

# Muse & Musings

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

## December 10<sup>th</sup> Meeting

### The Art of the Apothecary

Our annual gathering in honour of JA's birthday featured a fascinating discussion on the Art of the Apothecary by Cole Benoit, proprietor of the [Apothecary Bitters Company](#). Cole told us how medicines in the past centuries were made by infusing medicinal herbs in high-proof alcohol, a process is intended to extract oils. Such an emulsion was consumed in a medicinal draught or shot. The English diluted it to make it more palatable.



*An Apothecary's sample; Cole answers questions.*

The cocktail, which wasn't popular until 1850s New York, originally invariably included bitters. Cole told us that bitters were classed as non-potable and therefore were able to be sold during Prohibition. These bitters and are now used primarily for flavouring cocktails, but may also be used for flavouring foods and sauces.

– by *Elsbeth Flood and Michelle Siu*

### What is the connection between our holly table lanterns and Apothecaries?



The illustrations of holly on our table lanterns are a reproduction of a drawing by Elizabeth Blackwell, who used plant specimens from the Chelsea Apothecaries Garden (now called The Chelsea Physic Garden) to produce her book *A Curious Herbal* published in 1739. She personally drew, engraved and coloured 500 illustrations for her book and wrote the descriptions of each plant's herbal and medicinal qualities. It was highly

praised and used by leading physicians and apothecaries of the time.

The Garden itself was founded in 1673 for the purpose of training apprentice apothecaries in the identification and use of medicinal plants. The Garden's location was chosen due to its proximity to the River Thames, taking advantage of the river's warm air currents which contribute to the Garden's unique microclimate. It also gave the Apothecaries convenient moorage for their barges when they collected the plants.

River access also allowed plants arriving from around the world to be introduced to the British Isles via the Garden. Its international reputation was firmly established early on, as a result of its "global seed exchange scheme," known as the Index Seminum, which it initiated in the 1700s and like the Garden itself, continues to this day involving over 360 other Botanic Gardens and universities in 37 different countries.



*Elizabeth Blackwell, holly illustration and the title page to her book.*

So that is the connection between our lanterns, apothecaries and by extension our December meeting speaker, Cole Benoit. If you want to know more about Elizabeth Blackwell, her fascinating life and her *Curious Herbal*, there is an article in our November 2011 Newsletter, available on our website.

– by *Joan Reynolds*

## Jane Austen's Birthday in Sydney

### Cab or Sav?

Only in Australia can you celebrate Jane Austen's December birthday wearing a summer frock in a balmy 30°C. JASA members look forward to her birthday lunch

each year because it signals the end of the year and the start of summer. School always ends around December 16<sup>th</sup>, then Australians take off for their beach cottages and summer vacations.

The lunch last December was held at the York Conference Centre on York Street, one of Sydney's main streets, not far from the Opera House. Close to 200 people attended including four overseas visitors: Irene Birnie from Scotland, Lynn and Ralph Bischoff from Salt Spring Island, and me from Vancouver. The wine was Cab or Sav, and the main course chicken or salmon served in true Australian style by bringing some of each to the table and expecting trading until everyone had the meal they wanted.



JASA president Susannah Fullerton with Aileen at the Sydney luncheon

Judy Stove gave the keynote address introducing her real life murder mystery "The Missing Monument Murders" about the Leigh's of Stoneleigh, family of Jane Austen's mother. Susannah Fullerton, dynamic president of JASA and frequent presenter at JASNA AGMs, gave an inspiring address and proposed the birthday toast.

JASA Sydney extends a friendly welcome to any visitors from JASNA Vancouver and hopes we will have a continuing warm exchange.  
— Aileen Hollifield

## Member Profile

### Violet Hayes and Petter Nordal

1. Tell us a bit about who you are and your life to-date.

**Violet:** I was born and raised in California, studied literature at UC Santa Cruz and moved to Seattle after graduating.

**Petter:** I was born in Norway and moved to the United States with my family when I was nine years old. I was raised between Seattle and Oslo and studied history at the University of Washington.

**We** met while we both were working at Left Bank Books in Seattle's Pike Place Market. **Petter:** I did my master's in education, with an emphasis on bilingual education. **Violet:** After teaching writing at Cornell and dabbling for a while in academia, I got my master's in library science, with an emphasis on public libraries.

**We:** Since marrying in 1998, we have lived in Seattle, Oslo, San Jose, Ithaca and most recently moved to Bellingham in 2015. We raised one daughter, who recently fledged and currently lives in London. **Petter:** I teach at a bilingual Spanish-English elementary school. **Violet:** I am currently working on a book on race, family history and adoption.

2. When did you join JASNA?

**Violet:** I joined JASNA, Central New York chapter in 2013. **Petter:** I became gradually more interested in the Regency period through English Country Dancing – the first Ball I attended was given by the Kingston Frontenac Public Library in honour of *Pride and Prejudice's* anniversary, proving that Canada has from the first been an important aspect to my Jane Austen interests. After pad-stitching my own tailcoat for a Christmas Ball and later being recruited to bake a savoury pie for a Regency-themed picnic contest in which we won first place, I decided to move from a hanger-on to a full-fledged JASNA member in 2015.

3. How did you first get started with Jane Austen?

**Violet:** like many young girls, I finished reading every single book available in the children's section of my local library around age 11 or 12 and was directed by the librarian to try *Pride and Prejudice*. However, while Austen was entertaining enough, she did not become a strong interest until later in life a close friend of mine was working on her dissertation on representations of female education in Austen. I was recruited to re-read all the Austen novels and give feedback on chapters, and thus was drawn into engagement with Austen on a more intellectual – and interesting – level.

**Petter:** I similarly read Austen while young, but did not really get involved reading the novels closely until after joining JASNA. Typically, I came at Austen through history, while Violet came at Austen through literature.

4. What do you like about JASNA?

Both of us love that JASNA offers something new to think about at every single meeting. Both in New York and in Vancouver, the meetings are always intellectually stimulating, often surprising in scope, and fun. Plus, everyone we meet is clever, kind and interesting.

5. Has JASNA given you any special memories? New friends? Inspiration to new experiences?



Probably the biggest “inspiration to new experiences” to come from JASNA are our stimulated joint-interest in material cultural history. Both of us were already interested in cultural studies, but the emphasis on understanding JA contexts, as well as the playful aspect of JA studies in a social rather than academic context stimulated us to explore Regency history from a material perspective that has been very eye-opening.



For example, the sense of how clothes regulate the body becomes more than theory after spending an evening strapped into an accurately designed tailcoat. You really understand that men literally could not slouch in such a piece of clothing. Likewise, trying to fasten a simple dress with drawstrings alone becomes an exercise in frustration, making very visceral the idea that Regency-era women were never expected to live alone. The concept of having to always live with other people no matter what your social or economic status is mind-boggling and would be difficult to really process without this experience. Our joint and individual experiences in trying out clothes, foods and dancing have enriched our readings and understandings of culture, both concerning Regency and other places/eras of history.

### ***North and South* by Elizabeth Gaskell** **Reflections of *Pride and Prejudice***

In the last issue of *Muse & Musings*, I described Dr. Herbert Rosengarten’s October talk on the connections between Charlotte Brontë and Jane Austen, focusing on *Jane Eyre* and *Pride & Prejudice*. In that article I said:

“He suggested (very amusingly) that both *JE* and *P&P* could be reduced to the same template: Wealthy and powerful man meets less wealthy lady, falls in love with her and proposes. Separation and complications – including family secrets – ensue until eventually the two are reunited. I am currently reading is *North and South* by Elizabeth Gaskell, which also fits the template!”

I had then been reading *North & South* in preparation for a seniors’ class given by Dr. Mason Harris at SFU on *N&S*. Coincidentally, our members Susan Kaufman and Phyllis Ferguson Bottomer are also enrolled in the class.

Elizabeth Gaskell is not as widely read as Jane Austen or Charlotte Brontë, but when I was in my twenties, I read all the Victorian literature I could find in print: the Brontës, Dickens, Trollope, Gaskell (including her biography of Charlotte Brontë) and others. Gaskell has had a 21<sup>st</sup>-century renaissance due to three BBC mini-series of her works: *Wives & Daughters* in 1999, *North & South* in 2004 and *Cranford* in 2007. Of these, the most faithful is *W&D* – the liberties taken with the text are largely because it was unfinished when, in 1865, Gaskell died unexpectedly of a heart attack at the age of 55.

*Cranford* is actually a new fiction achieved by screenwriters Sue Birtwhistle, Susie Conklin and Heidi Thomas very successfully weaving together strands from *Cranford*, *Mr. Harrison’s Confession* and *My Lady Ludlow*. I remember when it was first on TV, one of my teenage boys walked through the room, paused to watch for a few seconds (during a very affecting sickroom scene), and asked, “Is this kid going to die?” I was startled and said, “I don’t think so,” because all I really remembered of *Cranford* (which is the best-known of Gaskell’s works) was that nothing happened in it – except a cat swallowing some lace. After the kid did die, I scrutinized the credits, found the other books in my bookcase and was glad of the opportunity to reread them.



Colin Firth’s Darcy compared with Richard Armitage’s Thornton, shamelessly stolen from the internet: [See original blogpost](#)

*North & South* achieved a cult following among the fans of *P&P* adaptations because of its very swoon-worthy Mr. Thornton, played by Richard Armitage. Although I very much enjoyed the characterizations and the overall atmosphere of the *N&S* mini-series, I find some of the liberties taken in it to be quite objectionable.

But enough of adaptations. The point I wanted to make here is that the storyline of *N&S* follows that of *P&P* even more closely than does *JE*: there is mutual dislike on first sight, although (in both cases) the gentleman comes round

much sooner than the lady. There is an early proposal by and rejection of the wrong suitor; there is a first proposal which is rejected out of hand and then regretted by the lady when she thinks, due to a misunderstanding, that she has lost his good opinion. On the other hand, *N&S* has religious doubt, factories, death from industrial disease, a strike, a riot . . . Lots of stuff that Jane Austen never ever touched on even obliquely.

I first read *North & South* more than forty years ago, and I have read it several times since then, including twice after I enrolled for the class. Although I love the book, I have always disliked Gaskell's ending. About ten years ago, I wrote an alternative ending and have never had anyone to share it with who had read and cared about the book (rather than just the mini-series). Now, in the SFU class, I am finally enjoying that opportunity. I will be happy to share my ending with anyone who would like as long as they have read the book. — by *Elsbeth Flood*

### Regional Coordinator's Corner

Days after the last snowfall, I organized a handful of us Janeites who ventured out to the Irving K. Barber Learning Centre at UBC. In their new 2<sup>nd</sup> floor lobby were a half dozen cases filled with treasures from their Rare Books and Special Collections (RBSC) Library and some other sources. A highlight was the newly acquired first editions of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasions*.



*Librarian-Archivist Chelsea Shriver explains one of the displays; display of political cartoons*

Thank you to librarian Chelsea Shriver for letting us know about the acquisition, and to the three student curators (the “three Ks”) who put together the interesting display.

“Ever Austen” is on display until February 28. And after the exhibit is ended, all our members and the public are welcome to see these items in person by visiting the RBSC Library.

Our programming committee is hard at work to bring together some interesting topics. Highlights in development include a JASNA-sponsored lecturer on *Northanger Abbey* and caricature art, a speaker on 18th century art, and a discussion about Jane's legacy and her last year of life. If you have ideas, please speak with me or send me an email [jasnavancouverRC@gmail.com](mailto:jasnavancouverRC@gmail.com)

In July 2017, we are working with VPL for a day to mark the 200th anniversary of Jane's death. If you would like to help out, volunteer, wear your costume, speak to the public at our booth, or help out in any other way, please contact me and leave your name so I will be in touch as we continue to plan. — by *Michelle Siu*



*Jane's birthday cake December, 2016*

### Upcoming meetings

#### Mark your calendar

March 18<sup>th</sup> April 22<sup>nd</sup>

May 27<sup>th</sup> **Jane Austen Day** June 17<sup>th</sup>

Please see the program of events on our website:

[JASNA-Vancouver program](#)

**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 and book reviews on the subject of Jane Austen, her life, her works and her times, are welcome.

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