

Muse & Musings

"The company of clever, well-informed people, who have a great deal of conversation"

War and Remembrance

On November 15th, in honour of Remembrance Day, we commemorated 100 years since the beginning of World War I and 200 years since Britain was fighting Napoleon over much the same ground. First Carol Wylie read "The Battle of Blenheim" by Robert Southey (written in 1796 about a battle in 1704). Then we had a dramatic reading of "The Janeites" adapted from a story by Rudyard Kipling. After the "play" Pam Ottridge read Elaine Bander's poem "Beaumont-Hamel" (about a present-day visit to a WWI memorial). The dramatic reading involved 13 readers who all put their hearts in and made the production a huge success.



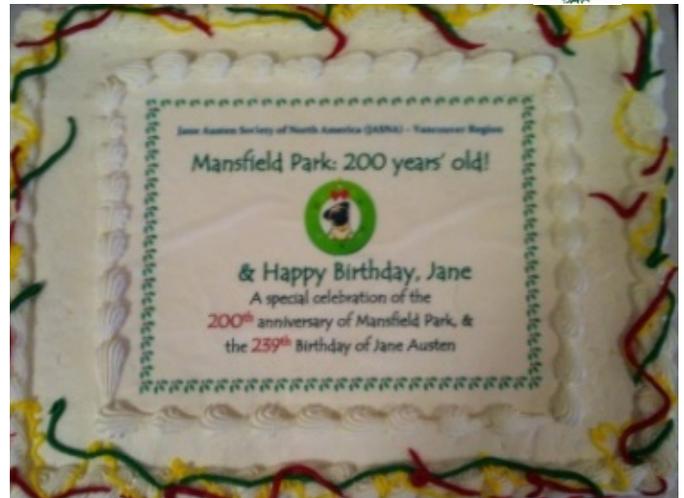
Richard Mills as Anthony and Joan Reynolds as Humberstall carried the show.

Thank you, Phyllis

Also at the November meeting, our long-serving Regional Coordinator (RC) Phyllis Ferguson announced that a new rule was instituted at the Montréal AGM under which RCs might serve only three two-year terms, and that she would therefore be stepping down at the end of the year. Michelle Siu was nominated to stand the new RC. As no more nominations were received, Michelle was duly

acclaimed at the end of the December meeting, at which time a gift basket was presented to Phyllis.

Happy 239th, Jane Mansfield Park Pug-fest



Our December speaker was our own Phyllis Ferguson who gave an expanded version of her AGM talk "Sisters Beneath the Skin" on Mansfield Park's seemingly very different Ward sisters: Mrs. Norris, Lady Bertram and Mrs. Price. Those who had one, brought along a pug, Lady Bertram's favourite accessory.

Musical entertainment was provided by Susan Olsen, who sang "The Song of the Discontented Cook."



Susan sings as Peg, the discontented cook.

Michelle's missive

Regional Coordinator's message

Thank you to our membership for your vote of confidence as I stood to accept the nomination to the role of Regional Coordinator in November. I must thank the outgoing RC for her excellent leadership and example she has set. Phyllis has given much of herself to our Region and JASNA at large. May she enjoy her hard-earned break from the hot seat! And to the excellent volunteers in the kitchen, and to the Programming Committee whose energy at planning meetings is unmatched! Thank you for your support.



I take this seat as RC with the goal to continue supporting growth and community in our Region. The Programming Committee has some great ideas that are underway, great speakers and topics that I look forward to hearing about. At every meeting, I learn something new, from our special lecturers, activities, and presentations. But the highlight for myself is at the end of our meetings when our little assembly has the opportunity to chat and share our knowledge of all things Jane!

And if you have any suggestions, any questions, please approach me at the meetings or email me with your ideas and comments jasnaVancouverRC@gmail.com

Phyllis's Last Fling

Outgoing Regional Coordinator's message

When my fellow Sunday School teacher, Marg Clarke, invited me to attend a special JASNA meeting with her on October 28, 2000, I had no idea that the sturdy but dormant seed of my appreciation for Jane Austen's works was about to germinate and grow in ways that I could never have predicted. Although that first day I enjoyed the drama presentation by Kim Hicks, it was the conversations shared afterwards with fellow readers which drew me back and continue to do so.

It is those same readers who have made my eight years as Regional Coordinator such a pleasure. I looked forward to our lively program planning meetings and was constantly impressed by how the group could take the

kernel of an idea and develop it into a creative and stimulating session (and one usually within budget as well). My thanks to all the members of our region for their good humour and willingness to contribute but particularly

- to Pam, our calm and gracious programming chair
- to Joan, our computer whiz energetically spinning out attractive posters, table decorations and research articles
- to Jennifer, our extremely competent treasurer
- to Eileen, Sandy, Susan and Elspeth our dedicated and knowledgeable Newsletter Editors
- to Laureen for quietly organizing our website since its inception
- to Nora and to Jayne for their cheerful efficiency in the kitchen
- to Ron for wine, once for whisky and always for being a model of reliability and steadfastness
- to Michelle for technological expertise and now for ably taking on the role of our Regional Co-ordinator. When the new by-law was passed at the last AGM, I believe that I was the only RC who had my potential "succession plan" sitting beside me!



Phyllis receives gift basket from Joan at the December meeting.

My years in JASNA have led to:

- writing a book and articles about some of Austen's socially awkward characters and giving presentations about my theories to groups in four countries
- my husband and I becoming "dance gypsies" as we pursue our delight in English Country Dancing at workshops, balls and residential camps as far west as Hawaii, south as St. Croix, north as Winnipeg and east as Florence

- the acquisition of two and three-quarter shelves of books about the works and times of Jane Austen (plus ten AGM bags and reams of hand-written notes from speakers' presentations)
- meeting and forming friendships with many wonderful, generous and intellectually curious people whose broad range of interests and knowledge has stimulated me to keep learning

I look forward to many more years of contributing to a group which has given me so much. Thank-you!

Phyllis Ferguson Bottomer

***Mansfield Park* or “Women in Love”**

According to Marie Sørbø

At the October meeting, where we reprised the Montréal AGM, I enthused about the presentation by Norwegian scholar Marie Sørbø, and especially about her book *Irony and Idyll: Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice and Mansfield Park on Screen*. Her subtitle isn't exactly accurate, as she talks at length about the novels before she discusses the film and TV adaptations, which interest her as “readings” of the text. Sørbø's thesis is that Jane Austen is all irony all the time, and that adaptors largely miss that, and thus, what they give us is “idylls” – idealized stories set in an exotic time and place.

The reason Jane Austen is taught at universities is not because she writes sweet love stories with happily-ever-after endings. It is because she was a pioneer of the “realistic novel”, which is what most mainstream novels have been since at least the middle of the 19th Century. The novels Jane Austen read were mostly wildly improbable stories set in exotic locations with extremely virtuous heroes/heroines, and extremely evil villains. Contemporary critics of Jane Austen remarked – either favourably or not – that her characters and settings were just like what they met and saw in real life. Her original readers had almost never seen anything like what she did.

The ensuing 200 years have transformed Jane Austen's everyday characters and settings into the exotic and idyllic, which accounts for part of the confusion.

Another part of the misreading comes from JA's sly ironic treatment. She teases her readers by standing expectations on their head. We read *Mansfield Park* expecting a courtship love story like *Pride and Prejudice*, and what do we get? A hero who spends most of the book in love with the wrong woman. A heroine who is mousy and priggish and almost impossible to love. A beautiful, sparkling Elizabeth Bennet-type who turns out to be a villain (Mary Crawford). A handsome, independently wealthy Prince Charming (Henry Crawford), who falls so deeply and sincerely in love with our heroine that he “wants to be a better man,” to paraphrase Jack Nicholson in *As Good as it Gets*. Henry loves Fanny for her own qualities, and appreciates her real character much more than Edmund ever will, but it doesn't matter, because Edmund is **Fanny's choice**.

And this brings us to my title, “Women in Love,” which Sørbø suggested would be an appropriate alternate title for *Mansfield Park*. The conduct books of the era were written by men who appeared honestly to believe that women didn't fall in love independently, but only (conveniently) in response to men's falling in love with them. In *MP* Fanny falls in love with Edmund at about the age of ten, and persists in her love until the end. Maria and Julia both fall in love with Henry Crawford, and although Julia is prudent enough to keep out of his way, Maria pursues her love to her personal ruin. And Mary Crawford falls in love with Edmund in spite of her intention of having the older son, and in spite of her dislike of clergymen. This is Jane Austen poking a stick at the conventional love story of her era, and showing us that women can love as passionately and as persistently as men.

Elsbeth Flood

This Newsletter, the publication of the Vancouver Region of the Jane Austen Society of North America, is distributed to members by email and posted on our website. Members who so request may receive a hard copy either at a meeting or in the mail. All submissions on the subject of Jane Austen, her life, her works and her times, are welcome. Editor, Elspeth Flood.

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