

Unanswered Questions

I have been reading Jane Austen with great enjoyment for many years but when I finish a book I often have questions at the back of my mind which never seem to get addressed in the literature. I am going to review some of these in the hope that they may interest you and set you off on a search for answers.

Sense and Sensibility

Sense and Sensibility, one of my favourites, is the source of several questions. When you read Regency and Victorian fiction, you are continually made aware that women do not control their money. On marriage, their fortune goes to their husband who may dissipate it on riotous living. The bride's family has safeguards in this matter such as jointures but the fact remains that women are not trusted with money. And yet the widow Ferrars has total control of her fortune to the extent that she is able to disinherit her eldest son Edward because she does not like his choice of wife.

Colonel Brandon regularly jumps on a horse and gallops off to London or back to Devonshire. Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice* does the same between London and Pemberley both distances more or less equal to the distance between Calgary and Edmonton. I know nothing about horses and have never ridden on one but I have to ask how fast a galloping horse can go and how long can it keep up the pace. I suspect that a horse covering a long distance goes at a trot rather than a gallop but even so we know that the rider will stop at a convenient inn and change horses, but this begs the question of how the horse gets back to its owner. After all these are wealthy men and their own horse is probably a Mercedes rather than a run of the mill Chev. How long can a man ride a fast moving horse? When he changes horses does he leap on the back of the next horse and tear off, covering the whole 200 miles in minimum time? This whole business of changing horses and returning them home must have been well organized. Was there an equivalent of Hertz Rent a Horse.?

When I finish *Sense and Sensibility* I get the impression that, having married Elinor to Edward Ferrars, Jane Austen is tired of the book and quickly marries off Marianne.

Also Jane is remarkably understanding of Willoughby who, of all her anti-heroes, has undoubtedly fathered a child and refused to do right by the mother.

Mansfield Park

Now and then I do manage to read Mansfield Park with enjoyment but I always wonder why Jane wrote it. The heroine, Fanny Price, is so totally unlike her other heroines. I find her a rather unlikeable prig full of noble and uplifting sentiments but no fun. I find Mary Crawford much more to my liking and feel that the advice she gives to Edmund Bertram regarding how to deal with Maria and which causes him to break off relations with her, is the right advice. If Sir Thomas had taken the disgraced Maria into his home and quietly kept her out of the way of society for a year or two he would have had his daughter despite her disgrace and she would have been able to go out in the local society. Despite the high tone, Jane has a rather disreputable joke when she speaks of Admirals, rear and vice.

Emma

I read Emma with great enjoyment, like all the characters and have only one reservation which may well be peculiar to me. I would find it difficult if not impossible to marry someone I had cradled as a baby as Mr. Knightly did Emma.