

Linda Andersson Burnett

Susan Manning

In her incredible final book *Poetics of Character*, which will be published later this year, Susan analysed the reputation, character and legacy of several transatlantic authors. Discussing the American writer Margaret Fuller, Susan quoted James Freeman Clarke, who described Fuller as having a remarkable: *‘power of exerting profoundest influence on individual souls’*.

This statement is equally true about Susan and her academic career. I am only one of a large number of students and postdoctoral fellows whose early careers have been deeply influenced and nurtured by Susan’s incredible breadth of knowledge, her support and her counsel.

I was blessed to have had Susan both as a postgraduate supervisor for my MSc and PhD, and to have had the privilege to work with her during my fellowship at the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities (IASH) when I assisted her with what turned out to be her last manuscript.

I would like to share with you some of my thoughts and memories of having Susan as a mentor. I first met Susan eight years ago. Over the years that followed, my sense of excitement at meeting Susan at her office at IASH never waned – every meeting with Susan was a treat.

Susan was always busy. She would dart between meetings, seminars and classes; often arriving on her bike dressed in her fluorescent vest and helmet

before re-appearing a minute later looking pristine. Despite this hectic schedule, she would always give you her full attention during a meeting.

She would start our meetings by asking about my family, especially my daughter. We shared jokes about balancing child-care and academia and Susan, full of warmth and kindness, would often ask about my health rather than discussing her own.

Susan managed in a difficult job market to give you both realistic career advice and necessary strategies for success, while at the same time, independent of those practical matters, giving you an enthusiastic response to new ideas and potential projects. Often in our discussions, she would exclaim: ‘We could do a symposium on this!’

Susan was a rigorous supervisor but she never dictated what you should think or write. Instead, she had a magical ability to help you unlock your research quandaries through dialogue. She opened up your mind and helped you look at your research in a new light. Regardless of how you felt about your research when you entered Susan’s office, you always left feeling empowered.

Susan was very calm and composed. I would like to share one example of her composure and good sense of humour. We were working together to get her manuscript finished for Cambridge University Press. It was the 21st of December and the press needed to receive it that day since they would be closing for Christmas.

While I was working against the clock to double check the last couple of references for Susan in the NLS (I think Thomas Carlyle was the culprit) which

were then fed into the final version of the manuscript, my laptop cable started to melt, smoke was rising from the cable and my computer died. After I had waved Susan's manuscript frantically over the cable to prevent the fire alarm going off, and after running back to my office at Hope Park Square to use another computer, I sent her an email explaining why she had not received my changes but that she would have them as soon as possible. Susan's email response was: 'Poor thing [computer] is worn out with the exertions of the past week! Don't panic; we should see the funny side!' This we did, and Cambridge University Press received the manuscript just as the security people were closing the building for Christmas. It was a joy to work with Susan.

Susan became my supervisor the same year that she became the director of IASH. I have therefore always associated IASH with Susan and I witnessed some of the wonderful programs that she initiated. These programs include the Carnegie funded *STAR Project on Scotland's Transatlantic Relations* and the Leverhume Trust supported *The Science of Man in the Scottish Enlightenment*.

Having finished my thesis, I was delighted to find out that I had secured a fellowship at the Institute. It is a fantastic place to be. It is, like Susan's publications, truly interdisciplinary and transnational and it connects peoples and ideas from across the globe.

IASH provides established scholars a breathing space where they can write and think in peace while at the same time meeting and receiving inspiration from other scholars. For junior scholars like me, it gives us an opportunity to discuss our ideas with more experienced peers and time to write and get our first publications out.

Susan, together with Anthea and Donald, gave IASH a warm and welcoming atmosphere. It is a place where there is no strict boundary between socialising and stretching your mind. Some of the best discussions I have had at IASH, have been held during our weekly Tuesday lunches. Susan left a wonderful legacy at IASH and Susan's work will be honoured in a number of ways by the University of Edinburgh.

Like Margaret Fuller and the other resourceful, intelligent, charismatic and strong women in her last book, Susan and her astounding body of work will continue to have a profound influence on new generations of academic researchers.

I know that I am not alone in continuing to look to Susan as a role-model of kindness, integrity, and academic excellence. Although I miss her terribly, I am very proud and grateful to have known and been taught by such a *wonderful* woman of character.