANKS FOR SUPPORTING BOOK DISCUSSIONS AND PROGRAMS, AND THANKS TO THE FRIENDS OF THE SANTA MONICA PUBLIC LIBRARY FOR THEIR ONGOING SUPPORT FOR SANTA MONICA READS.