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A down on her luck woman goes on an Austen-inspired journey of self-discovery in Jones's middling debut. After Lily Berry loses her mother, gets dumped by her boyfriend, and is fired, she finds in her passion for all things Jane Austen (Jane, indeed, is Lily's imaginary friend) an escape route: she travels to England to participate in a Jane Austen re-enacting festival. Full of enthusiasm—but not acting talent—Lily is not embraced by many of the Janeites, but this doesn't prevent her from meeting a charismatic actor, contending with an impossible roommate, and struggling with dark family secrets, all while trying to find the courage to be the protagonist of her own story. While Jones does a credible job of creating a heroine in transition, Lily's process of self-realization isn't nearly as involving as the subplots, which is quite unfortunate, considering how much time is devoted to sussing out her issues.

My Jane Austen Summer: A Season in Mansfield Park Details

Date : Published April 1st 2011 by HarperCollins Publishers

ISBN : 9780062003973

Author : Cindy Jones

Format : Paperback 324 pages

Genre : Fiction, Womens Fiction, Chick Lit, Romance

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From Reader Review My Jane Austen Summer: A Season in Mansfield Park for online ebook

Miz says

Trying to read around some Austen novels so I can have some gems for bookclub! This was a bit of a fail - disjointed storyline and narrator wasn't engaging. Didn't seem to have a resolution nor did I understand what 'My Jane Austen's motive was.

Krysta says

Super light summer read. I was really not fond of the protagonist, but thought the premise was good, and it lived up to expectations. Fun, quick read perfect for Jane Austen fans sitting on a beach or patio.

Maria Grazia says

Lily Berry has squeezed herself into undersized relationships all her life, hoping one might grow as large as those found in the Jane Austen novels she loves. Lily dreams of living in a novel. Mansfield Park, possibly. Escapism? Maybe. Her life is just coming a cropper. Everything in her life: her love story, her family. Who wouldn't look for an escape? Lily has got few certainties in her life, among them Jane Austen and her bookish friend Vera. So she follows her to England and lives a summer adventure at Literature Live, a Jane Austen literary festival in which she tries to reinvent herself.

It will not be easy to escape, her problems seem to follow everywhere. You can change the setting and the actors in the novel of your life, but in the pursuit of happiness the first you need to change is yourself. This is what Lily learns. She learns more and more about herself, until final self-acceptance. Happiness can start only from there. Happiness can't depend mainly on the others. You can't go on repeating the same mistakes over and over. You must learn to be happy in the real world. Lily leads the reader in this journey of self-knowledge.

In her quest for happiness, Lily realizes she has been sad all her life: *"Even I didn't understand my deep sadness, with me as long as I could remember. My earliest memories were of being sad, different from everybody else; perhaps the reason why I never fit in. Grave and serious like Jane Eyre, or Catherine and Heathcliff, or Anna Karenina. I understood exactly how they felt, and nobody in real life shared that kind of pain with me"* (p.151)

She can *"only connect with people who are dead or fictional and can only be happy in places that exist in an author's head"*. Her best friend is ... Jane Austen. She sees her everywhere, Jane follows Lily everywhere.

When she meets Willis, a deacon meant to become a priest soon (just like Edmund Bertram?) and writing a novel, she starts thinking happiness is not impossible for her. For the first time in her life someone seems to really understand how she feels. *"No one else had ever come close to understanding such thoughts. Not Martin (her ex boyfriend), not my friend Lisa, certainly not Karen (her sister), not even my mother (recently dead); no one but my Jane Austen. I felt so comfortable with this man ..."* (p. 114)

But to find love has never been easy, nor simple, for an Austen heroine. Fanny Price had to wait until Edmund saw her behind the chimera of a Mary Crawford. Lily is ready to do the same with Willis. She will be loyal and patient, she will wait. But ... will she be rewarded with love as, caring Fanny in Mansfield Park? In an unconventionally touching ending, Lily will discover that she can be deeply loved, she can live

in a novel but also hope to be happy in real life.

What I especially liked in this novel is Cindy Jones's wit and humour, her vivid style. While reading, you'll be surprised at discovering Lily Berry's world. It's not simply a romance, but especially a book full of literary references, beautifully written, based on a character's study which will not leave you indifferent.

Elizabeth of Silver's Reviews says

Three losses in her life....the loss of her mother, the loss of her job, and the loss of her boyfriend. What else could happen, hopefully something good? And something good did happen....Lily was going to London for the summer to participate in Literature Live. How would she afford it? She wasn't sure, but she had to attend and would think of some creative way to make the money she needed for the plane fare.

When Lily arrived at Newton Priors, she had no place to stay since she wasn't in the elite group so she seized one of the actresses's rooms that hadn't shown up....what a mistake that was to have to share the room with Bets. Bets turned out to be one of the stars, unreliable, and also a thief.

Bets's unreliability helped Lily get on the stage for one brief moment, but then Lily was relegated to be the tea-theater host. Lily also found someone to replace her old boyfriend, but there were contingencies and pain attached to him...just like all aspects of her life had always been.

Lily was glad she had "Jane Austen" around to help her solve some of the problems. She did wonder about Jane, though - "Jane Austen had secrets.....And she never told me. I would have told her something that important. I told her everything. Perhaps we weren't as close as I thought. Perhaps the person in my peripheral vision wasn't Jane Austen at all." Page 289

The book was not bad....the ending was memorable, but the book didn't have much action. Lily's flashbacks and memories of her mother were very touching, and her enthusiasm about Jane Austen was contagious, but I guess you really have to be a true Jane Austen fan to pick up on all the little nuances and the excitement. Rating 3/5.

Nadia says

I don't want to be negative, but this book is not delightful. It is 'trying' - as in, it tried my patience. Generally, I like to read books that are Austen inspired - such as Austenland by Shannon Hale (such a fun read!) - however, this particular book did not have any of the charm or wit that I expected it to have. Instead, I found myself reading a book that was lacking in everything. The writing was okay, the characters were dull and the plot was rather messy.

The story is basically about Lily, who has been dumped by both her boyfriend and job. She is desperate to rekindle her romance with her ex, but he has moved on and wants her to stop driving by his house every night to spy on him. As far as work goes, she decides to ask Vera, the owner of her favorite bookstore, for a job - apparently there is this literary festival that she is ready for (whatever that means). And so, we find Lily en route to work in England (after having paid for her own flight); once there, well things get a bit confusing. Does Lily even have a job with Vera? More importantly, does Vera even know what is going on with the

literary festival? Its all rather confusing. Of course, Lily always manages to find ways to stick around England, while at the same time seems to be finding herself (which was the whole point of going to England). Scattered throughout the book are literary references, which is always a bright spot (probably the only bright spot in this case). Oh, and did I mention the imaginary Jane Austen? Yeah, Lily has an imaginary friend, who happens to be Jane Austen - I'm not even going to touch that one.

Overall, I just did not connect with this book. I had to force myself to finish it and am just happy to be done with it. This is a book that I think only Austen fanatics might possibly enjoy, but even then I'm sceptical about recommending it. However, I will mention that I have read loads of positively glowing reviews about this book, so who knows - maybe, I'm just one of the few people who didn't get it.

Lydia Laceby says

Originally Reviewed at Novel Escapes

My Jane Austen Summer was a unique tale full of...well, Jane Austen and even managed to contain a paranormal aspect. A story of moving on and growth, this novel was slow to start for me as I found the main character, Lily, slightly over-depressive at first, but eventually I grew eager to find out her fate.

Lily Berry moves half way across the world to escape her crumbling life. She lost her job, her boyfriend just dumped her, calling her needy along the way, and she is still grieving her mother's death while her father has already moved on. Lily always finds solace in Jane Austen's works and when the opportunity arises for her to join a Jane Austen festival as an actor in England, she doesn't flinch or waste a second making the arrangements, even though she she's barely acted in her life, nor can she afford the trip.

I am not a huge Jane Austen fan and look forward to hearing what Kathryn thinks of this one because she's much more interested than I am. This, however, did not hinder my enjoyment of the story too much and I grew eager to find out Lily's fate and enjoyed watching her find herself and begin to change her life in direction she wants it to take.

It did take a while to warm to Lily's character and it probably wasn't until I was halfway through that I started to have much more interest in her as opposed to the unique characters she meets along the way. At times I wanted to shake her, especially when it came to her roommate, but she gradually changes her ways in time.

The ending wasn't typical and not exactly what I expected, but I enjoyed it none the less. Not entirely predictable, I liked how Lily grew in her role at the institute, her self discovery and growth and enjoyed her little shadow's antics. I wasn't sure exactly whether all her issues were resolved, but I think that's the fairy tale ending I'm usually looking for and this one's right on the money for real life. Not everything ends up picture perfect in My Jane Austen Summer, but is a work in progress, which is exactly what we see here.

I look forward to reading more from Cindy Jones!

Wendy E. says

Lily just wants to live in a novel. They are predictable and safe, unlike life. When her mother dies and her boyfriend dumps her, she decides stalking him is no longer worth it, sells all her stuff and buys a ticket to England. She hooks up with the owner of her local Indie to act in and work with Literature Live which is

reenacting Mansfield Park, her favorite Jane Austen. She soon discovers the hierarchy of academics, actors and volunteers involved with the production and struggles to carve out her own niche. There is enough Jane, enough Fanny and enough literature to keep Janeites and Austen fanatics going. The romance and self-actualization will interest readers who may not care so much about Jane as they might about a good storyline.

Anna says

Review originally posted on Diary of an Eccentric

In *My Jane Austen Summer: A Season in Mansfield Park*, Cindy Jones reaches out to those of us who wish to escape our problems by living in a novel, but as the protagonist, Lily Berry, is bound to learn, characters in a novel are fixed in time and on paper and never get a chance to learn from their mistakes. Grieving the death of her mother, Lily just can't seem to come to terms with the fact that her ex-boyfriend has moved on and that her father's new girlfriend tossed out the family memories before Lily and her sister could save them. She also is unemployed, having been caught reading *Northanger Abbey* on the job. The one thing Lily knows for certain is that she finds comfort in the words of Jane Austen and longs to escape into the pages of Austen's novels.

At the urging of Vera, the owner of the local indie bookstore, Lily sells all of her belongings and leaves Texas for England to the Literature Live festival run by Vera's husband, Nigel, where professional actors will perform *Mansfield Park* to a group of Janeites over the course of the summer. Vera assures Lily that she will have a part in the production, and even though she is not an actress, Lily jumps at the chance to live in her favorite novel. But life in England is just as complicated as the life she left behind. Lily must deal with family secrets unearthed by her sister back home and contend with Magda, an overbearing professor in charge of the production who dislikes Lily's love of Fanny Price (the heroine in *Mansfield Park*, who is so unlike Austen's other heroines that academics fight over her in the "Fanny Wars"); Bets, who pushes Lily out of the production even though she likens taking part in the festival to serving time in prison; Willis, an aspiring clergyman who hides in the attic of Newton Priors (the estate where the festival is held) writing a vampire novel; and Omar, the professor who adapts Austen's novel for the festival and befriends Lily.

As Lily spends the summer planning a tea-theater, crafting a business plan to save the festival, and running around in Regency attire, she befriends her inner Jane Austen, who lurks in her peripheral vision and follows her as she stumbles through new relationships and adventures. Lily's Jane Austen doesn't say anything, but fades in and out, writes lists, and gives Lily knowing looks where appropriate. While Lily deals with the problems that caused her to leave Texas and navigates a literary festival where she's in way over her head, she learns that Jane Austen means something different to each reader but that the world will never truly know her.

My Jane Austen Summer is a novel mostly about a woman trying to emerge from her grief and loneliness to find herself, with fun references to Jane Austen and reading in general. The plot is more complicated than I expected, helped along by the ambitious cast of characters, Lily's real-life problems, and the drama of the literature festival. I admire Jones for working her love of Jane Austen and *Mansfield Park* into a contemporary novel, keeping them in the forefront but giving Lily the space to tell her own story. Jones doesn't go overboard in her comparison of Lily to Fanny Price, it wasn't forced, making the novel flow more naturally.

Above all, I liked how the novel seemed true to life, as the trip to England does not solve all of Lily's problems and she's not healed or transformed overnight. I wasn't sure I was going to like Lily when the book opened — I questioned her mental state and thought she was kind of creepy with the stalking of the ex-

boyfriend — but I ultimately found her endearing. Hey, I can't blame a girl for wanting to escape in a novel — and not in the I'm-going-to-read-and-let-my-thoughts-drift kind of way. Who wouldn't want to act out the role of their favorite heroine, and who doesn't indulge in fantasies at one time or another? My Jane Austen Summer is a great escapist read, with a perfect blend of literary references and soul searching, and you can enjoy it without having read Mansfield Park.

Emily says

I try really hard to finish a book. Even books that aren't all that appealing to me once I start reading them, I still try to finish them. Because I always think, "well, maybe it'll get better," or I just feel guilty because I know how hard authors work to get a book published, I feel like I want to give them their due. There's also the whole, "well I've already bought it, I might as well get my money's worth out of it." But this one...I just couldn't.

All I wanted for my Christmas break was to find a mindless, romantic, chick-lit book to get lost in, and the synopsis of this book made it seem like the perfect fit - typical set-up: American girl gets dumped, loses job, feels like life is falling apart so she picks up and goes to England for a Jane Austen lit festival. What's not to love? Surely there'll be plenty of Jane Austen references, surely she'll find a man by page 20 and it takes place in the English countryside. What's not to love?

Um, all of it. It's dreadful from page one. First of all, it starts out with her driving by her ex's house for the umpteenth time, and then she has this really awkward encounter with him and his new squeeze IN FRONT OF HIS HOUSE, which even made me feel embarrassed and uncomfortable for her, and not in a good way. Lily Berry, the main character, has no appealing characteristics. I couldn't relate to her at all. She just came across as pitiful, dreadful, dull, and sad. And her Jane Austen obsession and desire to be in her own novel borders on creepy-need-to-see-a-psychiatrist-stat status. I thought that maybe if I just stuck with her until she got to England, it'd get better, but no. It didn't. There was so much going on, I'm not even sure I realized how she even got to England. Something about Elizabeth Banks was a no-show so since Lily acted in high school she got to go and be an actress? Wait, what just happened?

And I finally skipped to the end, and when I read she basically ends up in the same place as when the book started - alone and in a bookstore - I gave up. No romance? No thank you.

This book did not give me the warm fuzzy's I was hoping for in a chick-lit. Instead it left me feeling annoyed and frustrated that I spent even \$10 on it and now it's just wasted space on my Kindle.

Ugh. Back to the bookshelf.

Jess (Primrose) says

A begrudging two stars... only because I did enjoy the skit acting piece at the end with Jane Austen's cleverly done letters to critics. Other than that redeeming portion that was approximately 2-3 pages; I found this book to be a struggle. So much in fact, it prompted me to finally create a shelf entitled "almost gave up or did give up" and I'm cringing writing that because I know that was harsh.

For starters, I'm not a Janeite. I've read her stuff, loved the Colin Firth movie, and found the stories pleasantly diverting. Can I quote the books? Nope. Except for the "It is a truth universally acknowledged..". But let's be honest, most folk are familiar with that one. I have however read many books about women who

are Janeites and seek to find themselves/happiness/fulfillment through her work, Jane Austen book clubs, festivals, Bath, which usually involve escaping to England from some untenable situation in America. This is lumped into my modest experience with those sorts of books. It was the worst to date. I think because the character was a stark, raving mad nutter. She truly needed honest professional therapy for her grief issues over the loss of her mother. Instead, she goes to England after her boyfriend leaves her, she is fired from her job, her father has moved on with a girlfriend, and she needs to experience "her" Jane Austen. The characters are ridiculous caricatures and have little depth to them at all. The story was a like a farce making many attempts at humor with recorded staged laughter in the background.

To defend my opinion why the main character was a nutter; here's a few morsels I will let you digest on:

1. By page 2 into the book, we learn she is stalking her boyfriend. Her discovery of his open great windows allow for optimal stalking drive bys.

2. She is a level 5 human resources employee. College educated. Yet, she reads Jane Austen books through her lunch hour, well beyond it, and eventually cost the company +\$90,000 in payroll issues. Her response to the job loss is that books should come with a warning label "Literature can be dangerous to your mental health and should be indulged in moderation. Read in excess, fiction may blur the line between fantasy and reality, causing dysfunction in personal and professional relationships. Readers should refrain while operating heavy machinery or driving automobiles". Seriously. No. In this unbelievable scenario, you the main character should come with the warning label.

3. She spends the entire book with imaginary Jane Austen by her side offering pointed looks, sighs, or dramatic flourishes. We even get to see a momentary Jane Austen possession in the main character. Yet this is never questioned as perhaps a psychotic break.

Don't let the pretty cover fool you. It's horrific inside. My one positive thought was that this author does seem incredible well read and I appreciated her attempts at introducing theories into Austen's work. Her clever retorts in the Austen letters skit were witty and comical.

Sophia says

This book has been setting on my shelf for some time. I originally picked it up because I loved the idea of reading about a woman traveling overseas to work a summer gig as an actress and all around Girl Friday at a Jane Austen festival held on an English country estate. A fun 'travel themed' group read with our GoodReads group gave me the motivation to get going with this book.

I dove in with a little excitement and soon sat back on my heels. This was not going to be a light and fun summer read like I expected. The heroine, Lily, goes well beyond quirky. She has some very real issues that she is refusing to acknowledge by hiding between the covers of her favorite Jane Austen novels- her mother's death, her father's rapid replacement of his wife with a younger model, losing her job, losing her boyfriend whom she stalks thinking he'll change his mind though he has moved on, and finally her determination that she can live out a life like/as a Jane Austen heroine got into some heavy issues and set the tone and pace of this slow moving gentle story.

There is a strong connection to Mansfield Park which I thought was handled well in a modern story. It's not a one to one correspondence like a retelling which I thought was a smart move. Its there and noticeable especially when Lily herself starts to not just realize, but purposes to follow the formula in the original novel seeing herself as Fanny Price fending of a rich man's tempting assurances, pining over a man who has committed to someone else, dealing with disappointment and jealousy over a rival, and being tempted to be the woman who was seduced then discovered she was temporary goods.

While I appreciated some of this story, I stayed disconnected from it and the heroine throughout. I was glad to see her growing and finding herself, but my practical side kept screaming at me that she needed to seek

some counseling to deal with the losses and grief and her unhealthy retreat into her imaginary world. She was very deep into that world and stayed there which I think plays a huge role in why I couldn't get into her- I couldn't find the real Lily very well. And that ending. Open. I know some people not only tolerate, but love them. I fall at the other end of the spectrum.

I think when all's said and done, I would have appreciated this more if I would have anticipated this book differently. I didn't pay attention to the way it was classified and labeled. I went in seeing a light, even comedic, read when it was more a serious women's fiction about a heroine finding herself and putting distance with her past issues and fails.

So, it was a little satisfying and I'm glad I read it, but it is a story that left me still wanting.

QNPoohBear says

The characters in this novel are similar to their literary counterparts. Lily is not a very likeable character. She's worse than Fanny Price (who I can not stand) because she's whiny, self-centered and obsesses over every little thing. She acts like a stalker around the men in her life and when even her ex says she's "too needy," she refuses to acknowledge her problem. I do understand about her relationship with her mom and the sentimental ties to her childhood and her reaction to her father's new life. I could empathize but at the same time, I wanted her to move forward like her sister. None of the other characters are very appealing either. I didn't care much for Willis. I couldn't figure out who he was supposed to be and am still confused over what happened. I'm not much into brooding men myself so I didn't see the appeal. Bixby is even worse than Willis for different reasons, Magda is witch with a capital B and even Vera and Nigel use Lily for their own purposes. Bets is a stereotypical teenager but I found her honesty refreshing. I kept waiting for Lily to grow up but she never really did. The story drags on way too long and ends rather quickly. I'm a bit confused as to why it ended the way it did and what the ending is supposed to mean. This book just didn't appeal to me very much. I was also turned off by Lily's obsession with the Anglican church and everything that goes with it that she mentioned far too often in the beginning. If I had known there was strong Christian content, I probably would not have read this book. Other content warning: one mild love scene and one bizarre somewhat graphic scene that I can't explain without spoiling the plot. The only plot parts that really interested me was what would happen with her father and if she would find her necklace. Otherwise, this book was not worthy of my attention. Austenland this is not.

Georgiana 1792 says

Se non sopportate Fanny, con Lily arriverete sull'orlo del suicidio...

Ebbene sì, se soffrite di depressione questo romanzo è decisamente sconsigliato. Perché? Perché l'eroina (se proprio vogliamo chiamarla così), poverina, ne ha passate davvero di tutti i colori nell'ultimo periodo, ma il suo atteggiamento nei confronti della vita, per quanto possa essere accettabilissimo, visto quel che le è capitato – e che continua ad accaderle anche dopo aver varcato l'Oceano Atlantico – fa provare un'angoscia perenne al lettore.

Cominciamo col dire che la narratrice – molto inaffidabile – di questo romanzo è proprio lei, Lily/Fanny; questo rende il lettore piuttosto oppresso. Ogni volta che prendevo in mano il libro mi sembrava di dover sopportare una di quelle conoscenti-piattola che, quando hai la sfortuna di incontrarle per la strada, si appiccicano e ti raccontano tutte le loro disgrazie, non demordendo neanche quando sei addirittura arrivato a sbuffare loro in faccia, adducendo appuntamenti urgenti (chiaramente fasulli).

D'accordo, Lily subisce prima la morte della madre, poi viene lasciata dal fidanzato, quindi perde il lavoro, e poi continua a fare scoperte sempre più deprimenti, anche quando decide di vendere tutto per lasciarsi tutto alle spalle e cominciare una nuova vita. Avrebbe quindi tutti i diritti di fare la vittimista, anche se alla lunga il lettore non la sopporta più. Però, malgrado Lily sia la narratrice, dunque tenda a presentarsi al meglio, nascondendo i suoi difetti e cercando di farci comprendere le sue ragioni, appare comunque un po' ossessiva, invadente e talvolta sfacciata.

Al contrario di Fanny Price, infatti, Lily Berry viene sì invitata a partecipare a un festival letterario che si tiene annualmente in una tenuta inglese (si metterà in scena *Mansfield Park*), ma quando poi le viene detto che non ci sarà posto per lei all'interno del cast – non essendo un'attrice professionista, come richiesto – lungi dal tirarsi indietro, continua a imporre la sua presenza, anche calpestando la propria dignità, oserei dire. È chiaro che non ci sia una Mrs. Norris degna di questo nome che la tenga a bada, anche se Magda – altrettanto odiosa – prova in tutti i modi a ricoprirne il ruolo.

Ad avvalorare l'idea che Lily non abbia proprio tutte le rotelle a posto, poi, c'è la continua presenza della sua Jane Austen, ovvero lo spirito (?) della scrittrice, che la accompagna sempre con la sua penna d'oca e un foglio su cui traccia perennemente elenchi di personaggi, come se scegliesse l'eroe del romanzo di Lily cercando un collegamento tra le sue creazioni e i personaggi reali della vita della sua... protetta.

Avete presente l'action figure di Jane Austen? Ecco, se Lily si fosse portata dietro il pupazzo e avesse parlato con quello, sarebbe sembrata meno sciroccata!

Non è difficile ritrovare vari paralleli tra i personaggi di *Mansfield Park* e quelli di *My Jane Austen Summer* (Mrs. Norris a parte), ma questi ultimi, lungi dall'essere modernizzati, sembrano restare statici, cristallizzati in un ruolo che non si addice a nessuno di loro. Come il cast di un film scelto molto male.

Lo stile non è affatto scorrevole, ma pieno di giochini di parole e riferimenti che, anziché rendere il romanzo frizzante come avrebbe desiderato forse la Jones, lo appesantiscono con una prosa barocca. I dialoghi sono ancor più farrinosi, con tutti i personaggi che si esprimono seguendo la stessa linea e giocano a un gioco di cui sembrano conoscere le regole solo loro. Cercano di essere simpatici, ma non lo sono. E Lily lo è meno di tutti. Non c'è niente di peggio che leggere una storia narrata da una persona che vuole fare la simpatica, ma che in realtà troviamo odiosa.

Il finale è l'unica piccola scintilla che salva il romanzo dal rogo di Cassandra, ma è davvero troppo poco, dopo essersi sorbiti oltre trecento pagine di angoscia e noia.

Non so, invece, se salvare la cover. È molto bella, è vero, e proprio per quello illusoria, visto che mi faceva sperare in qualcosa di meglio, che è arrivato solo nelle ultime (pochissime) pagine.

Insomma, per fortuna *My Jane Austen Summer* è stata costellata da ben altro, perché, se fosse dovuta dipendere da questo libro, sarebbe stata ben misera!

Potete leggere la recensione completa QUI:
<http://ildiariodellelizzies.blogspot...>

Sheila Espineli says

I found this book in Target and it was one of those impulse buys I almost regretted. While I found it amusing being a big Jane Austen fan, I thought that the book had some issues and I don't think the central heroine was as likeable as I believe she thought she was. And honestly, I tried not to hold her liking of Fanny Price

against her! In fact, I think that because of reading this book, I actually like Fanny Price more than I had previously (which is surprising to me).

I guess I should explain briefly about Fanny Price...she is my least favorite of Austen's female protagonists, mainly because she is so passive and a "goody-two-shoes." Then again, she is probably closer to how most women acted in a dependent situation in Regency England, while someone like Elizabeth Bennet is almost a fantasy, though a delightful and entertaining one. Mansfield Park, while not the most engaging of Austen's novels, is certainly one that generates a lot of debate, and that intellectual debate is interestingly depicted here, though it was still hard for me to imagine how this live Austen festival actually worked. I can't imagine that people were happy spending money watching actors perform lines from Mansfield Park...I would rather go see the Sleep No More production currently in Manhattan.

The premise of this novel was interesting (the protagonist, Lily Berry, escapes a bad relationship and job to work, sort of, for a Jane Austen festival held at a manor house in England) but the execution was poor. Unfortunately, I read this while also reading George R. R. Martin's Song of Ice and Fire series where his gift for character development just continues to astonish me as I progress through each volume...it's an unfair comparison, but it made me see how Jones was trying too hard to give Lily Berry (ugh her name made me cringe too) some character depth, when Martin's characterization appears effortless in comparison. The various subplots were too much...the Elizabeth Banks story literally went nowhere and apparently served as a plot device to provide Lily a wardrobe as well as put one of her treasured keepsakes in jeopardy. Honestly, her "stalking" of her ex and her obsession with her late mother's funeral made her seem creepy rather than someone I wanted to get to know more...not that every character should be likeably perfect but the author could have presented her neuroses in a more subtle manner, in my opinion. And a vampire novel?! How unoriginal - the parallel was too obvious and was another element that took me out of the story.

I did get more than I expected out of this impulse read, but at the same time it left me wishing for more...there was potential, but it got too bogged down in the conventional and obvious details. Oh well...

Lori says

I chose Cindy Jones' new novel, My Jane Austen Summer: A Season in Mansfield Park, due to the Austen connection and the overall storyline. Although Mansfield Park is not my personal favorite of Jane Austen's works I thought the concept sounded like Austenland by Shannon Hale, which I loved reading.

While there were similarities to Ms. Hale's work, in the end My Jane Austen Summer didn't gel for me. Perhaps the initial, and main, problem was that I didn't connect with Lily, the main character of the book. I wanted to and I kept waiting to feel a kinship with her that just didn't come. I felt as though every time I began to make that tenuous connection, the chapter ended.

Likewise, Lily's potential love interest - - her Henry Crawford or Edmund Bertram, depending on how you view it - - seemed a shell of a character that I just couldn't get behind. Much like Lily, even after pages of reading about him, I felt I really didn't know him.

The supporting characters were equally as mystifying to me and other than Omar, I really didn't like them. They appeared selfish, greedy and utterly self-obsessed. None of the characters, Lily included, seem to have genuine and real interactions with others. I didn't feel love or affection, nor did I feel any strong bonds of friendship.

Sadly, the ending of the book felt very much like a letdown for me and I was disappointed with it. I

appreciated that Lily had grown and changed for the better but being a Jane Austen themed book, I wanted a clear romantic resolution and My Jane Austen Summer did not provide one.

On the upside, I thoroughly enjoyed reading about the Literary Festival. The descriptions and actions were so vividly written by Ms. Jones that I could easily and quickly see it in my mind and wish that I was there, either as a participant or a patron. I also enjoyed reading about the daily life at Newton Priors, the hustle and bustle of the Janeites and English country life.

It's obvious from the many chapters devoted to the Literary Festival and Mansfield Park in general that Cindy Jones is a devoted fan of Jane Austen, as well as a talented writer. Ms. Jones' writing is what saves this book, bottom line. Despite the fact the book itself didn't fully work for me, the writing is top notch and Ms. Jones is an excellent writer. For that reason I would not hesitate to read another book by her.

While I can't fully recommend My Jane Austen Summer without reservation to all readers, I won't say it's not worth reading. I was expecting more of the lightness and joy that I had found in the aforementioned Austenland and that I think would have made the book more rewarding for me. As stated, Ms. Jones' writing is superb and perhaps fans of Mansfield Park may appreciate My Jane Austen Summer in a way that I did not.
