



“Janeite” at 100

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“Janeite,” the word, is now 100 years old, having passed the century mark in February 1994. It was written into the language by George Edward Bateman Saintsbury in a preface which he prepared for an elaborately illustrated edition of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* published in February 1894. Among “Austenians or Janites,” he noted, would be found partisans of every one of the novels. He counted himself among these “Janites” and boldly asserted, “I, for my part, declare for *Pride and Prejudice* unhesitatingly.” The 1894 *P&P* was issued in both London and New York and is probably best known for its 101 illustrations by Hugh Thomson. Saintsbury was a leading critic of his time, with an impressive list of weighty titles to his credit, among them *A History of Nineteenth Century Literature*, *A Short History of English Literature* and *A First Book of English Literature*.

My curiosity was roused when I found “Janeite” in *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, Tenth edition, published in 1993. The definition reads, just as it ought, “. . . an enthusiastic admirer of Jane Austen’s writings.” The entry is dated 1896. The *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged* (1971) may be the source of the *Collegiate’s* definition. It is an exact echo, but the unabridged gives no date of origin. “Janite” appears as an alternate spelling. These few scraps sent me to the *OED* for more information.

“Janeite” did not make its debut in the *Oxford English Dictionary* until 1976 when the second volume of *A Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary* was published. The entry lists “Jane-ite” and “Janite” as alternate spellings and documents the word as the Christian name of Jane Austen, novelist, + -ITE. The earliest usage is again dated 1896 and is taken from Saintsbury’s “*Hist. 19th Cent. Lit.*” Saintsbury persisted in spelling “Janeite” without the middle “e.” The *Supplement’s* next entry is for Kipling’s “The Janeites” (1924) spelled as we spell it today. Whether he intended it or not, Kipling, like JASNA to follow, popularized “Janeite.”

One dictionary leads to another. I did not find “Janeite,” “Janite,” “Jane-ite,” or “Austenite” (for Jane Austen, it is there as a “solid solution . . .”) in

the second edition of Webster's unabridged or in any edition of any other unabridged or hand dictionary. Even circulating library copies were scanned.

It was a perusal of more of Saintsbury's writings that revealed his first use of "Janeite" two years earlier than the dictionaries indicated.

Given the whirl of enthusiasm for JA's novels before the turn of the century it seems likely that "Janeite" appeared in print even earlier than 1894. Who can say? Fortunately, one can consult David Gilson's *A Bibliography of Jane Austen* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1982) for many leads to pursue in a search like this.

In the meantime, how "Janeite" made its way into the *abridged* dictionary is another story, one we hope to report on in the future.

NOTES

Much has been produced about Janeites, and B. C. Southam, for instance, surveyed a lot of it in "Janeites and Anti-Janeites" in *The Jane Austen Companion* edited by J. D. Grey (New York, Macmillan, 1986, p. 237). James Heldman discussed Rudyard Kipling's short story, "The Janeites" and his poem, "Jane's Marriage," in *Persuasions* 10 (1987) p. 44.

For Saintsbury's preface see Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, London (George Allen) and New York (Macmillan), 1894, pp. ix-xxiii. This edition was reprinted at least a dozen times. See also Saintsbury's *A History of Nineteenth Century Literature (1780-1900)*, (London, Macmillan, 1922, p. 129).