

Jane Austen Society of North America

VANCOUVER REGION - NEWSLETTER NO. TWENTY-FIVE - FEBRUARY 1989

AT THE DECEMBER MEETING:

"Whereas notice of JASNA has appeared in the form of a published newspaper article with an accompanying photograph of our President, it is hereby moved by Dianne Kerr and seconded by Viviane McClelland that said article and photograph be reproduced in full in the next forthcoming edition of our newsletter, and that this motion directly precede said reproduction in print".

13 - Wednesday, December 7, 1988 - Capilano Chronicle

Jane Austen club picks local for president

CAPILANO RESIDENT Eileen Sutherland recently earned the distinction of becoming the first Canadian president of the Jane Austen Society of North America.

Sutherland was elected to the post at the closing session of the society's annual convention, which was held this year in Chicago, Illinois. There are chapters of the society spread throughout each American state and every Canadian province except Newfoundland.

"It's a society that brings together people that have nothing else in common at all," said Sutherland of the society that boasts 2,265 Jane Austen-philies.

The theme of the annual conference is chosen by the host chapter. This year, the topic was "Jane Austen's England," which saw participants studying the contemporary writers that would have influenced Austen, her family background, her early childhood reading, English gardens, the servant situation, how parishes were run, the Anglican evensong service and the role of women in her society. "In a sense she was an early feminist," says Sutherland.

Although it may be unusual for an author who wrote at the turn of

By PEGGY TRENDLE-WHITTAKER
Chronicle Reporter



EILEEN SUTHERLAND ... first Canadian president of North American Jane Austen Society.

the 19th century to have such an enthusiastic following today, Sutherland says that Austen's

work "doesn't really date."

Sutherland says some of the reasons Austen appeals to modern readers are her use of the language, her precision, and the manner in which she "punctuates pompousness" in her works. "She believes in honesty and a lack of shame," asserts Sutherland.

Sutherland also believes that the study of Jane Austen-related material can never be exhausted. "There seems to be enough in Jane Austen to satisfy everybody and keep the ideas flowing." Letters of Austen or her contemporaries that come to light and new biographies that are published provide even more fuel to keep readers' interest alight.

The local chapter meets roughly once a month to discuss a novel or hear a guest speaker. Each year, the group sponsors an Austen-related essay contest at Simon Fraser University and the University of British Columbia and in March hosts a Jane Austen Day at which members and others can hear lectures in the morning and the afternoon and enjoy a lunch together.

Sutherland's personal favorite work of Austen's is *Persuasion*, "although *Pride and Prejudice* comes very close I'm constantly picking up and reading little bits of all of them."

The Vancouver group has approximately 45 members, with 235 Canada-wide. For more information on the society, call Sutherland at 988-0479.

MORE THOUGHTS ON BIOGRAPHIES

"Jane Austen and Space" (from Jane Austen, Tony Tanner) by Barbara Peacock.

'I did not know before' continued Bingley 'that you were a studier of character. It must be an amusing study'.

'Yes', Elizabeth replies, 'but intricate characters are the most amusing. They have at least that advantage'.

'The country' said Darcy, 'can in general supply but few subjects for such a study. In a country neighbourhood you move in a very confined and invaring society'.

'But people themselves alter so much that there is something new to be observed in them forever'. (P&P)

Tony Tanner points out that Elizabeth's last remark is not wholly borne out by the book, for the Collinses and the Mrs. Bennets and the Lady Catherine of this world do not change. But "intricate characters are capable of change, as both she and Darcy change...Very generally we can say that obviously it is always likely to be in some ways oppressive for an intricate person to be forced to live among simple people".

As I see it myself, people operate on different levels. It is not that someone on a different "level" is unintelligent or uninteresting but simply that the attempt to communicate at a level other than one's own often leaves a feeling of dissatisfaction and of something unresolved.

Tony Tanner says:- "This matter of social space is an important one, but a word may be said about what we may refer to as mental space or range, and its effect on language. We can recognise at least two different ways in which people use language...Some people employ it unreflectively - they are unable to speak and unable to think outside their own particular social situation. Others, by contrast, are capable of using language reflectively and not just as an unconditioned response... Because the same space is occupied by people using language both reflectively and unreflectively, the claustrophobia for someone sensitive to speech can become very great. Witness the agonies of embarrassment which Elizabeth goes through while her Mother rattles unreflectively on. This can lead obviously to a desire to escape and, although Jane Austen does not seem to envisage how someone might renounce society altogether, she does show the relief with which an intricate person seeks out some solitude away from the miseries which can be caused by the constant company of more limited minds".

A further example of Jane Austen's understanding of this kind of situation takes place in The Watsons when Emma Watson "In his [her father's] chamber Emma was at peace from the dreadful mortifications of unequal society and family discord... She still suffered from them in the contemplation of their existence in memory and in prospect, but for the moment she ceased to be tortured by their effects".

The descriptions of the personality of Harris Wither, quoted from letters of Caroline Austen and Anna Lefroy, make it seem that his range of thinking was on a completely different level from Jane Austen's. Indeed, it seems he was an irritant to his father, and could not have been at all like his sisters who were Jane's friends. There would indeed have been social space at Manydown, but no mental space in her life with Harris. And very probably a complete dousing of her creative art. Jane had just come from Bath where she had not been happy, and began no new work. Possibly a return to the joys of country living had stirred her to start writing

again, but during the night of December 2, she might have realised that life with Harris Wither would put an end to any such pursuit. As wife to the heir of Manydown she would have many responsibilities and "the writing of novels" could not possibly be included. It is an indication that Catherine and Alethea Bigg-Wither understood Jane's decision, as they remained her friends throughout her life.

Park Honan [Jane Austen: A Life] remarks on the conditions at Southampton, where Jane stayed in Frank's house. Although he does not give a source for his comments, I find his concept reasonable: "...there was no outlet for a person in need of privacy, no place to retreat to, nothing apparently upstairs or downstairs to call one's own, no recourse to be other than sisterly (to Mary) and polite...the situation did not allow her to say more than 'I am sorry and angry'. The more dutiful she tried to be, the more her resentment grew and her sense of relief at Chawton appears to derive partly from these years".

But, as we know, when Jane Austen was happily settled at Chawton, she started to write again.

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BRIEF OPINIONS

Park Honan: "Mainly negative" (K.P.); "Impressed with the family details; naval part was interesting; boring beginning" (M.A.); "Absorbing family background" (J.B.); "Description of living conditions of the time was interesting" (B.P.)

John Halperin: "'No sense of humour, priggish - I got madder & madder" (J.S.); "Even worse than I thought" (J.C.).

Jane Aitken Hodge: "Readable, smooth". (B.P.).

Views on Jane and Cassandra, in general: "Biographies spoil my illusions; I dislike Cassandra for destroying the letters" (P.D.P.); "Cassandra was protective" (P.P.); "They show sibling rivalry and jealousy on Cassandra's part" (D.S.); "Jane did too much toadying to Cassandra" (D.K.); "Enjoyable to see the communication between the two sisters" (P.P.); "The censorship was all for the best - the sisters were close" (J.B.); "Cassandra protected herself as well - they wanted to live private lives" (J.C.); "In the Victoria era we got the 'Gentle Jane' image; in the 20th c. we see a swing to the other direction, the theories of Jung, Freud, etc." (K.P.).

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SOLACE FOR INSOMNIA

When Kay Rankin cannot sleep, she sometimes gets up in the middle of the night, prepares herself a drink of warm milk and watches TV Superchannel - a "silent news" programme, with a quotation every night. One night she saw a quotation from Jane Austen: "A lady's imagination is very rapid; it jumps from admiration to love, from love to matrimony, in a moment".

How many members know who said this, and under what circumstances?

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Below: Hugh Thomson; Right: C.E.Brock.



Cheerful prognostics



'Jane had not been gone long before it rained hard.'

"This Pride & Prejudice [Macmillan: Illustrated Standard Novels, 1895] is of particular interest, because here we have these two great illustrators drawing identical subjects in the same materials. CEB must have grown very tired of being endlessly told that he was a 'follower' of Hugh Thomson and that he was 'indebted to Thomson'. He admired the Irishman's work; who could help doing so? Nobody ever drew in pen-and-ink more delicately than H.T. and nobody ever will. But a careful scrutiny of these two books makes it quite clear that CEB needed to be in nobody's debt. His pictures for P&P are fully capable of standing up to comparison. They are every bit as attractive, just as delicate where delicacy is needed, and undeniably stronger and more certain where it is not. I think it is true to say that CEB gave more attention to faces than did H.T., whose faces are often curiously indefinite". - The Brocks: C.M.Kelly.

A book is like a garden which you can carry around in your pocket.

Old Chinese Proverb.

BIRTHDAY PARTY

The birthday gifts suggested for characters in the novels provided us with a lot of laughs, but also perhaps indicated something about the donor.

Some members were kind, considerate and thoughtful: they suggested for Mr. Woodhouse a year's supply of instant oatmeal or a hot-water-bottle with a hand-crochet cover; for John Thorpe a picnic hamper for rides into the country with hopes he may have better luck next time; for Willoughby a winning lottery ticket so he won't spoil anyone else's life; for Marianne a poem by William Cowper especially written and dedicated to her; or for Mrs. Allen, five yards of the finest sprig muslin, cotton and polyester so it won't shrink.

Some disliked the character and vented their spleen: for Lady Bertram, another dog - a pit bull! for Willoughby a boa constrictor or a black widow spider; for Mrs. Norris a one-way ticket to China: she is so thrifty she would use it; for Mrs. Clay white-lead powder for her complexion; or for John Thorpe a boomerang: unskilfully used it will return and knock out the thrower.

Some of the gifts were available today: a micro-wave for Mr. Woodhouse's gruel; the latest model sports car for John Thorpe or Willoughby; a walkman for Lady Bertram; a Harlequin romance for Marianne (*sotto voce* comment: introduce her to the editor - she is a Harlequin romance); a freezer for Mrs. Norris so the leftovers from Mansfield Park will not be wasted.

Others were contemporary to the time of the novels: for Mr. Woodhouse, two jars of homemade calf's foot jelly, one for him to pass on to Miss Bates; for Mrs. Bennet, smelling salts; for Harriet Smith, a pretty sun-bonnet for walking around the farm.

Some gifts were material objects: a shawl or warm scarf for Mr. Woodhouse; a walking cane for John Thorpe; perfume or a bouquet of roses for Marianne; or a pocket calculator for Mrs. Norris. Others were "gifts of the gods": longevity and good health for Willoughby (to suffer!); a mean and disagreeable disposition for his wife, for Willoughby; laryngitis for Mr. Collins. Some were gifts that could have come only from a "colonial": a buffalo robe or a Hudson Bay blanket for Mr. Woodhouse.

But my choice for the most perfect gift was for Mrs. Bennet: a framed portrait of her five daughters and her five sons-in-law!

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GODMERSHAM SUPPORTS CATHEDRAL

[Jane Austen would have known Godmersham, Kent, very well - this was the home of the Knight relatives who adopted her brother Edward. Perhaps she also knew of this bit of history, passed on to us by Donna Short, taken from Canterbury, the Story of a Cathedral, by Sally Rousham, 1975)

"As an example of the financing of building works, one can take the reconstruction of the nave which was completed under Prior Chillendeñ (1391-1411). When it was discovered that the Norman nave was unsound, Archbishop Simon Sudbury invited subscriptions to the building fund and offered an indulgence of forty days to anyone who contributed. He also made a personal donation of three thousand marks. (A mark was equal to 13s 4d and might represent as much as £80 sterling in present-day purchasing power.) His successor, Archbishop Arundel, gave a thousand marks and the income from the rectories of Godmersham and Westwell...."

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ON THINKING OVER "PRIDE AND PREJUDICE" - by Dianne Kerr.

Elizabeth: You are mistaken, Mr. Darcy, if you suppose...had you behaved in a more gentlemanlike manner.

Mr. Darcy: Your reproof...I shall never forget: 'Had you behaved in a more gentlemanlike manner'. Those were your words.

Elizabeth: You could not have made me the offer of your hand in any way that would have tempted me to accept it.

Mr. Darcy: ...you said that I could not have addressed you in any possible way that would induce you to accept me.

Austen could have had Darcy repeat Elizabeth's exact words both times. We are certainly to understand that Elizabeth's reproofs to Darcy were burned in his brain word for word. Yet he varies the second repetition in a significant way. He can cope with the first case, being called 'ungentlemanlike', because he IS a gentleman, and nothing can alter that, and they both of them know that.

But he can't cope with the second case; he substitutes 'addressed you' for 'offered my hand'; and he substitutes 'induced to accept' for 'tempted to accept'. Why? Because, although he has been humbled, his essential nature has not been altered. He has not, of course, become a wholly humble man, in place of the once proud man that was. He has to minimize that awful recollection, the spectacle he made of himself, presenting his hand as though he were bestowing a gift of great value, only to have it rejected, not merely as a worthless trifle, but as a positively loathsome object. His nature obliges him to soften the recollection by formalizing it - address: a formal declaration, as opposed to offer: a naked presentation; induce: a mild persuasion, as opposed to tempt: an urgent exhortation.

And this is even more than simple sublimation and substitution; it is more than changing in one's mind "I was scorned and scoffed at" to "My presentation was not favourably received". It is the man Darcy saying what he alone would say in those circumstances. Taken out of context, we would not mistake his speeches for those of Mrs. Gardiner, Lady Catherine, Mr. Collins, or any of the others who speak with measured words.

Austen instinctively combines the insights of Shakespeare before her, and Freud yet to come.

Ah! The awesome artistry!

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SENSIBILITY

"Sensibility is perhaps the key term of the period. Little used before the mid-18th c., although Addison among others had employed it to suggest delicate emotional and physical susceptibility, it came to denote the faculty of feeling, the capacity for extremely refined emotion and a quickness to display compassion for suffering. Its adjectives tell the tale of its rise and fall. It is 'exquisite' in Addison, 'delicate' in Hume, 'sweet' in Cowper, and 'dear' in Sterne. But as it declines from fashion, it becomes 'acute' in Austen, 'trembling' in Hazlitt, 'mawkish' in Coleridge, and 'sickly' in Byron. In the 1760's and 1770's many poems extol sensibility, while in the 1780's and 1790's book titles such as Excessive Sensibility become common". Sensibility: An Introduction, by Janet Todd.

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BOOK-LOVERS' HOLIDAY

Would you like to spend a vacation in a hotel which offered you the "Jane Austen Room"? You can, at the Sylvia Beach Hotel near Newport, Oregon, on the coast just south of Portland. Named after Sylvia Beach, whose bookshop in Paris in the 1920's gave the "Lost Generation" a place of warmth, comfort, occasional loans, and support for the arts - what Hemingway called "a moveable feast" - this hotel tries to give the same kind of companionship, informality and ease.

Each guest room - twenty in all - is named after an author, and decorated in the appropriate style: the Hemingway room suggests the African bush with walls covered with trophies; the Melville room has captain's chairs, a sea chest and a brass porthole window; and the Jane Austen room has a special nook for reading, JASNA newsletters, and an antique quilt. Other rooms feature Willa Cather, Emily Dickinson, Gertrude Stein, Edgar Allan Poe, Mark Twain, and others. The rooms are furnished with comfortable chairs, writing tables and a complete set of the author's books - no telephone, no TV.

In addition, the library offers fireplace, overstuffed chairs, stacks of books, and coffee, tea and hot spiced wine every evening. The "Table of Contents" dining room serves breakfasts and gourmet dinners in an atmosphere that encourages talk of books and lively discussions.

I haven't been there yet, but some day soon, I hope to be sending all my friends postcards "from the Jane Austen room - wish you were here".

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MORE VACATIONS WITH JANE AUSTEN

Keele University in Keele, Staffordshire, England, is offering "Jane Austen in the Midlands", a study/tour which will "take you on the route of the midland journey made by Jane Austen in fact and fiction", visiting relatives in Stoneleigh Abbey and then the rectory at Hamstall Ridware near Lichfield, in 1806; Elizabeth Bennet also visited the nearby countryside with the Gardiners. The tour takes place July 8-9, and the cost of £66.00 includes tuition fee, admission charges, all meals and one night's accommodation. Take comfortable walking shoes.

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Elderhostel is offering, among many other courses, "The Elegance of 18th-Century Bath" - "the creation of Georgian Bath, Palladian town planning, its Neo-classic and Italianate architecture, its 18th-century furnishings, decorations and gardens, with visits to a restored Georgian house in the beautiful Royal Crescent, the splendid Pump and Assembly Rooms and nearby Stourhead House and Gardens" - at Bath, August 7-30, and Aug.14-Sept.7. And "Literature and Landscape" - "The city of Bath has always been an inspiration to writers. Probably the most famous author from the 18th c. was Jane Austen. The course looks at the effect of the landscape on her and other 18th c. writers" - also in Bath, June 26-July 20, and July 10-Aug.3.

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NEW YEAR'S GIFT

"Jan.1, 1790. My beloved and I woke at seven. Found by our bed side Petticoats and Pockets, a new year's gift from our truest Friends" [presumably the two maids]. (A Year With the Ladies of Llangollen, by Elizabeth Mavor).

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BELLES OF THE BALLS

In 1798, Jane Austen wrote to her sister: "Our ball was very thin, but by no means unpleasant. There were thirty-one people, and only eleven ladies out of the number, and but five single women in the room " [Letters, No.15]

Off Bantry Bay, Ireland, in 1801, Captain Collingwood had a similar problem:

"We dine with each other [the officers from the various ships of the fleet] when the weather will allow boats to pass, and indeed the young men find ladies even among these rocks to make a dance now and then. I mean all those who have shoes and stockings and a bit of blue ribbon to adorn their black heads. They can all dance, and while they hold their tongues, are very decent behaved people". [Life and Letters of Vice-Admiral Lord Collingwood: Oliver Warner].

Not to be outdone, on this side of the Atlantic, dance promoters faced the same difficulties. Celebrating the launching of the Oneida at Oswego, Lake Ontario:

"Building a brig hundreds of miles from a ship-yard was a trifle compared to the attempt to give a ball in the wilderness. True, one fiddle and half a dozen officers were something to open the ball with; refreshments and a military ball-room might also be hoped for, but where, pray, were the ladies to come from? The officers declared that they would not dance with each other. Ladies must be found. No recruiting officers ever made more vigorous efforts in behalf of the service than Lieutenant Woolsey and his command on this occasion. [March 31, 1809]

"At length, by dint of sending boats miles in one direction, and carts miles in another, the feat was accomplished; ladies were invited, and ladies accepted. A difficulty suggested itself, however...by what rules were the honours of the evening to be allotted? Woolsey issued his orders to the master of ceremonies: 'All ladies, sir, provided with shoes and stockings, are to be led to the head of the Virginia reel; ladies with shoes and without stockings, are considered in the second rank; ladies without either shoes or stockings, you will lead, gentlemen, to the foot of the country-dance'!" [Ghost Ships: Emily Cain]

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VALENTINES

Under the headline "Capture Romance With Love Stories" in the Sun, Wendy Metcalf Roy lists "some of the great love stories of all time" from a booklist called Star-Crossed Lovers. Samples include biographies of Victoria and Albert, Queen Guinevere, Tristan and Iseult, Gable and Lombard, and Bogart and Bacall. Under the heading From Fiction is Emma by Jane Austen: "Emma is full of good intentions and high-flown ideals: she knows what is best for everyone, but has some trouble recognizing where her own happiness lies. One of Austen's finest comic creations".

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"A written word is the choicest of relics.
It is something at once more intimate with
us and more universal than any other work
of art."

Henry David Thoreau.

SALE OF JANE AUSTEN MANUSCRIPTS

Jane Austen's vellum-bound manuscript of the third volume of the *Juvenilia* was sold at a tense, crowded auction in London last September, when the British Library acquired this early work. A spokesman for the library called it "a marvellous acquisition, a superb heritage item". All three volumes of the *Juvenilia* are preserved in England, the first volume at the Bodleian Library at Oxford, and the other two now at the British Library in London.

A second Jane Austen manuscript, the first draft of *The Watsons*, was also put up for auction, and sold to an anonymous bidder. Both manuscripts were part of a collection of works of art acquired for investment purposes by the British Rail Pension Fund in the 1970's - not only far-sighted business men, but obviously men of taste!

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THE BRITISH NAVY

A post-script to our lecture about the Navy and the Battle of Trafalgar by Dr. Nellis last meeting comes from Kathleen Glancy in Edinburgh:

"*Persuasion* is Jane's tribute to the Navy, but its closing lines must have seemed somewhat odd to its first readers. After all, the most celebrated sailor of the age had only been dead for 13 years and was well remembered, for more than one aspect of his life. And as one of the things he was remembered for was the neglect of his own wife in favour of someone else's, it must be judged that he at least was not distinguished for domestic virtues. I suspect that if Jane had had time to revise properly she would have changed that last sentence, having remembered - as clearly she had momentarily forgotten - that few people knew what good husbands and fathers Charles and Frank Austen were, and everyone knew about Nelson.

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A JANE AUSTEN HEROINE?

Donna Short sent this account of the young daughter of one of our members:

"Maria Grzejszczak and her daughter Helena spent an evening recently at my home where we viewed the video of *P&P*. Young Helena is at a wonderful age, truly a 14 year old going 15, and as such, found the story very romantic and wonderful. However, she was completely let down when, at the end, there was no embrace! It seemed to her the romantic yet total commitment could not be complete without that final touch.

Last summer Maria and her daughter were guests in my sister's home. My nephew, a nice lad of 15, received constant telephone calls from girls. (He obviously enjoyed the attention, although he has complained that they all seem to feel he is to be a possession of one determined young woman or another). Yet with Helena at the dinner table the conversation was of school life, and things that would have been considered attractive during Jane Austen's time. My sister commented on the difference displayed between Helena and the girls who constantly and aggressively pursue my nephew. Her attitude struck us as something rather special in today's general practice of the young, displaying the warmth and romantic side almost considered to be part of a bygone era."

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THE LINEAGE OF LADY CATHERINE - by Kathleen Glancy.

"De Burgh is a Norman name - Irish Norman to be exact. Burke is a corruption of it. King Robert the Bruce's Irish second wife was Elizabeth de Burgh. Come to that, Fitzwilliam is an Irish Norman name, too, and Darcy, spelt that way rather than D'Arcy, is the Irish variant. But it is certainly true that Lady Catherine, despite her and her husband's actual lineage, has a touch of the *nouveau riche* about her which I put down to her family being impoverished. There are clues: Colonel Fitzwilliam's need to find a wife who has money, though he is not so desperate as to marry only for that, the odd fact that Lady Catherine didn't learn to play the piano as a girl, the fact that she and Lady Anne both married men who were untitled, though well-born and rich, rather than peers who would be apt to look for wives with substantial dowries to add to the family coffers - all speak for the Fitzwilliams being long on lineage and short on cash, most likely because their estates were in that notably unprosperous country, Ireland."

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Kathleen Glancy will be one of the speakers at the conference this year in Santa Fé - watch for complete information in the next issue of JASNA News - due sometime in April.

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JANE AUSTEN DAY

Mark your calendars for March 11th, and keep that day open for the major event of our Vancouver JASNA Jane Austen year. The enclosed notice gives you all the details. When you have noted the information, pass this notice along to a friend, or post it on a bulletin board at your favourite bookstore, community centre or library. This promises to be even better than last year!

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"Fiction is like a spider's web attached ever so slightly perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners."

Virginia Woolf.

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This Newsletter, the publication of the Vancouver Region of the Jane Austen Society of North America, comes out four times a year: February, May, August and November. All submissions on the subject of Jane Austen, her life, her works and her times, are welcome. Mail to the Editor: Eileen Sutherland, 4169 Lions Ave., North Vancouver, B.C. V7R 3S2.