

# *My Dear Cassandra . . . . .*

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*"When I think of Jane Austen I think of opulence and sophistication."  
- Beatrice Arthur*

## **September Meeting**

I hope you have all had a wonderful summer, and are ready for another exciting year of  
**'fun with Jane.'**

Our next meeting will be on Saturday, September 15 from 2:00 to 4:00 pm in the William Castell Library meeting room. Phyllis Ferguson, Regional Coordinator of the Vancouver Chapter of JASNA, speech pathologist and author, will be speaking about her just-published book,

*So Odd a Mixture: Along the Autistic Spectrum in 'Pride and Prejudice'.*

It promises to be an interesting way of looking at some of our favourite characters. We will begin the meeting with the speaker, and have our business meeting after the coffee break. This will include a report from your Program Committee about the plans for this year's meetings (including a Tea!) and news about restructuring our executive for 2008. There have been several requests for information from interested people over the summer months, and with the Vancouver AGM and all the Jane Austen media hype it promises to be an exciting year for our members.

See you on September 15!

- Randi Lind

## **Sprigged Muslin Dancers**

Our newer members may not know that our chapter of JASNA has its very own group of dancers. We meet about once a month to learn English country dances (just like in the movies!) under the direction of Pat Barton. New dancers are always welcome; the dancing is a lot of fun and surprisingly good exercise! The first practice for this year will be on September 17 at 7:00 pm in St. Andrew's Anglican Church. (1611 St. Andrew's Pl. NW)

### **Note:**

Following is a story by Sheila Dechant. She wrote it in response to the request for articles about 18thC health care for the May meeting, but there wasn't room for it at the time. Sheila is a member of the Edmonton JASNA group.

### **Diana Parker meets Henry Woodhouse**

### **Sheila Dechant**

(Just a quick reminder, Diana Parker is the amusing character from "Sanditon", who is overly concerned about everyone's health and who feels that her family are very delicate and always ill. However, most of her concerns are imaginary and due to lack of useful

activities, plus an officious frenzy of organising everyone around her. Her family are trying to encourage people to go to Sanditon, a newly developed seaside resort, in which they have financial interests.)

Miss Parker: “Mr Woodhouse I have been longing to meet you. Your daughter kindly invited me to join this evening party along with my friend, Mrs. Goddard, whom I know through my second cousin Miss Johnston. I am visiting here because I have heard of some interest in sea bathing in this part of the country and I wish to recommend the attractive and modern seaside resort of Sanditon, in which my brother resides, to his great advantage. I want to advise anyone who is interested in their health to consider a stay at Sanditon, where the air, placement and means for attending to the needs of visitors and residents are second to none. I have heard of your exemplary concern for health matters, of course, and am delighted to meet someone of the same mind as myself.”

Mr Woodhouse: “I do not, myself, feel that sea bathing is of much use for my family in our situation but, sadly, my daughter, Isabella felt it necessary to go to Southend recently, though I had recommended Cromer and poor Emma seems to feel a seaside visit would be beneficial to her.”

Miss Parker: “My dear sir, I would highly recommend them both to visit Sanditon whenever they wish to indulge in the benefits of the seaside. I have just recently settled an heiress of doubtful health and a seminary of young ladies in lodgings at Sanditon, for the season. I like to help where I can, although my own health is precarious at best. Why, just before I began my recent transactions I was very ill with a severe attack of spasmodic bile, hardly able to crawl from my bed to my sofa, while my sister has been suffering from headaches, had three teeth drawn and endured an attack of nerves. She was scarcely able to speak for a week. My eldest brother is recovering from a sprained ankle, but, luckily, the play of the sinews was not much affected, much to my relief. I am, however, still concerned about my youngest brother, Arthur, who also seems to have lumbago hanging about him and I am also fearful for his liver.”

Mr Woodhouse: “Dear, oh dear, you must rest while you are in Highbury. May I recommend that you join me in eating a bowl of gruel? You will not find unwholesome food here. Suppose we both take a little gruel. Serle, our cook knows the full meaning of a light, smooth basin of gruel better than any other.”

Miss Parker: “I do not usually eat for about a week after traveling, but I think that a basin of gruel will suit me entirely at the moment, to ease my palpitations and settle my constitution. I wish I could get Arthur to take some gruel in the evening, but he does like his toast and butter. He does assure me, however, that he spreads the butter very thinly if at all. Well, well, here is the gruel. While we enjoy your cook’s excellent preparation, let me tell you a little more about Sanditon, the very best place to go to improve your health”

(The above speeches were adapted and enlarged from various conversations in “Emma” and “Sanditon”.)

**Question: What event has 158 productions following Jane Austen’s appearance?  
– answer at bottom of next page.**

## Political Background to the Times of Jane Austen

For those of us who enjoy gentle tutorials on history, well researched novels are a great way to relax and learn at the same time. A chance selection at the Library has really improved my knowledge of political and social history in England during the teenage years of Jane Austen. As avoiding the “larger picture” is often a criticism of Jane Austen, I appreciated that a novel entitled *Life Mask* by Emma Donoghue has helped me understand how chaotic the political scene was in the period 1787 — 1795. Jane lived 1775—1817.

The story takes place mostly in London and includes characters such as Sheridan (theatre owner and MP) and Lord Derby (active in the Whig opposition party) during the time that William Pitt (the Younger) was a powerful Tory Prime Minister. George III is on the throne, and intrigue surrounds the dissolute behaviour of his heir nicknamed “Prinny” (for prince).

Across the Channel the French Revolution at first looks like a natural and welcome correction to corrupt power. People visit for site-seeing in this exciting new society. Until things go too far, and the streets of Paris run with blood. In England, fearing revolution and experiencing riots, Pitt’s government suspends Habeas Corpus and restricts large gatherings. The parallels to modern fears are drawn in a fairly obvious but interesting way.

Although slow moving, *Life Mask* fully explores friendship within a close social circle, as do the novels of Jane Austen. The malicious power of gossip is a strong theme, particularly of the innuendo swirling around close female friendships amongst single women. The implications of social rank as in being able to deal with interpersonal problems is also an important theme that draws one into thinking about Jane Austen’s writing.

In reading *Life Mask*, a thoroughly modern and bold novel, I began to wonder if Jane Austen was actually addressing issues that were much more sensitive in her time than in ours. Perhaps the novels are not a preoccupation with marriage, as some people now think, but an exploration of the difficulties of preserving the self within the constraints of social expectations. We all still understand that theme very well.

– Judith Umbach

### Do you know

- we have 80 books in our own Jane Austen library.
- you can get an electronic copy of this list.
- to get a copy just email Ann at [ancraig@shaw.ca](mailto:ancraig@shaw.ca)

### Answer:

Well done.....you guessed the *Calgary International Film Festival*, didn’t you!  
This year’s festival starts on Friday, September 21 with “Jane Austen Book Club” (102min.) showing at 6:45pm at the Uptown-Upstairs – [www.calgaryfilm.com](http://www.calgaryfilm.com)

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