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# Austen Goes Pop: The Evolution of Jane Austen from Rural Writer to Contemporary Icon

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## Jane Austen's Popularity Timeline

1175 Austen born in Hampshire, England

1811 *Sense and Sensibility*

1813 *Pride and Prejudice*

1814 *Mansfield Park*

1815 *Emma*

1817 Austen dies. Virtually unknown, her books were published anonymously

1817 Cassandra Austen publishes *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey*

1833 Publication of all six books together

1870 Publication of Austen-Leigh's *Memoir*, renewed academic interest in Austen, spike of published papers

1871-1890 Austen's popularity grows in England and America

1894 Term "Janeite" is first coined by George Saintsbury in a Preface of *Pride and Prejudice*

1890-1995 Interest in Jane Austen small and cultish, as considered part of a good liberal arts education

1926 "Janeite" popularized by Rudyard Kipling in "The Janeites" Originally meant for Jane Austen scholars, academics, and considered mostly male

1940 Jane Austen Society founded in Great Britain

1979 Jane Austen Society of North America founded

1995-1997 Spike of popularity, due to *Pride and Prejudice* (1994)

2006-Present Renewed interest from adaptations in movies and books

## Introduction

Living in rural England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Jane Austen had a very quiet life. She was pretty far removed from the strife and turmoil that existed during her lifetime. She never went to college. She never married and never had children. She never traveled outside of England. However, the idea that Austen had no life is simply a misnomer. If her novels were any indication of her world, Austen had a very rich life. Given that her novels are still being read and discussed today, they are many universal themes applicable to today.

When Austen died in 1817, few people knew her name. During her lifetime, she gained very little fame for her six novels, quietly publishing anonymously as “A Woman.” After her death, Austen’s sister Cassandra published her last two novels, *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*. Those books sold well, but modestly. Only when Walter Scott, a great literary critic in England, praised the books in an article in 1837 was more attention paid to her work (Tomalin 273).

Moving forward to contemporary times, Austen’s novels have a life of their own, being adapted into movies. Some of these try to remain true to her world, while others take her themes and adapt them to different places and time periods. Her novels have also spawned sequels and other novels that pay tribute to her world. After almost a century of scholars and readers believing Austen had no life, there has also been a renewed interest in the woman herself. Some of the intense fandom has grown separately around *Pride and Prejudice*’s Mr. Darcy, especially as portrayed by Colin Firth in 1995 BBC miniseries. While most of her fans are in Great Britain

and the United States, Austen remains popular in many parts of the English-speaking world. She has emerged from being an author to become a pop culture figure.

### **Chapter I: Early Treatment of Jane Austen**

By the 1850's, Austen's books began resurfacing, and her fame began to grow even more. Her stories of romance and human foibles did well with the staid readers of the Victorian Era. However, the earliest treatment of Austen that had a lasting impact was that of James-Edward Austen-Leigh, Austen's nephew. His book caused a rise in her popularity. A religious man, Austen-Leigh carefully pieced together a memoir creating a portrait of his version of his aunt. Despite creating an inaccurate image of his aunt, Austen-Leigh helped make her books more widely read in Victorian England and America.

#### **The Victorian Nephew**

During the decades after Austen's life, her family and her descendants said little about their sister and aunt. However, that changed in 1870 with the publication of *Memoir of Jane Austen* by her nephew James-Edward Austen-Leigh. The oldest son of Jane's older brother James, Austen-Leigh was a clergyman like many in the Austen family. He had married a family friend and together they had ten children, all of whom survived. Austen-Leigh attempted to write novels as a young man, only to eventually reject writing for the gentleman's life. Eventually inheriting a substantial amount of money and property, he became wealthy through family connections (Tomalin 273-274).

When the book was published, Austen-Leigh was an old man remembering an aunt who had been dead for nearly half a century. He had only been nineteen when his aunt died. While the memoir provided some valuable information important to later Austen scholars, Austen-Leigh also made an attempt to create an image of respectability for his aunt. This image was

perpetuated for over a century. The initial image of Austen as respectable spinster and hobbyist writer originates in the words of her nephew. Austen-Leigh's memoir seeks to honor his deceased aunt, but it also whitewashes some information from her life to fit an image of propriety.

Throughout the memoir, Austen-Leigh gives his readers an image of Austen as artistic and intelligent, yet also dutiful and practical. Talking about Austen's relationship with her sister Cassandra, Austen-Leigh is careful to let the reader know not to make parallels between Austen and her characters:

Cassandra's character might indeed represent the 'sense' of Elinor, but Jane's had little in common with the 'sensibility' of Marianne. The young woman, before the age of twenty, could so discern the failings of Marianne Dashwood, could hardly have been subject to them herself (17).

By most accounts, Cassandra was the more somber and practical of the two Austen sisters. Austen-Leigh portrays his famous aunt as being wise beyond her years, even as a very young woman. He makes a conscious effort for readers to distance his aunt from some of her sillier characters like Marianne, even when it seems unlikely that such a comparison would ever be made.

As an artist and writer, Austen-Leigh creates a profile of a woman who apologized for what she did: "She was careful that her occupation should not be suspected by servants, or visitors, or any persons beyond her own family party. She wrote upon small sheets of paper that could easily be put away, or covered with a piece of blotting paper" (102). This imagines Austen writing during stolen moments of self-indulgence. He portrays her art as sinful, adding a level of shame to her writings. She supposedly did not even allow the servants to know what she was

doing. Austen may have not broadcast her work; however, considering the breadth of her novels, it seems unlikely they were created this way.

Though many people love a character like Marianne, Austen-Leigh feels the need to defend his aunt's immoral characters:

[Her work] is entirely free from vulgarity, which is so offensive in some novels, dwelling on the outward appendages of wealth or rank, if they were things to which the writer was unaccustomed; and secondly, that she deals as little with very low as with very high stations in life. She does not go lower than the Miss Steeles, Mrs. Elton, and John Thorpe, people of bad taste and underbred manners, such as are actually found mingling with better society (18).

Austen-Leigh simultaneously applauds his aunt for staying away from vulgarity while condemning other novelists for exploiting it for profit. Other novelists of the era were vulgar because they never really knew anyone of society, unlike Austen, argues Austen-Leigh. He obviously looks down on most novelists, yet he can not cast his aunt in the same light. This seems like an odd stance to take considering that many readers of *Memoir* were also novel readers, hence their interest in Austen.

Continuing, he defends less savory characters like Lucy Steele and John Thorpe by saying that these "underbred" people often find their way into better society. Austen-Leigh makes unneeded apologies for these characters. Austen casts these characters in a bad light because they experience the same true love the heroines do. Also, they create necessary tension in the plot. Austen-Leigh is defensive; placating any tensions in the novels when it is what makes them so readable.

Austen-Leigh's recollections about his aunt seem idealized at best. After mentioning her physical beauty, he portrays her inner beauty as even brighter:

She was, in fact, as ready to comfort the unhappy, or to nurse the sick, as she was to laugh and jest with the light-hearted. Two of her nieces were grown up, and one of them married, before she was taken away from them...they know what a sympathizing friend and judicious advisor they found her to be in many little difficulties and doubts of early womanhood (99-100).

While there is no doubt Austen was an intelligent woman, Austen-Leigh marginalizes her intelligence by saying she was her best at counseling her nieces. This may have been an aspect of her personality, but Austen-Leigh chooses to make it the focus of his memoir. Austen-Leigh is intent on making Austen the typical English country girl, despite the fact that her books prove otherwise. A woman who wrote such great literary works cannot be discounted as being simply "ordinary."

Throughout the book, Austen-Leigh includes many topics, even religion:

I do not venture to speak of her religious principles: that is a subject on which she herself was more inclined to *think* and *act* than to *talk* and I shall intimate her reserve; satisfied to have shown how much of Christian love and humility abounded in her heart, without presuming to lay bare the roots whose those graces grew (100).

This passage is unusual because Austen-Leigh often speaks with such authority, yet here he is ambiguous. He also moves from this question quickly, launching into Austen's final days. The reader has the feeling he is glossing over the subject. For the reader, her Christianity was

something she felt internally, although he has no direct knowledge of this fact. Then, he almost chides the reader for questioning such a thing, though he does not provide a satisfactory answer.

Even during a fatal illness, Austen-Leigh portrays his aunt as never losing her good grace and class. In fact, the heading of the page when Austen is on her deathbed is titled “Humility.” Austen-Leigh makes sure to mention that in death, she was presided over by her two brothers, both clergymen. He also mentions that Austen was grateful for the care she received from her sister and sister-in-law, the latter of which happened to be Austen-Leigh’s mother (175). The Austen of his memory seems more worried about the people around her than impending death. Austen takes on an angelic persona here, quietly slipping away with her loving family around her.

For many Austen scholars, the work has been to find the real Austen in the lobotomized version Austen-Leigh creates in his memoir. When the book initially came out, it was enormously popular in England (Tomalin 274), thus creating a precedent of how Austen was to be viewed. Emily Auerbach points out how many modern Janeites might feel: “The *Memoir* worked hard to contain Austen’s genius—to put it in its place. Austen-Leigh thus paves the way for generations of critics to locate Austen in a respectably ladylike nook, not in the pantheon of the world’s greatest writers” (Auerbach 16). In trying to create an air of respectability and femininity for Austen, Austen-Leigh instead did a great disservice to his aunt and her work. According to Auerbach, Austen-Leigh cuts out pieces from letters in *Memoir* that he deems unsavory or does not fit the image is trying to create. Austen-Leigh’s book that led many scholars to believe for almost a century Austen had led an unremarkable life.

In response to the rising popularity of Austen’s novels, her nephew James Austen-Leigh wrote a memoir chronicling the life of his famous aunt. As an old man who remembers a woman

who had been dead for almost half a century, he attempts to go back to provide details of Austen's life. However, in writing this book, he also has an agenda. He wants to create a portrait of a woman who is the epitome of Victorian femininity and respectability. In doing so, he leaves out any real detail of what Austen was like or the life she led, instead focusing on her virtues and feminine qualities. Doing the greatest disservice to Austen's writings, Austen-Leigh portrays her work as a hobby that she felt shame for enjoying. Despite all of this, this memoir was considered an important source on Austen for almost a century. Modern Austen scholars had to mine deeper for a truer portrait of the woman, undoing the damage of the memoir.

#### Nostalgia and the British Victorians

After the memoir was published, Austen's novels immediately found a new audience. Critics, academics, and small book circles in England had already been reading Austen, but she grew in popularity among the average English reader. In the two years after *Memoir* was published, more articles had been written about her work than in all the years following her death (Sutherland 1). In 1871, Austen-Leigh released a second printing which contained works that had been previously kept from the public, including the short story "Lady Susan" and the cancelled chapter of *Persuasion*. Austen's books became an important part of English heritage, chronicling a simpler time before industry and factories ruled England. For the Victorians, the allure of Austen was part nostalgic but also part romantic: Victorian England enjoyed the more staid part of Austen's novels, a quiet world of refined women looking for respectability through marriage.

During the Victorian era in England, the books were available to a wide audience: they were sold as pretty bound editions as well as inexpensive paperbacks. Many of these paperback editions were abridged, made easily accessible to all types of readers. One edition managed to fit all six novels into fewer than 400 pages. The most expensive editions of the novels were the

Macmillan editions of the 1890's. The Prefaces were by George Saintsbury and had elaborate illustrations by Hugh Thompson. These illustrations depicted a very romantic Austen, with pretty girls, dandy gentlemen, and cherubs. These books slowly became known as the Hugh Thompson editions or the Cranford editions, named after one of the earliest novels Thompson illustrated (Sutherland 6, 9). It was Saintsbury who originally coined the term "Janeite" in the Preface to *Pride and Prejudice*. The term has been defined as a reader of Austen who feels a loyalty to her books, not a mere passing fancy (9).

This abridged and sanitized version of Austen that British Victorians seem to enjoy so thoroughly might be unsettling to her 21<sup>st</sup> century readers: "In Austen's canonization, it would seem too much is left out—too much literature, and too much life" (Sutherland 13). Austen was recast to appeal to Victorian audiences. *Memoir* inadvertently was written so that Jane would line up with Victorian morals. Much like any other book, Austen became more a product, set with the audience in mind. While novels like the ones Austen loved as a young girl had traditionally been a woman's domain, few novelists were allowed to move into critical and academic circles. It was actually progressive because few women writers were as widely read as Austen is during this time.

#### Jane in America

Even though interest in Austen was widespread in Britain, her appeal also translated to American audiences. By the mid-nineteenth century, Americans were divorced enough from their English oppressors to appreciate the British import. Like the British, Americans also had a sense of nostalgia for the time depicted in Austen's novels. America was also going through its own problems of the Industrial Age. Well-known American writers of the period such as Mark Twain, James Fennimore Cooper, and Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote of a wild, unkempt natural

world. These writers gave a very male perspective to literature. American literature up until this point had been a very masculine canon; Austen represented an acceptable feminine perspective and a backlash from the lack of American social structure.

On the surface, Austen's novels go against the American grain. They are very much about social conventions and class structure, where marriage is the only acceptable way to get out of current circumstances. This was not part of the American dream in place by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century: anybody can come to America and become somebody, even starting with nothing. Many male American writers like Twain, Edgar Allan Poe and Emerson famously criticized Austen's novels. American literature up until then had focused on individuals trying to make their own path in life, often defying social convention to do so. America was still very much a country of open terrain and unexplored spaces (Favret 168-169).

Besides adding a feminine perspective, Austen's books helped serve other functions for American readers. Her novels were very different from what was considered typical British literature, setting her apart. Although her books deal with rigid class structures, her characters feel very egalitarian. Ultimately, the characters in her books are judged by their actions and not simply their social standings.

Possibly one of the most interesting points was that Austen provided an escape for Americans weary of strife. By the mid-nineteenth century, America had become a hotbed for racial unrest. Besides the issues arising among the black slaves and the white slaveholders who eventually divided the nation, waves of immigrants had been making their way into large cities. Austen's novels were a homogenous world, a totally white Anglo-Saxon society. It is not that racial strife did not exist during Austen's time, but she glossed over that fact. For example, Sir

Betram's plantations in Antigua are only mentioned in passing, and the issue of slavery is not really part of the storyline (Favret 179).

For critic Mary Favret, the issue actually goes farther than merely that America was war-weary and wanted escapism. Favret suggests white Americans wanted to live in a homogenous culture that would thrive and be more secure. Austen provided an outlet to upheld white America's notion that the Anglo-Saxon race was the superior one:

In the later nineteenth and twentieth century, Austen's homogenous society emerged as especially (and problematically) suited to the needs of a nation struggling to renew itself in the aftermath of war. To the extent that white American readers were in love with Austen and found consolation in her fiction, they were willing to imagine themselves rid of the legacy of slavery, the trauma of the Civil War, and the difficulties posed by mass immigration (179).

Favret argues that Americans were feeling hit from all sides by the end of the nineteenth century. African-Americans had not been fully integrated in society, and masses of people were immigrating into America. It seems America was becoming too egalitarian, so the idea of a class system where everyone knows their place would be appealing. However, Austen's novels did not necessarily reflect the true problems of her day.

James-Edward Austen-Leigh responded to the rising popularity of Austen's novels by paying tribute to an aunt he most likely barely knew and barely remembered. His primary goal was also to maintain an Austen family legacy of propriety. He achieved his goal in his *Memoir of Jane Austen*, which cast her as the perfect specimen of a Victorian lady. Instead of highlighting her talent and wit, Austen-Leigh focused on her femininity, piety, and grace. He portrays her as

intelligent, but not overly so to put off men. Most insulting to Janeites, Austen-Leigh portrays his aunt's writings as a whimsical hobby that she never let get in the way of domestic felicity.

Despite the many problems and inaccuracies later discovered in *Memoir*, the book became a bestseller and reinvigorated interest in the six novels. In Great Britain, her books were sold in many forms: from expensively bound editions with elaborate illustrations to abridged paperbacks. In a real sense, British Victorians responded to a truncated Austen: reading abridged editions of her work that focused on marriage and manners believed to be written by an angelic woman who dutiful lived for her family.

Americans were also interested in her work, rebelling against the canon of unexplored and wild terrain in an uncertain world. Americans were divorced enough from Mother England to appreciate again the social classes. Austen's novels also provided a real escape to a war weary nation: an egalitarian world where everyone is judged based on their actions. For white America, it was a homogenous world where racial and cultural strife were not an issue. While interest in Austen took many forms that might have upset purists, it did help invigorate interest in Austen, bridging into the twentieth century.

## Chapter II: Jane Austen in the Modern Day

It is the twenty-first century. Forty undergraduates sit poised in their seats for the first day of English 467, a Jane Austen seminar at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. As I walk to the front of the class, I notice a striking fact: only one of my students is male. ‘My mother made me take this class,’ he apologetically explains. ‘Well, really I’m here because Colin Firth makes me swoon,’ admits a starry-eyed student who says she and her roommates have watched the 1996 BBC/A&E version of *Pride and Prejudice* twenty times. ‘I want to learn more about Jane,’ says another. I sigh and take out my notes. It suddenly seems appealing to teach Milton to a class filled with equally males and females, none of them thinking of him as John or having seen film versions of *Paradise Lost* starring Hollywood’s leading heartthrobs as Adam and Satan.<sup>1</sup>

It is very rare for undergraduate students walking into a literature class today to feel as if they already know the subject before the class has begun. However, Austen has permeated the conscious of many people in the English-speaking world. Some of these people may have never read one word that Austen actually wrote. During the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century, interest in Austen and her books never really waned: at first, it was considered small and cultish, clusters of devotees who kept her writings alive. Then came a full resurgence based on a sudden explosion of movies and books devoted to Austen.

### The Placid Writer

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<sup>1</sup> Emily Auerbach 3

Even though her novels continued to be popular well past the Victorian Era, Austen herself was still treated as the angelic creature from her nephew's memoir who wrote as a hobby. Encyclopedias, books, and anthologies still wrote that nothing of consequence happened in her life. She never married, never traveled, and lived with family her whole life, so her life was uninteresting. Encyclopedias often recycle information over and over, so this myth was perpetuated well into the twentieth century (Auerbach 27-28).

The fact that women were very limited in Austen's time in what they could and could not do did not appear to be taken into consideration. Emily Auerbach argues other geniuses who supposedly lived great lives possibly just had more opportunity:

What if Michelangelo had been confined to tiny canvases and a palette consisting of only soft shades of pink? What if Shakespeare had been denied the chance to act on stage and had been told to spend his days playing charades and completing 'carpet work.' Chances are that even under such restrictive circumstances their genius would have come out, though perhaps in a genre or medium dismissed as lacking in profundity (Auerbach 28-29).

Austen's image suffers from a misogyny that existed up until very recently. She was repressed as a woman by the society of her day, and then she was made to conform to a later era of Victorian propriety. As the twentieth century unfolded, her audience felt because she was an unmarried woman without children, she never really accomplished much. In the twenty-first century, her audience wonders why she did not do more in life, so it becomes easy to allow for the spinster who wrote for pleasure.

For much of the twentieth century, Austen was quietly revered by a small but loyal following. Little societies of mostly woman gathered and discussed Austen. Austen's inclusion

in the British canon meant that she would be taught at universities, often as the lone female writer in a group of white men. Reading one of her novels, especially *Pride and Prejudice*, was considered part of a well-rounded liberal arts education. If ownership of a book is any indication of readership, *Pride and Prejudice* is definitely still widely read. *Library Thing*, a website where users can catalogue their books, lists *Pride and Prejudice* as the tenth most owned book by its users, just behind the Harry Potter series and *The Da Vinci Code*. Austen herself is listed as the ninth most popular author in number of books owned by users (*Library Thing*).

### Selling Austen

With the advent of the moving picture in the twentieth century, moviemakers began reaching back to classic storylines and works of fiction for fodder for their movies. Most classics had a built-in audience that would make the movie successful. Austen's novels definitely fell into that category, hence the creation of the many movies. However, early Austen adaptations often manipulated her work to suit the needs of the time, usually emphasizing the more romantic themes of Austen's novels.

In 1940, MGM came out with a version of *Pride and Prejudice*, with Greer Garson as Elizabeth Bennet and Lawrence Olivier as Mr. Darcy. The screenwriters who adapted the story had written a great many screwball and romantic comedies. The plot of the movie emphasized the silliness of some of the minor characters like Mr. Collins or Mrs. Bennet, and the tensions between the lovers. The biggest departure from the book was at the end, when Lady Catherine ultimately blesses the engagement of Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth. The movie also compresses certain events to fit a two hour movie (Parrill 49). One ad campaign of the movie had a picture of all five Bennet sisters with the caption, "We want a husband!" The movie was marketed as a

movie for women, boasting that viewers of the movie would learn how to land a husband like the Bennet sisters (Auerbach 278).

This treatment of Austen as what would later be known as a “chick flick” would influence many later screen adaptations of her work. Possibly the strangest “adaptation” of all by MGM were the costumes. Clothing of Austen’s day was considered too plain for the movie screen. Coupled with the popularity of MGM’s earlier release of *Gone with the Wind*, the costumes resembled more the puffy sleeves and hoopskirts of the middle of the nineteenth century than Georgian England. Instead of bonnets, the ladies wore large hats that framed and flattered their faces for the screen (Parrill 55). Despite the success of the film, another Austen adaptation was not done for half a century. The BBC did some television adaptations that were moderately successful, but probably only played to a small audience (5).

#### The Resurgence

For much of the twentieth century, the Janeites were rather cultish, a small group of devoted fans. However, that changed with a popular adaptation that caused a stir in the mid-1990s. After that, a love of all things Austen went mainstream. In 1995, BBC released a miniseries of *Pride and Prejudice* in the UK. At 300 minutes long, the miniseries format allowed the writers to follow the book’s plot closer. In 1996, the miniseries was shown in America on the *A&E* channel. The series was an overnight success and a ratings boom both in the UK and America. Later released as a box set in both VHS and DVD format, the series sparked a newfound interest in Austen (Parrill 63-66). In the next two years after the series premiered, six adaptations were released of Austen’s novels, including *Clueless*, *Sense and Sensibility* and two versions of *Emma*. Many of these were planned before *Pride and Prejudice* even was out. These subsequent films only added to the popularity and a new boon started (6-7).

Much of the success of the *Pride and Prejudice* miniseries can be traced back to a few factors. One of the biggest factors was the portrayal of Mr. Darcy by Colin Firth. Firth's nuanced performance is now considered the definitive Darcy. Actors in past productions had always played Darcy as a stiff, foreboding man. Firth worked a lot of body language into his performance, paying attention to what Darcy does not say as much as what he does say. The screenwriter Andrew Davies also added scenes not in the novel to show an athletic Darcy and also a man tortured by a feeling of inadequacy (65-66). Firth's Darcy sparked a separate devotion, especially among female viewers, of Darcy as the perfect romantic hero. The phenomenon of Firth and Mr. Darcy will be explored more fully in Chapter V.

Overall, Davies' screenplay worked sexuality into the movie. Jennifer Ehle, who played Elizabeth Bennet, wore many outfits that highlighted her cleavage. Julia Sawalha's portrayal of Lydia suggested a budding sexuality played out by her interest in the soldiers. Many adaptations of Austen in the last twenty years have had a certain amount of modern sex appeal, while being anchored in a certain amount of nostalgia for the social structure of Austen's era. Many of these adaptations feature smoldering, handsome men and beautiful women in Georgian outfits who try to maintain a certain amount of propriety, yet who also flirt with the edge of what is considered proper and what is considered immoral. This sexual tension seems to appeal to many audiences. The audience of the mid-1990s and possibly today are nostalgic for a sense of order and a life before industrialization (4-5). However, audiences want to feel a connection to the feelings onscreen, hence the sexual tension. Amanda Collins calls this melding of the centuries "hyperreality," allowing factors of a modern audience to come together with older sensibilities (Collins 80).

Auerbach feels that these contemporary adaptations have strayed too far from what Austen intended:

As if taking Austen back full circle to the sweet maiden aunt portrayed by her relatives, some filmmakers have reduced her novels to little more than sappy love stories. Male heartthrobs in frilly shirts and leggings pursue beautiful women with cleavage showing at the tops of their pastel-colored regency gowns...The marketing of Austen films as “chick flicks” seems to have reinforced the notion that her novels are feminine (280-281).

Auerbach seems caught up in the visuals of the movie. However, this is simply surface. People who consider themselves Austen experts can enjoy the dialogue, as an Austen novice might enjoy the love story. She seems to feel if the audience does not enjoy the same aspects of Austen as she does, then they are not true Austen fans. This seems unfair. Many people reading the novels enjoy the love story as well. Austen is very multi-faceted writer; different people find enjoyment in different places. It is also hard to discount the universal qualities of a good love story like in the novels. Also, the movies allow people who have not previously been interested in Austen to enjoy her work and possibly explore it further. More exposure of people to Austen can not be a bad thing.

#### Bringing Janeites Together

Like Trekkies and *Star Wars* fans, Austen fans have moved their enjoyment of her work to public forums. Modern day Janeites have come together to form several communities to sustain and preserve interest in her work. The most prominent organization is the Jane Austen Society of the United Kingdom (JAS). JAS was founded initially in 1940 to preserve the cottage in Chawton where Austen lived with her family after her father died. This is where she did the

majority of her writing and where she lived when many of her books were published. Today, JAS maintains the house as a museum and preserves many items that belonged to Austen and her family (JAS website).

However, JAS has spread beyond England to all over the world. In the United States and Canada, the Jane Austen Society of North America (JASNA website), a non-profit group, boasts over sixty regional groups that get together to discuss Austen. JASNA was founded in 1979 and states as its mission: "...to foster among the widest number of readers the study, appreciation, and understanding of Jane Austen's works, her life, and her genius" (JASNA). JASNA's members are diverse, embracing scholars and non-scholars alike. JASNA appears to be one of the more active groups, offering its members workshops, lectures, luncheons, and even an annual meeting. The annual meeting is a literary conference that features a different theme or aspect of Austen's works and is only open to JASNA members. The organization also publishes *Persuasions*, a print and online journal of articles about Austen's works and sponsors essay contests. JASNA sponsors trips to England for its members and gives tours dedicated to Austen sites, both real and fictional.

Much more confined to the web is *The Republic of Pemberley*. Billing itself as "a haven for Jane Austen addicts," the website is a series of resources and message boards allowing members to discuss Austen in their own corner of the Internet. The website was founded in 1996 initially as a message board for people to discuss the BBC miniseries *Pride and Prejudice*, and it grew from there. The most interesting feature is "Lady Catherine & Co.," an advice column for Janeites. The site is run completely by volunteers. The site clearly states that it is a website for Janeites only, not scholars or students looking for homework help. The site even posts this warning to students looking for help on a paper: "Don't pretend you want to be friends. We can

tell. The people who run this site are an eerily exact cross between your mother and your English teacher” (Pemberley website). The site also maintains a database of electronic Austen resources, including short stories, the novels, and photos from the movies (Pemberley).

While the devotion to all things Austen might seem odd to the outsider, these organizations and websites appear to fill a void. They help scholars and non-scholars alike to connect with each other and discuss Austen. While scholars and writers have an outlet to express an attachment to Austen, there is a larger audience of people who do not have that ability. Austen may be one of the few writers who lived centuries ago to sustain such popularity among average readers. Usually, this sort of fandom for books is confined to contemporary writers. The internet has been a boon for like-minded people to form communities, and Janeites are no exception. These organizations also serve the important purpose of maintaining interest in Austen and making that subsequent generations continue to read her works.

#### The Makeup of the Modern Janeite

How might one define a contemporary Janeite? While it is impossible to stereotype the people who make up JAS, JASNA, and *The Republic of Pemberley*, JASNA member Jeanne Kiefer conducted a survey of JASNA members to get a profile of the average Janeite. The only criteria for participating were that respondents had to have read all six novels and they also have to consider themselves an admirer of Austen. Almost 5,000 people responded to Kiefer’s survey.

The overwhelming majority of people who responded were women, with 96 percent being female. The median age of the respondents was approximately 40. However, the age groups were diverse, with 335 teenage respondents and 215 being over the age of 70. Most were well-educated: 81 percent of people over 20 having achieved a four-year degree. Of those, 12

percent held doctorates. Of the people who went to college, only 29 percent had studied English. The majority of the respondents worked, one-third in education or academia.

On the economic front, respondents tended to be more affluent than the average American, with one quarter making above \$100,000. Janeites also tended to be more liberal, with 55 percent identifying themselves as liberal. Half of Janeites listed multiple hobbies, the most popular being reading (not surprising!). The majority of people who said they enjoyed reading read more than two books a month. Outside of Austen, respondents who read picked mystery novels as their favorite genre (29%). Janeites were remarkably well-traveled, with over half having traveled outside the United States. Over half of respondents listed *Pride and Prejudice* as their favorite novel, with Elizabeth Bennet being the most popular heroine and Mr. Darcy the most favorite hero. A majority of respondents said the BBC version of *Pride and Prejudice* is their favorite screen adaptation. Some other miscellaneous facts are: 63 percent of respondents preferred tea to coffee, 29 percent liked classical music, and 36 percent owned cats (Kiefer).

In the survey, Kiefer tries to emphasize the diversity of her findings showing that Janeites are not necessarily librarians or bluestockings who watch PBS and own too many cats. She mentions the diversity of employment of Janeites: judges, air traffic controllers, pastry chefs, and bartenders, to name a few. However, it appears that an outsider can at least make certain assumptions about people who are more likely to enjoy Austen than others.

For much of the twentieth century, devotion to Austen was relegated to a select few, a mostly female group of Janeites and scholars. Reading Austen was considered part of a well-rounded education for many. However, the 1995 release of the BBC miniseries *Pride and Prejudice* changed much of that. Janeites went more mainstream, with fans flocking to organizations like JAS and JASNA, and logging onto *Pemberley*. The term Janeite expanded to

encompass many people from different walks of life, although some old stereotypes remained. A more sexualized Austen occurred, with a melding of Georgian sensibilities and modern sexuality injecting some life into adaptations. These adaptations became enormously popular with their mixed sensibilities.

### Chapter III: Adaptations and Sequels of Austen's Novels

#### The Movie Adaptations

For readers of Austen in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Austen's words have come alive on screen, a phenomenon which has brought new audiences to Austen and given different perspectives to her works. These film treatments have allowed people to access Austen who may not have previously been interested in her novels. M. Casey Diana conducted an experiment with her freshman English class where she showed half of her class Ang Lee's *Sense and Sensibility* and assigned the other half of her class to just read the book. Diana then had both groups take a quiz on the events of the plot, write an essay, and fill out a questionnaire about which medium they experienced *Sense and Sensibility*. Student responses were more favorable to those viewing the movie, and these students felt a deeper connection with the characters than the ones who had only read the novel (140-141). In modern society, attention spans tend to be shorter than they were in Austen's day. Movies engage people in multiple ways to grab their attention.

While many early movies like MGM's *Pride and Prejudice* (1940) altered basic plot points in order to suit tastes of the time, adaptations from the past two decades have remained closer to the novels. Much of the emphasis seems to be on staying "authentic" to Austen and honoring her novels. Despite this fact, Austen's stories still receive the Hollywood treatment: dressed up, glamorized and sexualized in order to appeal to the modern sensibilities of the audience.

#### *Emma* and the Hollywood Treatment

On the heels of the popularity of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Clueless* came the movie adaptation of *Emma* (1996) starring a little known Gwyneth Paltrow in the title role. Paltrow was

a young actress just starting to garner recognition when the movie came out. The DVD cover features a close-up of Paltrow holding a bow and arrow, posed to shoot with one eye closed, essentially winking at the audience. She is the only person on the front cover, with her name in big letters across the top. The tagline: "Cupid is armed and dangerous!" This movie version emphasizes Emma as an independent wealthy woman, a glamour figure who enjoys matching people together.

As Emma, Paltrow has a big personality: Emma definitely runs the village and intimidates the women around her. Paltrow is an attractive blond, glamorizing Emma as not only the most prominent woman, but also the prettiest. On the DVD cover, Paltrow wears a white dress with her hair plied in curls on top of her head. Her dress and hairstyle betray the girlish nature of Emma, not quite a woman in virginal white. Paltrow's performance emphasizes that Emma thinks she knows more than she probably actually does. When Emma's plans eventually fall apart, she does not seem as humbled as she was in the novel. Paltrow never drops the haughty nature of Emma's character, only softening it towards the end. Emma is very much obsessed with match-making. The movie opens at the wedding of the Westons, an event only talked about in the novel. This triumph causes Emma to want to set up other couples.

Besides Paltrow, this movie has a very prominent cast of actors whose fame has grown since the movie first came out. Toni Colette, Jeremy Northam, Alan Cumming, and Ewan Macgregor all play major roles. Colette plays Harriet Smith, the unassuming friend Emma adopts and tries to match with Mr. Elton. Colette plays up Harriet's naivety, portraying her as almost a simpleton. Harriet has no mind of her own in this version. She constantly allows herself to be manipulated by Emma. Colette emphasizes her rather wide eyes, trying to make Harriet out as

the innocent. In the novel, it does not so much seem Harriet's immaturity as Emma's cunning that allows her to be used in Emma's matchmaking games.

Northam, Mr. Knightley, plays him as a very conservative, reserved figure. For most of the movie, Knightley does not chide Emma as much as he makes suggestions to her. Only when Emma humiliates Miss Bates does Northam's Knightley shows any real emotion. He acts as the parent, yelling at Emma for her actions. Northam is distinguished looking; his looks portray an older, more established man, much more mature than the girlish Paltrow.

Overall, this movie is very pretty: all the actors playing major roles are attractive, the scenery is attractive, and like all Austen novels, nothing really terrible happens to anyone in the story. The backdrop of the story shows an idealized village with stately houses and charming cottages. Outside of Robert Martin and Harriet, there is no real portrayal of the lower classes. The whitewashed nature of the scenery plays right into the atmosphere of the story. However, there is also a modern sensibility to the movie. Quick cutaways and internal dialogue allow the movie to move at a very easy pace, more like a romantic comedy than a period piece. *Emma's* atmosphere is very light, as Paltrow keeps her characterization of Emma very bright without being silly. Paltrow's performance makes Emma bigger than life yet maintains a certain naivety that makes the audience root for her. This is really the crux of how the Emma of Austen's novel became so popular.

#### Persuading the Audience: *Persuasion* and Cinematic Realism

Many of the Austen adaptations like *Emma* give a Hollywood sheen to Austen's stories: pretty people, pretty settings, and a straightforward love story. However, the BBC movie version of *Persuasion* (1995) hits a very different chord. Because of the nature of the plot, to create a world like the one Emma inhabits would be a disservice to the novel. While it does have a bit of

that idealism that is in all movies, *Persuasion* dresses down and deglamorizes the story to create a much more realistic adaptation of the novel.

Amanda Root's performance as Anne Eliot emphasizes her dowdiness in the beginning of the movie. Anne wears her hair in a messy bun, with two strands coming down to create a rather unflattering look. Root's look can be best described as mousy, with the lines on her face being emphasized to make her look older than her years. Anne is given a makeover halfway through the movie, given a real hairstyle and some more makeup. This seems to indicate a change in Anne, when she starts to assert herself more as a person. Just as in the novel, Anne is often discussed by other characters while she is in the room. She is often overlooked by the people closest to her, including her sisters and father. Her appearance portrays a woman who would prefer to fade into the background.

Contrasting Anne's looks are the dashing good looks of Captain Wentworth. Ciaran Hinds's Wentworth is attractive without looking like typically Hollywood. Wentworth is handsome and immediately attracts the attention of the Musgrove sisters as husband material. The visual contrast of Anne and Wentworth in the movie is something a reader may not have considered reading the book. Wentworth and Anne are supposed to be about the same age, yet Anne is considered a spinster past her prime, while Wentworth is considered a good catch.

Besides the contrast of Anne and Wentworth, many of the major cast show a contrast to emphasize differences in characters. While Anne and her sisters look like old, dowdy spinsters, the Musgrove sisters are bright and pretty. Often shown in close-ups smiling, the Musgrove sisters contrast the reserved nature of Anne and especially the sickly Mary. The difference between Mary and Anne portrayed in the novel is emphasized in the movie: while Anne tends to hold her feeling inside, Mary never passes up on an opportunity to complain about something.

Sophie Thompson portrays Mary with a nasally, almost child-like voice, constantly whining to whomever will listen.<sup>2</sup> The biggest contrast of the movie is between Wentworth and the sinister Mr. Eliot. While Wentworth is darker and ruddier looking as a man who has spent time at sea, Mr. Eliot is very blond with a pale complexion. If Wentworth is the hero, Mr. Eliot's looks betray him as the villain.

As none of the actors in the movie are excessively attractive, the movie seems slightly more realistic than many of its counterparts. The movie also tries to fill in certain gaps for visual effects. At the beginning and end of the movie are scenes of the sea and sailing ships, a prevailing theme. In the very last scene, Anne is portrayed sailing with her husband Wentworth on the sea, something that does not appear in the book. This last scene portrays Anne as the independent, worldly woman, a sort of feminist figure for nineteenth century England.

#### *Pride and Prejudice: The Next Generation*

After the stunning success of the BBC miniseries *Pride and Prejudice*, it seemed unlikely that anyone would want to try to retell the story. However, *Pride and Prejudice* (2005) received a new life, following closely the plot of the novel yet it also fit the timeframe of a two hour movie. The movie strikes a balance between the realism and the fantasy of an Austen novel, while seeking to reinterpret certain aspects of the plot.

Keira Knightley fills the shoes of Elizabeth Bennet, the smart and sassy second Bennet sister. Knightley emphasizes Elizabeth's independent streak; Knightley's Elizabeth yells at people and runs through the countryside. Elizabeth seems very much a woman wise beyond her years, often spouting very grand statements for someone very young. Knightley is pretty in an

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<sup>2</sup> Thompson also portrayed Miss Bates in the Gwyneth Paltrow version of *Emma*. Thompson played Miss Bates alongside her mother Phylinda Law, who played Mrs. Bates. Thompson is also the younger sister of Emma Thompson, who played Elinor Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility* the same year *Persuasion* was released (IMDB).

exotic way, much prettier than Elizabeth was ever intended to be. However, it is doubtful the audience would accept a homely Elizabeth.

Matthew Macfadyen has the awesome task of taking on Mr. Darcy, a role to many Janeites belongs to Colin Firth. Macfadyen plays Darcy very much as the quiet, brooding man plagued by his insecurities, similar to Firth's performance. This is achieved by an inherent sadness that seems to follow Darcy throughout the movie: Macfadyen's performance heightens the fact that Darcy has a secret. He hides his feelings in his snobbery. Macfadyen has a low, rather quiet voice that also seems to emphasize the feeling of a man constantly trying to assert himself despite being the sought-after bachelor in the village. Darcy is definitely very masculine. He appears rather tall and broad, so his appearance is very much against the grain of the stereotypical dandy

In creating the world of this movie, director Joe Wright made some unique choices to differentiate his movie from other versions of *Pride and Prejudice*. In the infamous scene where Darcy tells Elizabeth he is in love with her and she refuses him, Wright placed them outside in some abandoned ruins. It is raining when Darcy makes his pronouncement. None of this happens in the novel; the scene takes place inside. When Elizabeth refuses him, she storms off, leaving Darcy wet and alone. This added detail heightens the sense of rejection Darcy feels, thus translating better to the audience.

While most of the movie is shot in rather idyllic English countryside, it also shows some rougher parts of rural life. Elizabeth is often shown talking to servants or passing by the pigs. These scenes anchor the movie into a certain amount of realism, unlike the movie version of *Emma*. However, the movie often goes more towards the romantic. One of the last scenes where Darcy and Elizabeth finally unite is a good example. Both Elizabeth and Darcy are walking

through a meadow of tall grass, with the sun at Darcy's back. When the two finally reach each other and embrace, a beam of sunlight bounces off the camera lens. This appears to indicate their happiness at their newly found love. In the very final scene, Darcy and Elizabeth embrace and have a discussion about what pet names they will call each other. He asks her when she wants to be called Mrs. Darcy, and she replies she only wants to be called that when he is extremely happy. He kisses her and calls her "Mrs. Darcy" over and over. This emphasizes the romance of the ending.

Particular attention should also be paid to the character of Mr. Collins (Tom Hollander). Hollander gives a very different perspective on Mr. Collins. In past versions and in the novel, Collins is a fool. He talks incessantly and lacks any sort of charm. However, Hollander's Collins is off-putting because he has a creepy quality. Often leering at the women, he comes across as a lecher. His physical appearance also makes it clear to the audience he is an unsuitable match for Elizabeth. Noticeably in the scene where Collins dances at the ball, he is considerably shorter than Elizabeth. This is often a visual cue that a relationship will not work.

When the movie first came out, a lot of attention was paid to Judi Dench's performance as Lady Catherine de Bourg. Much like Hollander, Dench brings out a different side of Lady Catherine. Dench's Lady Catherine is pompous, as in the novel, but she also speaks with such authority that she tends to steal the scene. The audience cannot help but give her full attention. This is unlike other performances where she appears the fool, like Mr. Collins. Dench's characterization never hints at a foolish Lady Catherine. This makes the scene where Elizabeth stands up to Lady Catherine all the more galling and gutsy. Elizabeth is fighting a force of nature. To remake the beloved *Pride and Prejudice* and bring a fresh perspective on the well-known story is a feat. However, Wright brings some new ideas to the story without losing the

well-loved elements of the story. Knightley and Macfadyen make an interesting pair as Darcy and Elizabeth. Both manage to uphold tradition yet exceed expectations in these roles.

#### Our Romantic Sensibilities

Ang Lee's *Sense and Sensibility* (1995) was well-received for its balanced portrayal of the novel. Like *Pride and Prejudice*, this version shows both the light and the dark of the novel. The story opens on a heavy note with the death of Mr. Dashwood and the family being cast out of their home. To place the gloss of *Emma* on this movie would be a disservice. However, like *Emma*, Lee's version draws on many talented actors to fill major roles: Emma Thompson, Kate Winslet, Hugh Grant and Alan Rickman. Thompson plays Elinor, while Winslet plays Marianne. Thompson and Winslet's age difference emphasizes the dynamic of Elinor and Marianne's relationship; Elinor takes control as the sensible one and as a mother figure to Marianne. The beginning scenes show the reduced circumstances of the Dashwoods, portraying Elinor looking over the family budget. There is mention made of the sisters sharing a bed and having to forgo beef.

For much of the first half of the movie, sadness hangs over everything the Dashwoods do. Even their affection for Edward Ferrars (Hugh Grant) does not seem to really lift their spirits. Mrs. Dashwood and the sisters know they will eventually be expelled by the miserly Fanny. Grant's Edward is very unsure of himself, not at all dashing. He is charming, although Edward never tries to be. There is some substance behind his good looks. Contrasting that is the appearance of John Willoughby (Greg Wise). When Marianne meets Willoughby is that romantic scene in the rain, her whole demeanor is changed from that point. She is lighter, acting like someone in love for the first time. Wise's Willoughby is charming and handsome, almost

flashy for an Austen hero. That flash is short-lived, for Willoughby pulls back and eventually reveals his true character.

Rounding out the major players is Alan Rickman as Colonel Brandon. While good-looking, Rickman appears to be an unlikely leading man. Brandon's physical attributes pale to Willoughby's or Edward's, but his good personality and concern for Marianne makes him seem like good husband material. Brandon is all substance, no flash. He is persistent, despite the feeling for most of the movie that he is more a nuisance than a suitor.

Lee does an excellent job at further exploring relationships between the characters. For instance, he includes a scene where Lucy Steele tells Fanny about her engagement to Edward. The scene is very calm, with Fanny goading Lucy to tell of her secret engagement. The audience can already guess what Fanny's reaction will be, and the scene cuts to Lucy on the floor with Fanny attacking her. This scene is not in the book; virtually no violence appears in any Austen novel. The scene provides some comic relief to a low point in the story.

Also, Lee extends the ending to show the wedding of Marianne and Brandon. The scene is extremely happy and romantic; the audience gets the impression Marianne has found true love. In the distance, the camera pans away from the church to a hill where Willoughby is watching from horseback. The audience is left with the impression that Willoughby regrets his decision to marry for money. Much like many of the better adaptations, *Sense and Sensibility* combines the reality and the fantasy. As arguably one of Austen's harsher novels, it would have been easy to play up the dark elements. Lee manages to find the happiness at the end.

#### The Sequels: Improving on Perfection?

While all six novels have very tight endings, many Janeites still want to know more about the characters they have grown to love. What happened after Darcy and Elizabeth got married?

Does Mary Bennet ever get married? Whatever happened to Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill? While Austen probably never planned to answer these questions, some Janeites have made attempts. Many writers have tried to fill in the gaps, creating sequels and following the plot from a different character's perspective. The sheer breadth of these works makes it impossible do anything but scratch the surface of this phenomenon.<sup>3</sup>

These novels began to appear around the mid-nineties, right after the resurgence of interest from BBC's *Pride and Prejudice*. Indeed, *Pride and Prejudice* has arguably produced the most sequels. One of the most notable writers to produce a sequel was Emma Tennant, who has written sequels to *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma*, and *Sense and Sensibility*. However, other writers have produced books trying to tell the story of Elizabeth and Darcy and their descendants. The most prolific of these is Elizabeth Aston, who has written many books chronicling the exploits of the descendants of the Darcys, the Bingleys, and even the Collinses. To date, Aston has produced six books about characters in *Pride and Prejudice* (Elizabeth). The Darcys are imagined to have given birth to five daughters just as the Bennets did. The story opens up when the five daughters are of marriageable age like the Bennet sisters.

Besides telling what happened after the books end, there are also novels that try to tell the plot of the novel from the perspective of a different character. One of the most notable authors to do this is Amanda Grange, who published a series of books telling the stories of the six novels from the perspective of the men. All of Austen's books are set from a woman's perspective, so it is often not known what the male hero thinks. Each book is written as a diary, so there is *Mr. Darcy's Diary*, *Captain Wentworth's Diary*, and *Edmund Bertram's Diary*. Besides coming from

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<sup>3</sup> Because this is a fairly recent event and the books in general tend to be dismissed by many scholarly readers as just romance or casual reading, nothing has really been written regarding these types of books. However, to address this would be beyond the scope of my research. I have tried to discuss the books as a genre using book guides like Amazon.

a male perspective, a couple of books come out chronicling minor characters as well. The exploits of Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill from *Emma* have been explored in several books, including *Jane Fairfax: The Secret Story of the Second Heroine of Jane Austen's Emma* and *The Clandestine Courtship of Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill*.

While these books do their best to continue the story of many of Austen's characters, they do not seem to come close to the remarkable words that Austen herself crafted. While imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, it seems like a gargantuan task to try to fill Austen's giant shoes. Many reviews appear to say while the author is trying hard to mimic Austen, it can often come across as forced or unreal. It must be very hard to set out to write something that is comparable to high literature. Also, there is a lot of discrepancy between what is considered good and what is considered merely trashy romance and it seems hard to make that distinction without wading through some muck. Most Janeites would agree there is no improving on the perfection of Austen's novels.

Austen has managed to transcend the written page, appearing in film and making her characters come alive. These movie adaptations can help make Austen reachable to a wider audience. Austen's characters have also gotten new life in new books, where authors have tried to imagine what happened after the novel ends. Many movies made from the novels are prone to a heightened reality: the world her characters reside in is more of an imagined world than true eighteenth century England. However, a movie like *Emma* tends to be much more fantastical than *Persuasion*. While the movies are enjoyed by a wide audience, the Austen sequels tend to be enjoyed only by Janeites. However, these books seem small consolation to reading the words of Austen herself.

### Chapter IV: Tributes to the Woman and her Work

A tribute is defined as an homage honoring a person or their work. During the latter half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century, writers and directors were inspired to look for the universal elements of the plots. A self-awareness of the devotion to Austen became fodder for books and movies. Austen elicits a devotion that is unmatched simply because it has lasted for so long. Also, there has been a spark of interest in the woman herself. The publication of *Jane Austen: A Life* by Claire Tomalin in 1997 helped shatter the myth that Austen led a quiet and unremarkable life. This 400 page book goes into incredible detail about the world Austen lived and some of the people that populated that world.

Despite existing in a very different world, Austen's plots have many universal themes. For instance, Austen touches on concerns of love and money. The twist of using the themes of Austen in a different setting led to an expansion of her potential canon. Placing her in India or modern day California does not detract from her stories; in fact, it adds to them. These stories pay tribute to Austen for they seek to flatter and honor the writer and possibly draw new fans to her work.

#### Austen as Guardian Angel

“Each of us has a private Austen.”-Karen Joy Fowler

In *The Jane Austen Book Club*, Austen serves as a guardian angel figure to the group of friends who meet once a month to discuss the six novels. She is arguably the central character; the connection a group of unlike people uses to forge a bond. All but one of the characters comes with a love of Austen already. The various insights the characters give of Austen and the novels betray their true personalities. Both the book and the movie highlight the fact that Austen's

novels can mean different things to different people. This is a tribute because both versions portray Austen as an artist that can unite people and even make them fall in love.

In the book, Fowler parallels the lives of the characters to the novel that is being read. For instance, Jocelyn hosts at her house when the club reads *Emma*. Jocelyn is a woman who has never married and trains dogs for a living. She is well-known for her matchmaking and tries to connect her best friend Sylvia with the newcomer of the group, the slightly younger Grigg. Jocelyn is completely unaware that Grigg is in love with her. Many of these plot points mirror the novel *Emma*.

The book tends to go off on tangents and sometimes it can be hard to keep the characters straight. There are parts of the books that drag on longer than necessary. However, Fowler writes an excellent tribute to Austen. In the end, she provides summaries of the books and other materials to pique the interest of a wide range of Austen fans. The book even provides discussion questions for readers of the novel. Fowler appears to be encouraging people to read Austen and even start their own book clubs. It is very clear that Fowler is an ardent Janeite.

The movie version of *The Jane Austen Book Club* (2007) takes the elements of the book and improves upon it. The plot is streamlined with some of the minor characters written out. The boring asides are gone and what is left is a feel-good romantic comedy. The movie tries to answer the question: What is it about Austen's novels that modern readers find so enthralling? The answer the movie gives is that modern life is hazardous and complicated; Austen's world seems simple in comparison. During the opening credits, the characters and others confront the daily inconveniences that can make modern life irksome. Car horns, metal detectors, ATMs, and pump and go gas stations; all things supposed to make life better instead cause irritation for the characters. The implication is that many of us feel slightly lost in our own world.

In the movie, Bernadette, the free-spirit of the group, proposes the book club to her new friend Prudie, who she meets while in line at a bad movie version of *Mansfield Park*. After deciding to start the book club, Bernadette walks away off camera and says the line that hits home the central idea:

Bernadette: It's the perfect antidote...

Prudie: To what?

Bernadette: To life!

The mostly female cast of characters deals with the unraveling of their romantic lives. Both Prudie and Sylvia are dealing with unsatisfying husbands. Prudie cannot connect emotionally to her Neanderthal husband and Sylvia must deal with an unwanted divorce. Prudie also deals with an attraction to an eighteen-year-old student at the high school where she teaches. Allegra, Sylvia's daughter, is a fun-loving lesbian who seems to fall in love very easily. Like in the book, Jocelyn is unmarried and says she has never been in love. All the characters seem to be drawn to Austen because of dissatisfaction with their own lives.

The character of Grigg creates the tension in the group. As the only male, he is the interloper. He is both the romantic hero and the anti-romantic. In the beginning, he is an unknown, like Darcy. However, he is extremely logical and loves science fiction, not very romantic. During the first meeting of the book club, he brings a large volume of Austen that contains all six novels. This is indication for the other characters that he is an Austen novice. However, he softens by the end of the movie (possibly by reading) and becomes the love of Jocelyn's life.

By the end of the movie, Austen becomes a force that unites and reunites people. *Persuasion*, the novel of second chances, is the last book read by the group. Prudie and her

husband read *Persuasion* together, bringing them closer together and turning her husband into an Austen fan. Sylvia reunites with her husband after he writes her a letter explaining his feelings, an often-used plot point in Austen's novels. Allegra settles down with Dr. Yep, who treats her when she falls from a rock climbing wall. *The Jane Austen Book Club* also ends with a wedding: Bernadette returns from a trip to South America with a new husband in tow.

When the reunited club (plus extra members) finds out Bernadette's husband has not read Austen, the last line of the movie is "Oh, we'll fix that!" Austen has become a language that is spoken and understood among the group. In the beginning of the movie, the group is splintered and each is unsatisfied with his/her life. Austen unites and reunites people in the course of the story. This work is a good one for new fans of Austen, for the story combines elements of Austen's novels with a contemporary story. The plot of the book and the movie could garner interest and further reading.

#### Austen in India

In this unique adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, Regency England is replaced by modern India in a Bollywood version of the novel. *Bride and Prejudice* (2005) runs closely to the story of Elizabeth and Darcy, adding the music and dancing of Bollywood. Lalita Bakshi stands in for Elizabeth, living with her parents and three sisters, Jaya, Maya, and Lakhi. Lalita's mother Mrs. Bakshi is desperate to get her daughters married to rich husbands. Jaya is in love with Balraj Bingley, a wealthy Indian man raised in Britain. With his visits also comes his friend Will Darcy, an American hotelier who is bored by India.

Will has disdain for India, feeling out of place in the culture. He draws the ire of Lalita for lamenting about the lack of Western comforts in India. He is haughty and condescending in

the beginning like Darcy. Like Elizabeth, Lalita speaks her mind and is only interested in marriage if she loves the man. They clash throughout the movie over their strong opinions.

India is the perfect backdrop to this novel. The movie highlights many of the universal themes that appear in *Pride and Prejudice*. The social morals and customs of India parallel that of nineteenth century England. There is an extra layer of a tug-of-war between Indian and Western morals and customs. The men have British or American sensibilities, whereas India is the idyllic place of women. The character Mr. Kholi, the stand-in for Mr. Collins, shows these great contrasts. Mr. Kholi is a distant cousin who comes from Los Angeles to India to find a traditional wife. He embraces the American lifestyle as a successful accountant. However, he laments to Mrs. Bakshi about the lack of traditional women in California, and how all he wants is a woman who will cook him traditional food and cater to his needs. Mr. Kholi is particularly buffoonish, laughing like a donkey, and talking with a mouth full of food. He is considered a good catch because he is successful and has embraced American economics.

As in *Pride and Prejudice*, Lalita is faced with many other crazy characters. Johnny Wickham is a backpacker who has a past with Will. She meets Will's mother, the ignorant and pompous Catherine Darcy (like Lady Catherine). The movie reinterprets certain plot points, making the movie less predictable. In the most satisfying scene to many Janeites, Will and Lalita confront Johnny and Lakhi in a movie theater after they run away together. Johnny makes the stunning confession that he cares for Lalita more than Lakhi. Lakhi realizes what a fool she has been and returns to her family with Will and Lalita. Lakhi shows herself to have the good sense that her counterpart Lydia never had.

Austen and Bollywood may seem unusual; however, the movie makes it work well. Bollywood has often drawn on classic stories to create excellent movies. This movie pays tribute

to Austen because it shows many of her universal themes: love, money, and class. Love and courtship are portrayed in this movie as an intricate part of Indian society. Indian society is also very stratified; the caste system dictated for centuries what a person could be. This mirrors the highly classist Regency England. The sweeping musical numbers that are characteristic of Bollywood create a larger than life world that plays well to the themes of Austen. Like *Pride and Prejudice*, nothing really bad happens. Bollywood movies usually try to maintain the purity of the Indian woman, making an un-chaperoned jaunt like Lakhi and Johnny's seem too racy.

#### Jane Becomes Jane

Unlike many other tributes, *Becoming Jane* (2007) attempts to pay tribute to Austen herself. Anne Hathaway plays a young Jane Austen living a quiet life in the English countryside. The Austens are well-connected but have no money. Jane and her older sister Cassandra are expected to marry wealthy husbands. Jane writes but only to amuse herself and her family. Jane is pulled into two directions: she wants to become more serious about her writing, yet she feels a duty to marry well and be a good wife. The beginning of the movie parallels the rural life of the Austens to the busy city life of Tom Lefroy. Tom is a young lawyer who is under the patronage of his uncle in London. Tom's uncle feels the young man is too wild, so he sends Tom to visit relatives in the country where the Austens reside.

Moviegoers familiar with the plot points of *Pride and Prejudice* will see parallels to that story and *Becoming Jane*. Tom visits the Austen household and has clear disdain for his surroundings. He arrives late for a reading Jane is giving and then falls asleep while Jane is talking. His haughtiness and reluctance to settle down creates parallels between him and Darcy. Jane is portrayed as a more literate Elizabeth, independent and not like the other women of her time. Jane asserts herself in a scene where she and her mother are watching a cricket match her

brothers and the Lefroys are playing. When a man is injured and drops out of the game, Jane runs up and bats in his place. Her mother screams at her that this is not something a lady should do.

Despite a rocky beginning, Jane and Tom begin to grow quite fond of one another. They are in love, but Tom has no fortune of his own. The movie emphasizes that Jane's biggest concern should be marrying for financial stability. In a rather emotional scene, Mrs. Austen tells Jane of her regrets that she married for love and is now poor. Jane is being pushed by her parents to marry Mr. Wisley, a young man who is expected to inherit a fortune from his aunt. Mr. Wisley is a nice man but very dull. Wisley's aunt Lady Gresham is haughty, a Lady Catherine-type of woman.

Love and money intertwine themselves for other members of the Austen family, further emphasizing Jane's dilemma. Jane's brother Henry is a poor but handsome soldier who is pursued by an older, recently widowed cousin, Eliza. She is wealthy and he eventually marries Eliza for a comfortable life. Later, Jane's sister and closest companion Cassandra gets engaged to a man who goes to the Indies in hopes of making a fortune. Instead, he contracts yellow fever and dies.

Throughout the turmoil of all these events, Jane has one consistency in her life: writing. She is portrayed as writing habitually throughout the movie. At one point, she is struck with inspiration while Lady Gresham is calling on the Austens. Lady Gresham remarks on her unusual behavior:

*Lady Gresham:* What is she doing?

*Mrs. Austen:* Writing...

*Lady Gresham:* Can anything be done about it?

Reading and writing is one secret passion Jane and Tom secretly share. Tom tells her to read the scandalous *Tom Jones*. It is implied that the love scenes in *Tom Jones* inspire Jane to write about dashing leading men and romance.

After the Austens refuse to bless the marriage of Jane and Tom, the couple runs away to London to get the blessing of Tom's uncle. When he refuses to let them get married, Tom decides to stay in London and Jane returns to her family. She is resigned to her fate to marry Mr. Wisley for money. When Tom returns, Jane and he decide to run off and elope. However, the guilt of going against their families weighs too heavily on Jane. She returns once again to her family. She finds out later Tom has married a wealthy widow and lives in Ireland. The movie fast forwards to an older, now published, Jane. She still is unmarried and lives with her also unmarried sister, Cassandra. She is reunited with Tom and Jane meets his daughter, also named Jane. Jane Austen gives a rare reading for Jane Lefroy, an ardent fan. The movie ends with the implication that their love for one another still exists.

In the movie, a great sense of place is created. Jane's life does not seem glamorous or genteel; she is outside doing chores and working hard. However, her life does seem quiet when compared to Tom's life in London. The movie portrays London as rough, definitely a man's world. In one scene, Tom jumps into the ring of a bare knuckle boxing match and wins only after getting severely beaten. The setting seems more real in this movie than in many other movies based on Austen's novels because it shows an underbelly of genteel society.

When Tom and Jane finally meet, he injects some life into Jane's little world. He initially ridicules the work she is doing and then introduces her to a book she probably would have never read otherwise. The movie implies that Tom made her a better writer, and allowed her to break

away from what is proper. Interestingly, this image of Jane does shatter the image of the dutiful daughter and spinster sister. Even if it was brief and unconsummated, Jane did love.

The movie is a tribute because it tries to illuminate more who Austen was. Much of Austen's life still remains somewhat a mystery. Many of her letters were burned by well-meaning relatives. Much of what scholars know is mostly inferred. However, because so much of the movie appears to parallel Austen's fiction, it is hard to view the movie as hard fact. While it is possible that Austen may have encountered a Lady Catherine or a Mr. Darcy in her lifetime, the movie make it seem that *Pride and Prejudice* was autobiographical, except the fact that Elizabeth did not end up marrying Darcy. The fact that her life also parallels *Pride and Prejudice*, her most well-known novel today, also hurts the movie credibility. While Austen is a popular figure today, few people would have known her as an author during her lifetime.

#### *Austen is Clueless*

Like *Bride and Prejudice*, the movie *Clueless* (1995) is set in a world very different from Regency England. Affluent Beverly Hills, CA during the twentieth century is the setting for this retelling of *Emma*. Cher Horowitz (Alicia Silverstone) is the daughter of an affluent lawyer and one of the popular girls at her high school. As a precocious teenager, Cher thinks she knows more than she actually does. Her best friend is Dionne (Stacey Dash), equally popular as Cher.

Cher lives a rather privileged and care-free life and enjoys meddling in other friends' lives. Cher first decides to match two of her teachers together. Mr. Hall is a grumpy, lonely man who Cher thinks could improve with someone in his life. Miss Geist is the pretty, nice teacher who dresses like a frump. Her reasons are somewhat selfish for she hopes to start getting better grades.

After a successful match, Cher and Dionne decide to help out newcomer Tai (Brittany Murphy), who just transferred to Beverly Hills and is definitely out of her element. Cher and Dionne give Tai a makeover and get her with the in-crowd by introducing her to Elton, one of the popular boys. The relationship of Tai and Elton echoes the matching of Harriet and Mr. Elton by Emma. Cher convinces Tai to consider Elton, despite her crush on slacker Travis. Tai falls for Elton, only to be heartbroken when it turns out Elton wants Cher and has no interest in Tai. Like the novel, *Clueless* is very aware of a “class system” prevalent in American high schools. Cher tries to elevate Tai’s status by introducing her to people in her clique. Tai’s previous status in her old high school is never stated in the movie, giving her an unknown quality like Harriet. When she is attracted to Travis, she inadvertently betrays her high school “station.”

When Cher finds out her boyfriend is gay and fails her driving test, she is humbled as Tai seems poised to overtake her as queen of the school. She is the rich girl humbled. She is also challenged by her ex-stepbrother Josh (Paul Rudd), who she is unknowingly in love with.

The movie captures the affluence of the 1990’s. The world Cher lives in seems very innocent, nothing really awful happens in the plot, even Cher’s dead mother is treated flippantly. Cher considers her still very much part of her life, and talks to a giant portrait of her in the house. Like Emma, nothing in Cher’s life “vexes” her. Cher is a doppelganger for Emma, capturing the sympathy of the audience yet remaining quite selfish. Emma is humbled when she realizes her judgment of character is not that keen. However, Cher’s humbling is two-fold: she realizes that she is not a great judge of people, and that she does not understand life outside her world. Cher is allowed true happiness in her life when she is able to move past the surface and into deeper meaning.

The characters of Josh and Tai play pivotal roles in the plot of the movie. A character that parallels Mr. Knightley, Josh tries to advise Cher like an older brother. Josh is not that much older than Cher; however, he has a different perspective on life. While Cher's main concerns are fashion and popularity, Josh is a college student who stays politically aware and wants to better the world. On the other hand, the character of Tai is unsure of who she is. In the beginning of the movie, she is a rough but blank canvas. As she rises in popularity, she becomes too big for Cher to control. In the end, it is only when Cher lets go and lets Tai date Travis that everyone is happy.

*Clueless* is a tribute because it really highlights the universal elements of Austen. The parallels to *Emma* are so subtle sometimes; the audience might forget they are watching Austen. However, the plot points are not so understated that an audience of Janeites will not see them. This movie is excellent because it is a tribute, but even people with no background in Austen can enjoy it.

#### Austen and the Seniors

What do retired Jewish women in their 70's living in Boca Raton have to do with the young Bennet sisters? Paula Marantz Cohen makes many parallels between the two in her novel *Jane Austen in Boca*. The story centers around three women living in the Boca Festa retirement community: May Newman, Lila Katz, and Flo Kliman. The three women are all widows looking for companionship and security. The plotline parallels *Pride and Prejudice* in a very different setting. Like *Bride and Prejudice* and *Clueless*, this novel translates the elements of the Austen novel and places it into a new venue. This pays tribute to the diversity of Austen, showing her themes of love and money can not even be relegated to one specific age group.

Flo is the doppelganger to Elizabeth in this story. A retired librarian from Chicago, she is a little more educated and reserved than many of her counterparts in Boca Festa. Flo's closest friends are May and Lila. May is a sweet-natured lady very much in the mold of Jane Bennet. Lila is looking for a husband to care for her since her husband left her with so little when he died. Unlike Flo, both May and Lila have men in their lives. May is spending time with recent widower Norman Grafstein, who can often be stand-offish. Lila compromises like Charlotte Lucas and marries Hy Marcus, a widower who speaks incessantly of his medical problems and his children's accomplishments.

Norman Grafstein is dissuaded from spending time with May after getting advice from his best friend, retired college professor, Stan Jacobs. Stan and Norman live in the most expensive retirement community in Boca Raton, Broken Arrow. They are both considered good catches, especially since there are very few single men over sixty. The fact that they are comfortably retired and not worried about money only adds to their appeal. Norman is Bingley, well-tempered but susceptible to influence. Stan is Darcy in this story, as he shows disdain for Boca Festa and the man-hungry widows. He is intrigued by Flo, for she seems different from the other women. While exploring the reinterpreted plot, Cohen also addresses the lifestyle of retired Jews in Boca Raton, talking about where they shop, what they eat, and what is like to live in a retirement community. The book has a lot of great one-liners, and it combines many aspects of Austen without being too heavy-handed.

Austen's insights into themes that pervade her novels take a prominent role in *The Wisdom of Jane Austen*, edited by Shawna Mullen. Mullen pieces together quips and quotes from Austen's writings as a tome to Austen's insight. The book is divided into a laundry list of subject headings, from accomplishments to youthful folly. Some of the themes address the great themes of life, like Love or Friendship. However, the book has lesser themes, like Freckles. Individual quotes are separated, telling the reader where in Austen's writing each came from and what character said it. This book raises Austen to the role of philosopher, throwing out bon mots on a myriad of subjects. The book is part of a series of books that offer quotes from famous writers and philosophers.

Even though this book is not a novel, it shows a role that pop culture can play in literature. While Austen is not necessarily thought of today as throwing off many great quotes like Oscar Wilde, this book does highlight her rapier wit. By distilling Austen into manageable bites, it allows all types of people to appreciate her words. It also highlights Austen's love for the one-liners and cutting comments:

Nobody minds what is too good for them.--*Mansfield Park*

She could have no lasting satisfaction in the company of someone who joined insincerity and ignorance.—*Sense & Sensibility*

The book has a reference book feel to it, the themes placed in alphabetical order for easy access. However, it is also similar to a Magic 8 Ball, allowing the reader to flip until some insight is garnered. This is obviously a tribute because it is good for a little inspiration for a Janeite, or for someone who has no background to be exposed to her words. The book is very much indicative of the contemporary world, Austen in small doses that gives people hints of her genius without taking on a whole novel.

As Janeites moved away from the canon to find inspiration from Austen, a whole new genre of books and movies opened. Austen's universal themes allowed her stories to be told not just in the setting of Regency England, but also in South Florida, India or California. Love, marriage, and money are three major themes in the novels and have universality. Austen is slowly being seen as not just a writer, but a sage philosopher with key insights on human nature. Janeites also began to develop interest in the writer herself, no longer content with the long-held fallacy that Austen led an unremarkable life because she never married. The extension of her six novels beyond the characters and plotlines help keep her novels relevant and attract new readers.

### Chapter V: The Cult of Mr. Darcy

“Every single film since [Pride and Prejudice] there's been a scene where someone goes, ‘Well I think you've just killed Mr. Darcy.’ But he is a figure that won't die. He is wandering somewhere. I can't control him. I tried to play with it in *Bridget Jones*. I've never resented it: if it wasn't for him I might be languishing...” –Colin Firth

“I find I'm increasingly lusted after by people beyond pensionable age. I was told of a woman in hospital, diagnosed with high blood pressure, who was told not to watch any more 'Pride and Prejudice.' She was 103.” –Firth

When many people, Janeites and non-Janeites alike, think of Austen adaptations, the first movie that comes to mind is BBC's *Pride and Prejudice* (1995), starring Colin Firth as Mr. Darcy and Jennifer Ehle as Elizabeth Bennet. The wildly popular miniseries that was first shown in America on the *A&E* channel in 1996 (Parrill 65) essentially brought Austen into mainstream pop culture. In Kiefer's survey of JASNA members mentioned in Chapter II, it is listed as the most popular film adaptation by respondents by a wide margin (62%).

Approximately five hours long, the film follows closely the plot of the novel with some interesting asides that expand the plot. While the novel focuses on the lives of Elizabeth and Jane Bennet, the film version seeks to shed some light on the lives of Mr. Bingley and especially Mr. Darcy. While he was always considered the romantic lead, Darcy takes a more prominent role here. Firth's portrayal of Darcy brought a depth to the role that was not explored by previous actors. Because of the movie's length, he had the luxury of exploring various aspects of Darcy's personality. Screenwriter Andrew Davies mixes the strength of his character with the vulnerabilities of a young man. Firth's portrayal cemented his image as the quintessential Darcy for the twenty-first century. The quality of this version and the performance of Firth as Darcy

have helped spawn a new kind of devotion. This devotion has helped create Janeites and even a subset of fans: Janeites enraptured by Mr. Darcy as a romantic lead and especially as portrayed by Firth.

One of the best features of this adaptation is its length, allowing for exploration of relationships rather than abbreviating scenes that are enjoyable but not integral to the plot. For instance, many previous adaptations do not allow for Mary's moral pronouncements throughout the book. Mary's high-mindedness shows such a contrast to the silliness of Mrs. Bennet and Lydia. These scenes just add to the richness of the movie.

#### Modern Sexuality in Jodhpurs and Bonnets

In remaking the novel, director Simon Langton did what many had who tried to sell Austen to the masses. Booksellers and movie directors took elements of what made the novel appealing and repackaged them along with modern elements that would connect to the audience. He put *Pride and Prejudice* in touch with its sexuality. While the movie is not overt, it is definitely a more sexually charged adaptation than previously done. However, after *Pride and Prejudice* (1995) premiered and gained immediate commercial success, this pattern continued into many contemporary adaptations.

While watching the movie, the audience cannot help but notice the abundance of cleavage. Ehle's Elizabeth, appearing in most scenes of the movie, has her cleavage prominently displayed in her rather simple Regency dress. Jane Bennet, portrayed by Susannah Harker, also displays her cleavage like Elizabeth. These characters both eventually find romantic and sexual love in marriage. However, Mary Bennet is a staid woman who never finds love within the confines of the story. The dress she wears throughout the movie flattens and hides her cleavage, indicating her lack of love interests.

However, this is most noticeable in Lydia Bennet. Julia Sawalha's portrayal of Lydia as a bubbly, happy-go-lucky type who is foolish in love. Lydia is very flirty, indicating her budding sexuality. Lydia's cleavage is as prominent as Elizabeth and Jane's, despite being the younger sister. In a very telling scene, Lydia is trying to decide what dress to wear to a ball, so she goes in her slip to ask Elizabeth her advice. As she is walking through the hall back to her room, she runs into Mr. Collins. She makes a half-hearted attempt to conceal herself and giggles at an exasperated Collins. This added scene indicates her tendency to flaunt the rules of society, represented by Collins. She is also often shown leaning over tables throughout the movie, flaunting her newfound sexual feelings. This bit of wardrobe foreshadows her indiscretion of running away with Mr. Wickham.

By no means is the sexual charge of the movie limited to the women. In fact, much more has been made of the sexuality of Darcy; Darcy's masculinity is a major topic. Perhaps the most famous scene Davies added to the movie is when Elizabeth comes to visit Pemberley. The scene makes a lot of quick cutaways, between Elizabeth admiring the opulence of Pemberley, while Darcy is stripping down to his shirt and pants to cool down in a lake. The two cutaways intersect when Elizabeth sees a dressed down Darcy walking back to the house. She acts quite embarrassed, but she is also intrigued.

Even though this scene varies greatly from the one that appears in the book, this is possibly the most well-known part of the movie. As a plot point, this added detail does many things for the movie. It is only when Elizabeth visits Pemberley that Elizabeth garners some insight on who Darcy really is. Elizabeth sees a dressed down Darcy; she is seeing him a more vulnerable Darcy. Throughout the movie, Darcy is shown observing Elizabeth from a distance, like an object. Davies turns it around for Darcy; he is inadvertently made the object. This scene

also sexualizes Darcy. The audience is allowed to see Darcy's physique and him slightly undressed. In the conservative clothing of Austen's time, this is not possible. This part of the movie changes the audience's perception of Darcy.

Besides this scene, there are others things that put an emphasis on Darcy. He is very much a central figure in the movie, much more so than in the novel. Many times the way Darcy is presented to the audience speaks volumes about his character. In the beginning, Darcy is presented from the side, and often glances away from the camera. He seems more coy and elusive. After he makes his first proposal to Elizabeth, he is shown with more close-ups of his face, as if the audience is finally really getting to know him (Hopkins 114-115).

As the audience gets to understand Darcy better, they notice him noticing Elizabeth: "...Darcy looking at Elizabeth becomes a recurrent and compelling image, used both to provide a crucial insight into his character and to build up a powerful erotic charge, of which he is clearly the center" (Hopkins 114). This idea of Elizabeth being unknowingly watched by Darcy creates a sexual air. It is also very romantic; Darcy loves Elizabeth but does not know how to tell her.

Many of the shots of Darcy throughout the latter half of the movie feature him near a body of water. Whether it is the iconic scene by the lake or simply Darcy placing his face in a basin of water, such scenes try to "cool off" an electrified Darcy. He smolders throughout the movie, creating a heat that is as much directed at the audience as to Elizabeth. Davies' movie allows the characters to explore the sexuality, especially between Darcy and Elizabeth (119).

#### Finding Your Mr. Darcy

Mr. Darcy is often seen as the perfect romantic hero. For Elizabeth, he is the man that challenged who she is, question her biases, and love her unconditionally despite them. Many contemporary works have taken this relationship and recreated it. The heroines meet a man and

end up mirroring the Darcy-Elizabeth dynamic (sometimes that man is actually Mr. Darcy himself). The hero is usually very handsome, and he holds a position higher than the one the heroine currently holds. Often, he has seemingly cut himself off from the idea of falling in love. However, he meets a woman whom he cannot help but respect and admire. From those feelings comes a great love. The woman often loathes the man in the beginning for challenging her beliefs and grows to love him. The heroine's personality usually parallels Elizabeth's; she is a very strong-minded female who is very intelligent and often must assert her independence. This holds this type of relationship as an ideal, often seeming to encourage women to find a Mr. Darcy.

While in the past Mr. Darcy was interpreted as a dandy, in these works the Darcy figure is similar to Firth's Darcy: he speaks little, is often shown silently brooding, and is very handsome. He exudes masculinity, maybe excessively. This "new" Darcy appears to be the perfect melding of romanticism and twenty-first century male ideals. He is chivalrous and kind, and not threatened by strong women. He has strong feelings for the woman he loves; it is a love he never felt before meeting her. He has matinee idol good looks and often is rich or glamorous in some way to appeal to the woman. All of these archetypes fit into the mold of Elizabeth and Darcy as a romantic couple.

#### Darcy and Bridget

Putting a contemporary twist on the familiar story is *Bridget Jones' Diary* (2001), a novel by Helen Fielding that eventually became a popular movie. Renee Zellweger plays the title character. Bridget is a single woman in her thirties who battles her weight, her insecurities, and her meddling family wanting her to get married. The arc of the plot of Bridget's relationship with two men parallels the relationships Elizabeth has with Darcy and Wickham. *Bridget Jones'*

*Diary* adds many elements of *Pride and Prejudice* to the plot and pays tribute to the Austen movies.

At her mother's Christmas party, Bridget is introduced to Mark Darcy, a handsome eligible barrister. He acts haughty, and makes a snide comment about Bridget when he thinks she is not listening. Obviously, this parallels the initial meeting of Elizabeth and Darcy. Interestingly, Mark Darcy is played by Firth. For a character whose demeanor and manners mirror Darcy, it only makes sense to go one step further. Having Firth in the romantic lead blurs the line of fantasy and reality for this movie, Darcy in a contemporary persona.

After rejecting Mark as a snob, Bridget begins a lustful relationship with her boss Daniel Cleaver. Daniel seems much kinder and more charming than the off-putting Mark. Daniel is played by Hugh Grant, who also played Edward Ferrars in *Sense and Sensibility* (1995). Having another handsome actor who played a romantic lead in a popular Austen adaptation again blurs the line between fantasy and reality. Suddenly, Bridget has Edward and Darcy to choose from, the fantasy of many fans.

Like Wickham and Darcy, Daniel and Mark share a history. Daniel and Mark were close friends, until Mark slept with Daniel's fiancée, or so Bridget is told by Daniel. This solidifies her hatred of Mark. She embarks on this affair with Daniel, only to have it end horribly when she sees Daniel with another woman. Much like Elizabeth, Bridget is led to believe something heinous about Mark, thus making her impenetrable to his charms. He allows her first impressions to cloud her judgment and it is to her detriment.

After her relationship ends, she is forced to confront her feelings for Mark. At a dinner party, Mark confesses his feelings for Bridget despite being at the party with another woman. This scene is almost verbatim what Darcy says to Elizabeth in the first proposal scene. Bridget

rejects Mark, but always seems to wonder if she made a mistake. When she finds out it was actually Daniel who slept with Mark's fiancée, she has a complete change of heart. Daniel returns to try to seduce her back to him, but she ultimately decides to be with Mark. Darcy gets the girl in the end.

Despite the very different world where Bridget resides from Georgian England, she is like Elizabeth because of the independence of her character. The main plot line in the movie and book is not really Bridget and her men but how these relationships made her a stronger woman. She comes out the other side of the movie more independent and self-assured. The crux of the story is really Bridget trying to find herself. It is not a stretch to say that really it was Austen that ultimately empowers Bridget. The men were merely the inspiration.

#### *Darcy in Austenland*

The popular novel *Austenland* tells the story of Jane Hayes, who is obsessed with *Pride and Prejudice* and especially Firth's Darcy. She inherits an exclusive trip to a resort in rural England where wealthy, obsessed women go and live like an Austen heroine. She is hesitant but decides that the immersion might cure her of her fixation on Darcy. The premise of author Shannon Hale's novel feeds into the Darcy fantasy; Jane meets some hilarious counterparts and finds love where she least expected it, inside a fantasy.

At the resort Pembroke Park, she is forced to give up her personal items and dress in appropriate clothes. She then meets actors all playing roles like in an Austen novel. She visits her older wealthy "relatives" at the country estate, and she meets handsome bachelors, Colonel Andrews, Captain East and Mr. Nobly. She joined by two middle-aged woman dressed in similar Georgian outfits, claiming to be nineteen and twenty. Jane, in her early thirties, feels out of place

as the men pretend to court the women. She has a brief flirtation with a gardener on the property, and becomes intrigued with the stand-offish Mr. Nobly.

Nobly has a lot of the qualities of Darcy. He is distant, and haughty in the beginning, and slowly warms up to the women. She finds herself gradually enjoying the experience, always keeping in mind that it is fake. She having to constantly balance what is real and what is part of the fantasy. She has had problems with men in the past, a topic explored in the book, and she does not want to have her heart broken again.

Jane's personality is similar to Elizabeth's. In fact, she wonders if it was her independent streak that drove her boyfriends away. She refuses to allow herself to get lost in the fantasy. She is drawn to the handsome gardener because he seems more authentic than anyone she meets. When Nobly begins making advances on her, despite courting another woman, her initial thought is that it is part of the charade. When she begins to learn more about the actor behind Nobly, she falls for him, pretty sure his overtures towards her are part of his job. When he finally confronts her on her last day in England at the airport, they confess their mutual attraction.

While Jane seems pragmatic, underneath she is a romantic. She worries that the reason she has been single for so long is that no man has measured up to Darcy or Firth. Her romantic tendencies make her character more sympathetic. Her balance of fantasy and reality at Pembroke Park mirrors her life. She is constantly trying to balance her fantasy of Darcy swooping into her life with her real life as a single New Yorker.

Nobly is an interesting character because he is so elusive. Hale purposely keeps prevents her readers to know what Nobly is thinking until the very end, like Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*. The reader is never sure of what the motivation behind Nobly's actions are. Is he confessing his love for Jane because that's what he is paid to do? Or does he really care for her? Only when the

artifice is taken away, Jane finally gets to know the man behind Nobly. While the trip is about romance, Jane never expects to find true love.

### Darcy is *Lost*

Perhaps the most unusual of the Austen treatments was the British television miniseries *Lost in Austen* (2008). Jemima Rooper plays Amanda Price, a woman obsessed with the book *Pride and Prejudice*. Living in twenty-first century London, Austen is her escape. However, reality and fantasy blur when Amanda finds Elizabeth Bennet in her bathroom. Amanda switches places with Elizabeth and enters the world she has dreamed about for so long. Much of the storyline of the four hour series centers on Amanda's relationship with Darcy. Elliot Cowan portrays Mr. Darcy, staying true to the Firth/Macfadyen mold of a hyper masculine, smoldering man. *Lost in Austen* mixes the romantic hero Austen created with the sexualized Darcy written by Davies to create a new story for Darcy.

When Amanda arrives at Longbourne, the storyline is just starting. Because of Amanda's presence and Elizabeth's absence, certain plot points go awry. Amanda tries to meddle to return things to the plot of the novel, but instead things become worse. Amanda battles Mrs. Bennet, for she believes Amanda is trying to undermine all her plans for her daughters. Jane marries Mr. Collins, and the whole household spins out of control. A despondent Bingley becomes a drunkard and runs away with Lydia. Without Elizabeth there, Caroline Bingley moves to marry Darcy for his money, not love. She does not love Darcy, for she admits to Amanda that she is a lesbian. Amanda tries to return to the door from where she entered the novel to get Elizabeth back and to get her to meet Darcy. However, Amanda must also deal with her own feelings for Darcy, first in contempt, then of a deep love of a man she has loved for decades.

Only when she is kicked out of Longbourne and tries to search in desperation for Bingley and Lydia do things come to a boiling point and she must confront her feelings for Darcy. She finds another magical door to return to twenty-first century London. When she does find Elizabeth, she has embraced contemporary life. She has cut her hair, wears street clothes, and eats a macrobiotic diet. A confused Darcy has followed Amanda. She hopes that when they get together Darcy and Elizabeth will fall in love. However, Elizabeth's new life has tainted her; she tells Amanda she does not think she can love Darcy as she once did. Amanda and Darcy finally admit their mutual feelings of love for one another, and Amanda stays in the novel with Darcy.

In the miniseries, there is a lot of play between fantasy and reality, and what really happens when fantasy and reality meet. Much of the beginning of the series seems like a fantasy. All the major characters from *Pride and Prejudice* are played by very attractive. Even Alex Kingston, who plays Mrs. Bennet, looks like she should be the oldest Bennet sister and not the mother. Both Jane and Elizabeth have very fine features; it is very hard to pick the one who would be considered the prettier sister. While Rooper is an attractive woman, she still seems out of place in the Bennet household. Her features are a little harsher and more angular.

Contrasting the pretty people in the pretty countryside, Amanda is often faced with the harsh reality of living in Georgian England. For example, Amanda asks Jane early on if she could clean her teeth. Jane points to some birch twigs and some chalk and tells Amanda she already has what she needs. Towards the end when Mr. Darcy enters the world of twenty-first century England, he is confronted by a black man who he refers to as a "negro." Obviously a man from Georgian England would have a very different view of race than contemporary people. Despite her great love of the book, Amanda seems ill-equipped to maintain the manners and customs of the era. She is often chided for being disrespectful or rude. She complains throughout

that everyone she encounters never seems to say what he/she actually means. The fact that everyone tries to maintain appearances of propriety and good manners drives her crazy. She finds an unlikely ally in Mr. Wickham, who flaunts all the rules society has set. However, she refuses to fall for him. Ultimately, this does not bother Amanda enough to make her want to leave this world.

Even though this miniseries is a tribute to Austen, it is more a tribute to BBC's *Pride and Prejudice* (1995). Amanda makes several mentions of Firth's Darcy; however, she denies it is the reason she is drawn obsessively to the book. The audience learns the truth when Darcy admits his love for her. When she finally admits she loves him, she asks him to do something for her. The scene cuts away with a wet Darcy rising out of the fountain. He is dressed in just a white shirt and pants, and his physique is very visible underneath the wet shirt. Darcy says "It this okay?" Amanda remarks, "I am having a very post-modern moment." This scene is an obvious homage to the scene from the *Pride and Prejudice* movie. Even though it does not play exactly the way it does in the movie, it plays to the fantasy. Amanda is the audience watching Firth come from the lake looking disheveled and sexy.

For much of the twentieth century, devotion to Austen was relegated to a small group of compulsive readers. However, contemporary devotion to Austen went mainstream with the release of the BBC miniseries *Pride and Prejudice*. At approximately five hours long, the movie was allowed to explore the book fully, and to explore relationships between the characters. BBC also delved in depth to the male characters more, particularly Darcy. Colin Firth's portrayal of Darcy gave many more facets to the character than originally conceived by Austen. Darcy's façade hides a very vulnerable man as this movie explores. Darcy is shown wistful, observing Elizabeth from a distance. He is also more sexual, as is the movie as a whole. He is often shown

in water or near water, like he is cooling off a sexual heat. The scene of Darcy wading into the lake has become an iconic scene from the movie.

Because of the enormous popularity of the series and Firth's performance, a subset of Austen devotees has sprung of fans devoted to Darcy, particularly Firth's Darcy. Many of these have a similar theme of holding the Darcy/Elizabeth relationship as an ideal, with the heroine searching for her own Darcy. Many of these tributes to Darcy portray a contemporary heroine looking for love. Bridget Jones and Amanda Price both fall in love with incarnations of Darcy. Bridget falls for a modern version of Darcy, who was even played by Firth in the movie. Amanda Price finally admits to herself she loves *Pride and Prejudice* because of Darcy, and commits herself to loving him forever.

## **Conclusion**

For almost a century, Jane Austen was viewed as the quiet, lady writer. She gained little notoriety during her lifetime; most of her fame came long after her death. Her work was enjoyed by a small but devoted following of scholars and novel readers. Austen's books have never been out of print. However, contemporary Janeites have been able to enjoy Austen's novels in a plethora of books and movies. Austen has evolved from an obscure author to a pop culture figure.

The phenomenon seems unique to Austen. For a long dead writer to still inspire this level of devotion is simply unheard of; Shakespeare may be the only comparison. Mostly, this type of interest among the general public is reserved for contemporary trends in reading like Harry Potter or the more recent *Twilight* books. It is hard to believe that these books will be widely read one hundred years from now. It seems her popularity might be comparable to America's fascination with the British royalty. That sort of social structure never officially existed here, so it is a longing for the possibility. Austen's world is somewhat idealized, adding to the gloss. For the British, it is nostalgia for the past, even a glossy one.

Austen also has the unique position of being one of the few writers from her time period still widely read. While much attention is still paid to later British authors like Charles Dickens or Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, few people in non-academic circles are reading novelists who were Austen's contemporaries. Austen has become by default a voice for her era. Many readers understand that period of history better because of her, despite her efforts to skewer social morays.<sup>4</sup>

For a female writer to have garnered popularity for so long where men dominated for so long is astounding. While some critics still dismiss Austen as a "woman writer," the fact her

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<sup>4</sup> One good example is her portrayal of the noble class, with characters such as Lady Catherine or Lady Dalrymple who act like buffoons despite an elevated social standing. It also adds to the humor of the other characters who revere them.

name is even known to them is an achievement. She has endured the masculine canon, now she is more famous than many of her male counterparts whose works were lauded in their day.

Because of her obscurity during her lifetime and her family's lack of care with her memory, it would have been very easy for Austen to fade away. However, the fact that her work is still around and also so popular is a testament to her genius.

Austen devotion has grown exponentially in the past 200 years. It is a devotion that does not appear to be going away either. Books and movies inspired by Austen seem to keep appearing in new incarnations. What allows her work to be translated into many different ways has to be the universal character of her themes. Love and money often play central roles in her novels. Every culture in its own way deals with both. Austen's novels always portray a romantic love, with a marriage usually ending the novel. Stories of romance abound in contemporary pop culture with romantic comedies, romance novels, and even "chick lit" novels. Austen is usually placed into this canon because of her romantic stories. Her novels continue to be read because even though our lives are very different from hers, there are themes in the stories to which anyone can relate. Most people can say they have met a Lady Catherine or a Mr. Woodhouse. Everyone has worried about money and love at some point in his/her lives.

While some critics may feel this does a disservice to her genius, it has not changed that view of her. She will probably always be thought of as a "woman writer" who writes romantic stories; however, that does not take away from the brilliance of her stories. Austen's novels are mostly about the landed gentry of the English countryside during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; the world of her novels is very small. Yet, her works continue to be popular because many of the themes of her novels are universal.

Another factor that has allowed her to stay popular is nostalgia. Her novels tended to be glossy, with nothing tragic happening to her characters. Austen capitalized on escapism in her books, allowing the readers to lose themselves. Escapist material is always popular. When times are good, people still want an escape from everyday drudgery. When times are bad, people want to be able to forget their problems for even a little while. Her plots were idealized even for her time period, seemingly to represent a kinder, simpler time to even Victorian society that was only a few decades ahead of her.

Because of this combination of universal themes and the nostalgia factor, Austen is easily revisited to suit the audience of the time period. For contemporary audiences, infusing sexuality with society manners makes for a potent cocktail. Georgian social structure did not allow for people to express what they felt. There is a restraint to the flirting between two characters in love, adding to the tension. The audience sees glimmers of contemporary society in these flirting exchanges. Contemporary pop culture has only added to the Austen's works, such as is the character of Mr. Darcy. Colin Firth's portrayal redefined the character, making Darcy a cinematic leading man. The role has made Firth a Hollywood star. No actor could ever play Darcy without echoing Firth's performance.

The real legacy of Austen is her ability to entertain people with stories that seem both unique and universal. The current crop of romantic comedies and chick lit novels owe a debt of gratitude to Austen for her contribution to her work. Her work has unconsciously reached into many plotlines. However, her work seems to be reaching into other genres, with a novel about a zombie version of *Pride and Prejudice* recently premiering. Perhaps the possibilities for Austen are truly endless.

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