

MEN WRITERS OF AUSTENESQUE FICTION

Don Jacobson, Jeff Bigler, Barry S. Richman, Timothy Underwood

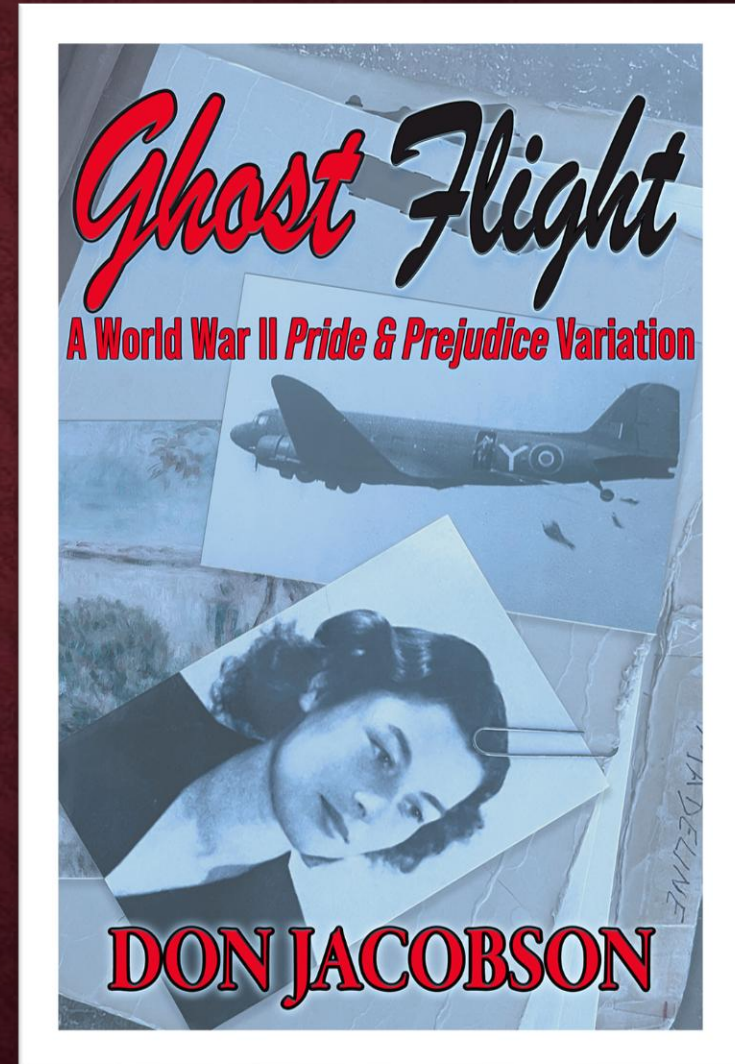


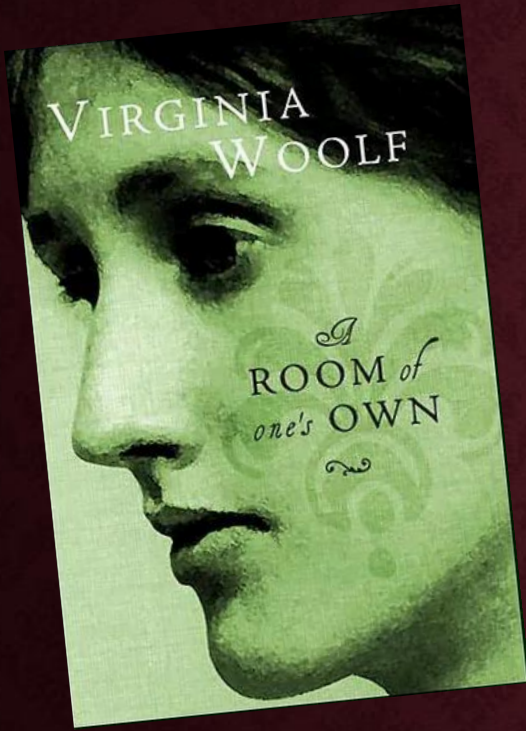
THE PROGRAM

- Don Jacobson: Virginia Woolf, The Shadow of “I,” and Me
- Jeff Bigler: Overview and Challenges
- Barry S. Richman: Action, Stories, and Characters
- Timothy Underwood: Is Austenesque Fiction Writing for Women Only?
- Discussion Points for Q&A
 - How should male authors approach writing Austenesque Fiction?
 - “Sore” spots/turn-offs
 - General Q&A

VIRGINIA WOOLF, THE SHADOW OF “I,” & DON JACOBSON

- Writer for 49 years—news, education, advertising
- Austenesque Author since 2015
- Fifteen Austenesque books
 - The Bennet Wardrobe Series
 - Six standalone
- Current WIP: *The Ambassador's Wife: A Lessers and Betters Pride and Prejudice Variation*





When Woolf read a novel by Mr. A.

A shadow seemed to lie across the page. It was a straight dark bar, a shadow shaped something like the letter 'I.' One began dodging this way and that to catch a glimpse of the landscape behind it. Whether that was indeed a tree or a woman walking, I was not quite sure.

But one was always hailed to the letter 'I'. One began to be tired of 'I'. Not but what this 'I' was a most respectable 'I'; honest and logical; as hard as a nut, and polished for centuries by good teaching.

In the shadow of the letter 'I', all is shapeless as mist. Is that a tree? No, it is a woman. But...she has not a bone in her body. Then the shadow of Alan at once obliterated Phoebe.

A Room of One's Own (1929), Ch. Six

THE CRUX

“Alan had views, and Phoebe was quenched in the flood of his views.”

- Woolf wonders: *Is it possible for a man to write for women? Or will he always be handcuffed by the social conditioning of his environment?*
- “Coleridge...said that a great mind is androgynous. Perhaps a mind that is purely masculine cannot create, any more than a mind that is purely feminine. But it would be well to test what one meant by manwomanly, and conversely by woman–manly.”

(RoOO, Ch. 6)

HOW I SEEK TO WRITE

- Thought Starter: Caroline Bingley retreats to her Netherfield chambers and smashes porcelain figurines. Darcy throws a crystal goblet into the fireplace. Is one a hysterical woman and the other a well-regulated man at the end of his rope?
(Author's toolbox: Yes, I know: Darcy would never act that way, unless...Elizabeth... while this is Caroline's natural state (?). What if the author has Darcy punching the wall or Caroline becoming frighteningly quiet?)
- Unity of mind erases gendered tropes. A woman can plan an attack. A man can weep.
- Write authentic characters who respond as believable people, not tropes
- Eliminating a lifetime's formative social conditioning is impossible, but 80%?.

JEFF BIGLER: AN OVERVIEW AND CHALLENGES

- HS physics and chemistry teacher
- Freelance violinist
- Morris dancer and musician
- First Austenesque book *Rewinding Time* published in 2024.
- Upcoming work includes *Guardian Angels*



Famous Male Authors Who Wrote Female Main Characters

- Lewis Carroll: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*
- Roald Dahl: *Matilda*
- Arthur Golden: *Memoirs of a Geisha*
- Gustave Flaubert: *Madame Bovary*
- Scott O'Dell: *Island of the Blue Dolphins*
- Stephen King: *Carrie*
- Leo Tolstoy: *Anna Karenina*
- Thomas Hardy: *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*
- Jeffrey Eugenides: *The Virgin Suicides*

MALE AUTHORS WITH FEMALE PEN NAMES

- Edith Van Dyne (L. Frank Baum): *Aunt Jane's Nieces*
- Carolyn Keene (Charles Leslie McFarlane): the *Nancy Drew* mysteries
- Deanna Dwyer (Dean Koontz): gothic horror novels *Dance with the Devil*, *Demon Child*, *The Dark of Summer*
- Leigh Nichols (Dean Koontz): romantic suspense novels *The Eyes of Darkness*, *Shadowfires*, *The Door to December*
- Sue Denim (Dav Pilkey): *The Dumb Bunnies*

CRITICISMS OF MALE AUTHORS WRITING FEMALE CHARACTERS

- Female characters who act like “men with breasts”.
- Female characters who are more likely to manipulate men dishonestly
- Female characters who have less self-doubt than female authors.
- Female characters have simple motives (especially revenge against a man)
- Female characters have less agency (e.g., act under manipulation)
- Female antagonists who are actually good, and turn away from evil by falling in love with the (male) hero

CRITICISMS OF MALE AUTHORS WRITING FEMALE CHARACTERS (CONT'D)

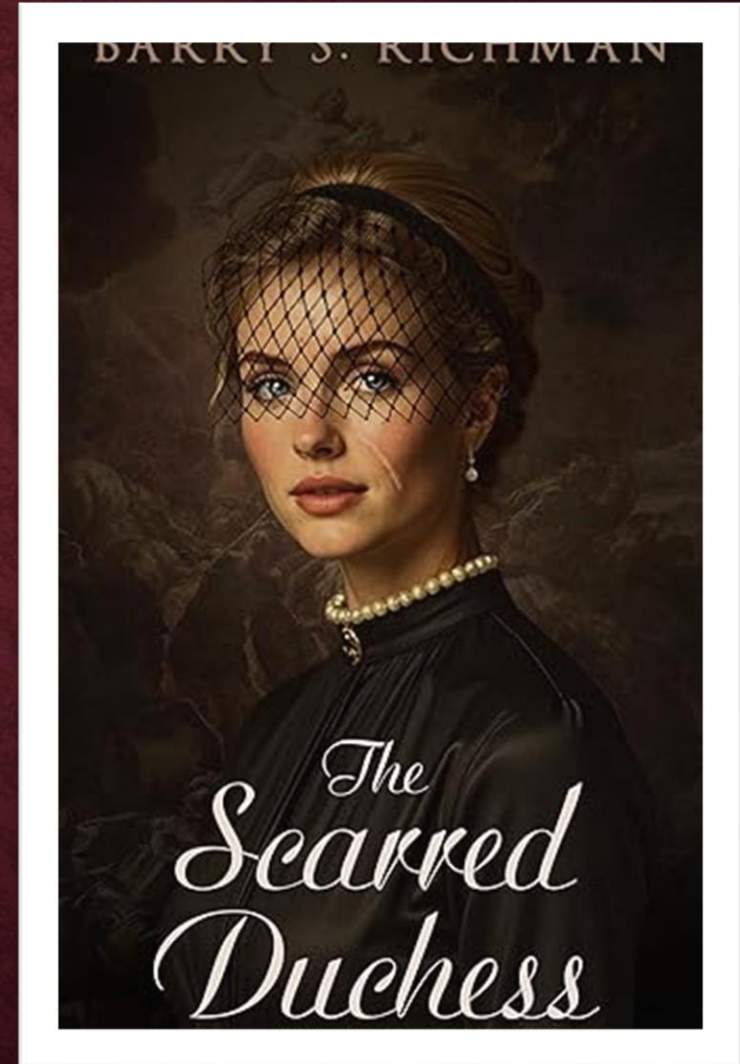
- Female characters with stereotypical inner monologue or conversations (e.g., only talking about men, gossip, *etc.*)
- Strongest desire in life is to have a baby/be a mom (e.g., career woman who is unhappy until she marries and leaves the work force to be a mom)
- Lesbian characters whose sexuality is “just a phase” and is “cured” by the “right guy”.
- Nerdy girls who take off their glasses and let their hair down suddenly are supermodels.

CRITICISMS OF MALE AUTHORS WRITING FEMALE CHARACTERS (CONT'D)

- “Badass” woman who still needs to be rescued/saved by a male hero.
- Experienced & capable female characters are superseded by a male character with natural ability but little or no training or experience.
- Novels that would fail the Bechdel test.

BARRY S. RICHMAN: ACTION, STORIES & CHARACTERS

- U.S. Army veteran who discovered Austen in 2003 while recovering from oral surgery. Devoured hundreds of variations after exhausting the Canon
- Expat Life on the Aegean: Lives on Turkey's west coast, speaks Turkish fluently, and writes at a small table in a hotel café overlooking turquoise waters
- He writes *"intrigue gift-wrapped in romance,"* narratives exploring quiet conflicts beneath civility: duty, secrecy, conscience, and consequence.
- Four variations published, two WIP



ACTION, STORIES & CHARACTERS

- I spent the day in Istanbul with my nephew, a film producer, hired to choreograph an A-list actor — İbrahim Selim — as an aged, experienced assassin in a short film.
- My job was to show him how to hold a weapon, move with ease, and sell his lethality on screen.
- That evening, I went home, bought a notebook, and wrote four pages about a man who treats it like a gnat fluttering about on a hot summer day – Colonel Richard Fitzwilliam.
- My first public reading was the duel scene, which at that time was the prologue for *Doubt Not, Cousin*. In it, I described step by step, from a second's POV, how the two men lined up and prepared to kill each other — the backstory, the expressions, the reactions, and each man's response to the other's movements.
- Not long after, other authors began reaching out, asking for help with their own duel scenes. Their support gave me the confidence to continue writing.

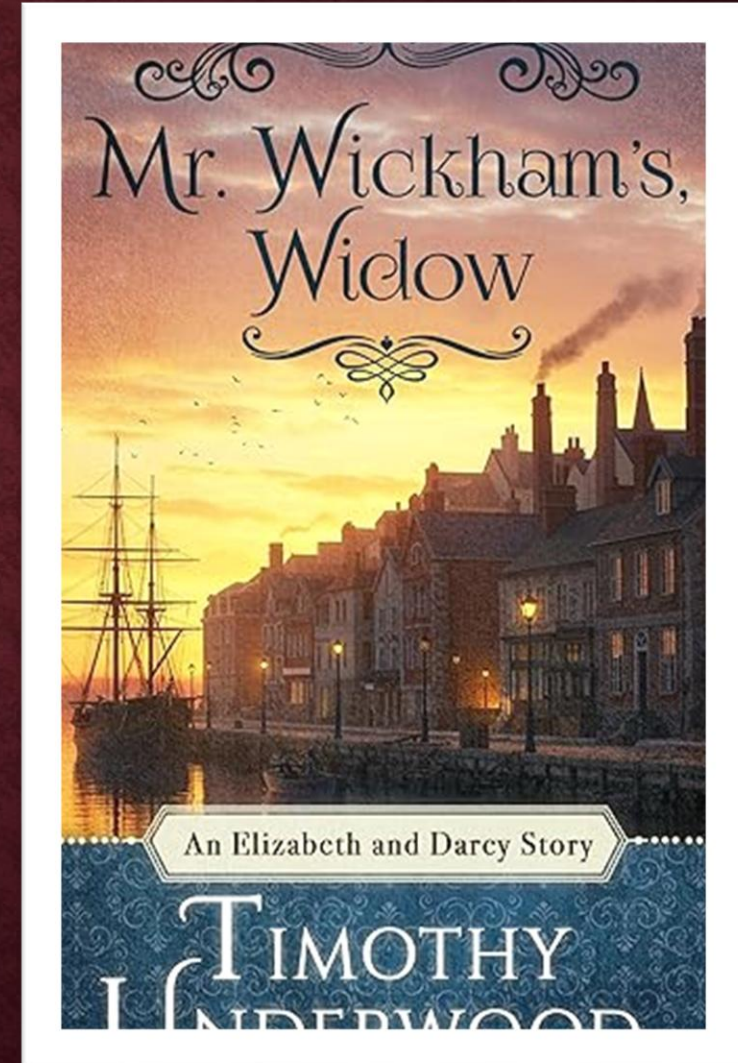
WHY I WRITE THIS WAY

- I like period-piece films, and *Pride and Prejudice* is my favourite of her works. The fact that it's number one for variations made it an obvious choice.
- I'm a prior military officer.
 - I've served in conflict zones and draw from those experiences. My historical fiction includes duels and the violence that surrounds them.
- I enjoy writing deep backstory, built on layers of suspense and drama.
- The male characters are capable, honourable, and conscious of their duty to family and country.
- The women are strong, intelligent, and witty — protagonists and antagonists alike.
- I don't think I'm particularly good at writing overt romance, so I keep it light: dialogue, gestures, camera angles, and zoom shots.

TIMOTHY UNDERWOOD: IS AUSTENESQUE FICTION WRITING FWO?*

- He lives in Budapest with his wife and two children.
- Started as a binge-reader of JAFF and was inspired to write *Mr. Collins' Widow*, published in 2015
- Austenesque style from the beginning
- Now a prolific Austenesque author with twenty-three books. Just released: *Mr. Wickham's Widow*

*FWO: *For Women Only*



WRITING AS A MAN IS MOSTLY THE SAME

- My books are a conversation with other P&P variations
- Reading them taught me how women like to write women
- Core emotions like joy, anger, and anxiety are the mostly the same
- Research can fill gaps in what I know about the female experience

THERE ARE DIFFERENCES

- Differences are good, because they make the work distinct
- Men and women notice different things about men and women
- A reviewer once said that Elizabeth noticing how masculine Darcy was showed that a man clearly wrote this
- I've gotten reviews about how my Darcys feel more authentic

FREE-FORM GUIDE QUESTIONS FOR Q&A

- How should male authors approach writing Austenesque Fiction?
- “Sore” spots/turn-offs
- General Q&A and Feedback

AUTHOR WEBSITES

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- Timothy Underwood: timothyunderwoodbooks.com (Backlist15 for 15%)