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Jane Austen and Professional Fanfiction

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Chapter 2. Jane Austen and Professional Fanfiction

Daniel Cook

“You write a few books that entertain your family and you win a little fame, perhaps even some money, while you live. And after, what then?”¹

Much more than a little fame has been won by Austen in the two hundred years since her death. Ironic testament is made to that fact in Janet Mullany’s *Jane and the Damned* (2010), in which a vampirine version of the author has literally become immortal. In Kathleen A. Flynn’s time-travel thriller *The Jane Austen Project* (2017), yet more recently, members of the Royal Institute for Special Topics in Physics return to 1815 to retrieve an unpublished Austen manuscript. As a side mission, Rachel Katzman, a disaster-relief doctor, hopes to diagnose the mystery illness that, in less than two years, would lead to the author’s premature death. We want more Austen: dead or alive or undead. Being Jane. Lost in Austen. A ‘Jane Austen syndrome’ grips readers ever more tightly, according to Marjorie Garber.² Available in small paperbacks or large, decorous editions, in most languages, millions of copies of Austen’s novels sit on the shelves in practically every bookshop and library on the planet, and inhabit countless Kindles and other electronic devices.³ Adaptations on the page, stage, and screen have kept her life and works firmly in the public domain like few other authors.⁴

In recent years, the rise of self-publishing platforms, including on-demand printing, e-publication, curated websites (*The Republic of Pemberley*, most conspicuously) and review-blogs (such as *Austenprose*) has facilitated ever increasing contributions from amateur and professional authors alike. Whole series have been established, including *Austenland*, *The Pride and Prejudice Variations*, *The Jane Austen Fairy Tales*, and *Austen Addicts*. Fanfiction

¹ Janet Mullany, *Jane and the Damned* (New York: Avon, 2010), 290.

² Marjorie Garber, *Quotation Marks* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 199-210. Suzanne R. Pucci and James Thompson propose the ‘Austen Phenomenon’ as ‘a blueprint for pedagogical practice that welcomes, indeed embraces, this promiscuous intermingling of reading, seeing, touring, and surfing’: “Introduction: The Jane Austen Phenomenon: Remaking the Past at the Millennium,” in *Jane Austen and Co.: Remaking the Past in Contemporary Culture*, ed. Pucci and Thomson (Albany: State University of New York, 2003), 6.

³ Quotations from Austen’s novels come from *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen* (2005-2008).

⁴ See Devoney Looser, *The Making of Jane Austen* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017), Deborah Jaffe, *Among the Janeites: A Journey Through the World of Jane Austen Fandom* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013), Claudia L. Johnson, *Jane Austen’s Cults and Cultures* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), and Claire Harman, *Jane’s Fame: How Jane Austen Conquered the World* (New York: Picador, 2011; first published in 2009). On Austen’s reception see Juliette Wells, *Reading Austen in America* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), Annika Bautz, *The Reception of Jane Austen and Walter Scott: A Comparative Longitudinal Study* (London: Continuum, 2007), and Katie Halsey, *Jane Austen and Her Readers, 1786–1945* (New York: Anthem Press, 2012).

(or attentive rewriting, we might say) fills in “missing scenes”, redoes endings, expands a book’s timeline and elaborates the background to minor or additional characters, or creates cross-overs with other franchises. Regency remakes or modern makeovers. Continuations or variations. Old characters in new situations. New characters in old situations. Invented offspring. Recovered siblings. Love rivals. Anachronistic antagonists. The sheer volume of published JAFF (Jane Austen Fan Fiction) lies beyond the reach of this essay. At a conservative estimate between twenty-five and forty new Austen rewrites hit the marketplace each passing month.⁵ ‘Uniformly derivative, this body of material is nonetheless dauntingly diverse’, so Deidre Shauna Lynch observed in 2005.⁶ An extensive literary, bibliographical or cultural analysis of such publications would nevertheless still address compelling questions about authorship and literary property in the digital age. Instead, after mapping out an expansive if brief overview of the history of Austen rewrites, I will end with a formal examination of the four novels that have been published so far in The Austen Project by The Borough Press (a subsidiary of HarperCollins, perhaps the most prolific purveyor of Austenian publications): Joanna Trollope’s *Sense & Sensibility* (2013), Alexander McCall Smith’s *Emma* (2014), Val McDermid’s *Northanger Abbey* (2014), and Curtis Sittenfeld’s *Eligible* (2016), a modern makeover of *Pride and Prejudice*.

As a curated series, The Austen Project provides a convenient case study for an investigation into the figuration and function of the Austenian author today.⁷ Trollope, McCall Smith, McDermid, and Sittenfeld were (and remain) established authors in different genres before they were commissioned. In their respective contributions to the series they also present themselves as Austen enthusiasts, thereby bridging the worlds of JAFF (a discrete but large and diverse community) and professional secondary authorship (a broader category of rewriting with a combative literary history). What general observations about modern rewrites can we feasibly extrapolate from such a specific set of circumstances? What, if anything, can

⁵ A comprehensive list, “Bibliography of Jane Austen Sequels”, can be found at *The Republic of Pemberley* (<http://www.pemberley.com/janeinfo/austseq1.html>). For a discussion of online JAFF, see Kylie Mirmohamadi, *The Digital Afterlives of Jane Austen: Janeites at the Keyboard* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 59-73, and Anette Svensson, “Pleasure and Profit: Re-presentations of Jane Austen’s Ever-Expanding Universe,” in *Global Jane Austen: Pleasure, Passion, and Possessiveness in the Jane Austen Community*, ed. Lawrence Raw and Robert G. Dryden (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 203-20.

⁶ Deidre Shauna Lynch, “Sequels,” in *Jane Austen in Context*, ed. Janet Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 160-68. See also Marilyn Sacks, “The Sequels to Jane Austen Novels,” in *The Jane Austen Handbook*, ed. J. David Gray (London: The Athlone Press, 1986), 375-76, and Anna Rosa Scrittore, “Rewriting Jane Austen,” in *Re-Drawing Austen: Picturesque Travels in Austenland*, ed. Beatrice Battaglia and Diego Saglia (Naples: Liguori, 2004), 261-69.

⁷ For a reception study see Nora Foster Stovel, “‘Welcome to the 21st Century!’: Modernising Jane Austen in the HarperCollins Project,” in *After Austen: Reinventions, Rewritings, Revisitings*, ed. Lisa Hopkins (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 105-25.

such a case study contribute to our critical understanding of rewriting? Secondary authors have long been described as fair-users or as thieves (kidnappers, in many eighteenth-century complaints).⁸ Even now, rewriting is often described as “sabotage” rather than a “symbiosis”, as Christian Moraru reminds us.⁹ But an author’s “aftering”, as Julie Sanders avers, ‘can mean finding new angles and new routes into something, new perspectives on the familiar’.¹⁰ Extensions of world-famous books are not inherently derivative; they can also be expansive, tangential or even illuminative, depending on the rewriter’s treatment of the materials.

Intention aside, can secondary works (whether benign homages or brutal reworkings) have any lasting impact on the brand of a familiar author? Do such concerns matter more or less when discussing a novelist so beloved by critics and readers alike? Addressing these and other questions in the purview of what we might call professional fanfiction, this essay identifies competing strategies followed in the Borough Press commissions; this may prove useful to future rewriters or to fanfiction theorists. Rewriting here denotes an ongoing engagement with charismatic literature, with varying levels of textual familiarity, as distinct from “the rewrite”, a filmic term that refers to the mending of a failed screenplay by script doctors. Recent fanfiction (fan fiction, fanfic or fic) in this context, I want to suggest, is best understood as a sort of enforced or (to use a milder term) belated co-authorship that invites us to keep the original in parallel view at all times at both the levels of production and consumption: Austen-like works as co-written rather than over-written. As we shall now see, this apparently recent turn in secondary authorship has a longer if obscured history that began, in the case of Austen, with the Austen family.

Rewriting Austen: A Brief History

By 1975, the bicentenary of Austen’s birth, Andrew Wright had grown weary of the various ways in which Austen’s property had been ‘tampered with’.¹¹ The history of the Austen rewrite is a long one, to be sure, and it shows no sign of abating. Catherine Anne Hubback (daughter of Austen’s brother Francis) based the triple-decker novel *The Younger Sister* (1850) on her long-deceased aunt’s unfinished fragment *The Watsons*.¹² Another niece, Anna Lefroy, often

⁸ See Elizabeth F. Judge, “Kidnapped and Counterfeit Characters: Eighteenth-Century Fan Fiction, Copyright Law, and the Custody of Fictional Characters,” in *Originality and Intellectual Property in the French and English Enlightenment*, ed. Reginald McGinnis (London: Routledge, 2009), 22-68.

⁹ Christian Moraru, *Rewriting: Postmodern Narrative and Cultural Critique in the Age of Cloning* (Albany: State University of New York, 2001), 4.

¹⁰ Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (London: Routledge, 2006), 158.

¹¹ Andrew Wright, “Jane Austen Adapted,” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 30.3 (1975): 421-53 (421).

¹² See Kathryn Sutherland, *Jane Austen’s Textual Lives: From Aeschylus to Bollywood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007; first published in 2005), 242-65. Tamara Wagner offers a suggestive overview of

consulted Austen for advice on writing, but even she could not finish the abandoned *Sanditon*. Alice Cobbett, among others, seized on the opportunity to complete that text in her oddly but appropriately titled *Somehow Lengthened: A Development of Sanditon* (1932). Edith (Hubback) Brown, a great-great-niece of Austen's, wrote two sequels to *Sense and Sensibility* and *Mansfield Park* respectively: *Margaret Dashwood; or, Interference* (1929) and *Susan Price; or, Resolution* (1930). A great-great-grand-niece of Austen's, Joan Austen-Leigh, produced a familial sequel (to coin a phrase) as recently as 1996, namely *Later Days at Highbury*, a follow-up to her own *Mrs. Goddard, Mistress of a School* (1993) and *A Visit to Highbury* (1995). In her final 'continuing history' of Highbury high society she wittily raises concerns about following *Emma* too narrowly: 'I am not at all sure what Emma and Mr Knightley might say to each other when they are alone and settled at Donwell. I prefer to take no liberties; I do not intrude'.¹³

Austen sequels, including completions, began as a family business, seemingly with the author herself. James Edward Austen-Leigh claims in his 1870 *Memoir* that his aunt 'would, if asked, tell us many little particulars about the subsequent career of some of her people', such as the lives of the two unmarried sisters of *Pride and Prejudice*: 'Kitty Bennet was satisfactorily married to a clergyman near Pemberley, while Mary obtained nothing higher than one of her Uncle Philips' clerks'.¹⁴ Another imagined case: Emma's paranoiac father, Mr Woodhouse, would die a mere two years after her marriage to George Knightley. And another: Jane Fairfax would die young. 'Of the good people in *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*', Austen-Leigh concedes, 'we know nothing more than what is written: for before those works were published their author had been taken away from us, and all such amusing communications had ceased for ever'. Austen's comments towards the close of *Northanger Abbey* (1818) chime with this impending – and impeding – writerly finality: 'The anxiety [...] can hardly extend, I fear, to the bosom of my readers, who will see in the tell-tale compression of the pages before them, that we are all hastening to perfect felicity'. *Perfect felicity* might sound alarming, though, if we are alert to the author's deft irony. Moreover, even if the death of the author, in this schema, means the literal end of the characters' stories, Austen-Leigh's anecdote has inadvertently bestowed 'a seal of authorial approval on sequel-writing', as Lynch notes.

Austen-like continuations and completions: "Rewriting Sentimental Plots: Sequels to Novels of Sensibility by Jane Austen and Another Lady," in *On Second Thoughts: Updating the Eighteenth-Century Text*, ed. Debra Taylor Bourdeau and Elizabeth Kraft (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007), 210-44. See also David Hopkinson, "Completions," in *The Jane Austen Handbook*, 72-76.

¹³ Joan Austen-Leigh, *Later Days at Highbury* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1996), preface.

¹⁴ James Edward Austen-Leigh, *A Memoir of Jane Austen* (London: Richard Bentley, 1970), 204.

Notable if loose rewrites appeared in the decades that followed Austen's death. Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1855), claims Janine Barchas, 'may be the first full-length reworking of *Pride and Prejudice*'.¹⁵ Before that, in *The Inheritance* (1824), Susan Ferrier (like many rewriters after her) casually appropriated the iconic opening line of the most adapted Austen text: 'It is a truth universally acknowledged, that there is no passion so deeply rooted in human nature as that of pride'. The broad-strokes rewriting of Austen's works, however defined, is clearly not new business. Sybil Brinton's *Old Friends and New Fancies: An Imaginary Sequel to the Novels of Jane Austen* (1913) is nevertheless often considered to be the first major sequel to Austen's completed novels. Delightfully, in a manner seen in much JAFF since then, *Old Friends and New Fancies* does not respond to just one text, but instead brings out of all six completed Austen novels an array of previously unmixed characters, from the Bennets to the Wentworths. Other bold extensions have followed. D. A. Bonavia-Hunt produced an ambitious sequel to *Pride and Prejudice* titled *Pemberley Shades* (1949), for one. Perhaps the most famous of the persistent extenders of Austen to date has been Joan Aiken, who produced six Austen novels in the 1980s and 1990s, from *Mansfield Revisited* (1984) through to *Lady Catherine's Necklace* (2000). Aiken's preface to *Mansfield Revisited* forcibly confronts any criticism levelled against her: 'A sequel to *Mansfield Park*? What presumption! No, no presumption. Love and admiration. *No one* could presume to make any attempt to fill the gap left by Jane Austen'.¹⁶

Aiken's wording is deft: she acknowledges Austen's pre-eminence and yet also makes a case on behalf of engaged readers for plugging the gaps left in the story – 'finding myself filled with an overmastering wish to find out what happened after Fanny married Edmund, and when Susan came to live at Mansfield, I had no recourse but to try and work it out by a mixture of imagination and common sense'. (Austen-Leigh, we might recall, had indirectly sanctioned the impulsive completion of his aunt's stories.) At once, Aiken downplays her authorship by likening it to puzzle-solving, thereby upholding the integrity of the original property (on the presumption that the pieces were left intact by the first author), and maps out her own writerly ambitions. As Juliette Shapiro puts it in the introductory note to her nominally co-authored (with Jane Austen) *Sanditon: Jane Austen's Unfinished Masterpiece Completed* (2009): 'This story, my personal resolution to the unsolved mysteries of Sanditon, is written with every intention of remaining faithful to Jane Austen and entertaining those who, in longing to know

¹⁵ Janine Barchas, "Mrs Gaskell's *North and South*: Austen's Early Legacy," *Persuasions* 30 (2008): 53-66 (53).

¹⁶ Joan Aiken, *Mansfield Park Revisited* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2013; first published in 1984), preface.

more about her wonderful characters, find it in their hearts to forgive the impertinence of the sequelist'.¹⁷ Repetition without replication. More of the same, yet entirely different.

Continued and Extended

Secondary authors often revisit popular plots or locales. P. D. James's *Death Comes to Pemberley* (2011) takes place six years after the events in *Pride and Prejudice*. (James, incidentally, redeploys the mystery story mashup produced by T. H. White, author of *Darkness at Pemberley*, back in 1932.) Or they relocate them to entirely new climates, as in Lavinia Angell's *The Sheik of Araby: Pride and Prejudice in the Desert* (2010), or Jack Caldwell's *Pemberley Ranch* (2010), which is set in Texas. Paula Marantz Cohen has written two highly inventive novels in which she relocates the spirit, if not the substance, of Austen's stories: *Jane Austen in Boca* (2003), a Floridian *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Jane Austen in Scarsdale* (2007), a very loose retelling of *Persuasion* based in the state of New York. Even Austen herself has been taken overseas, as in Barbara Ker Wilson's *Jane Austen in Australia* (1984). Jo Baker's *Longbourn* (2013) glimpses favourite characters (Elizabeth Bennet and that 'great tall fellow in the green', Mr Darcy) but largely attends to the servants' perspective lacking in *Pride and Prejudice*. Decades earlier, Naomi Royde Smith refocused the story on a different character, *Jane Fairfax* (1940).

Emma in Love: Jane Austen's Emma Continued (1996) by Emma Tennant picks up the story four years from the wedding that closed *Emma* and, infamously, charts a downward spiral in the marriage. The gamble paid off: Tennant cornered the market in scurrilous extensions in the mid-1990s with *Pemberley: A Sequel to Pride and Prejudice* (1993), *An Unequal Marriage: Or Pride and Prejudice Twenty Years Later* (1994), and *Elinor and Marianne: A Sequel to Sense and Sensibility* (1996).¹⁸ The opening of Tennant's *Emma in Love* writes again (rather than aggressively rewrites or erases), in a tandem form of authorship, the opening paragraph of its forebear, including the heavy doubtfulness of the word *seemed* ('Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her'). Tennant has: 'Emma Knightley, handsome, married and rich, with a comfortable home and doating husband, seemed to unite some of the

¹⁷ Juliette Shapiro, *Sanditon* (Berkeley: Ulysses Press, 2009), 1.

¹⁸ On Tennant's Austen novels see Rebecca Munford, "'The Future of Pemberley': Emma Tennant, the 'Classic Progression' and Literary Trespassing," in *Uses of Austen: Jane's Afterlives*, ed. Gillian Dow and Clare Hanson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 59-76.

best blessings of existence, and had lived nearly four years since her marriage with very little to distress or vex her'.¹⁹ As a young girl and as a married woman – two parallel existences – Emma is outwardly content. At the same time, abrupt changes have been introduced, not least of all the off-page deaths of Mr Woodhouse and Isabella: this novel both replays and alters Emma's story. (It also enacts Austen's post-novel plans for Mr Woodhouse, in line with Austen-Leigh's anecdote.)

Tennant cannily extends the abruptness with which Austen unfurls the beginning of her original novel. After all, *Emma* begins with what amounts to the logical conclusion of a conventional courtship, the marriage between Mr Weston and Miss Taylor. Austen uses the successful love-match of the lead character's cherished governess to make a telling point about Emma's self-congratulatory attitude. Tennant instead attempts to generate sympathy for the fatherless young heroine. Literal replications of Austen's lines are not uncommon in imitations or variations of her works, a testimony to 'the preference for repetition over rewriting', according to Tamara Wagner.²⁰ Julia Barrett's [Julia Braun Kessler and Gabrielle Donnelly's] *Presumption* (1993), to offer an example beyond Tennant, transposes Darcy's gentleness when facing Elizabeth's distress in *Pride and Prejudice* to another character (Leigh-Cooper) in order to mark him out, quickly, as the romantic hero of that story. An alternative, long-running means of absorbing Austen's property entails placing a fictive version of her within the work, whether a continuation or a whole new genre of secondary authorship.

A lengthy poem by Mary Corringham, *I, Jane Austen* (1971), reconstitutes Austen's letters and fiction in rime royal ('On guilt and misery other pens might dwell: / A comfortable tale I chose to tell'). The first of a series, *Jane and the Unpleasantness at Scargrave Manor* (1996) purports to be a recently recovered diary of Austen's adventures as a detective. Others have banked on the continued salience of Austen and her characters' cultural standing. Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1995), and the popular movie adaptations (and book and movie sequels) based on it, capitalized on the new wave of Darcymania of the 1990s. In a canny piece of casting, Colin Firth, for many people the iconic on-screen embodiment of Fitzwilliam Darcy, also plays Mark Darcy, a more downtrodden but recognizably aloof love interest.²¹ 'I just stole the plot from *Pride and Prejudice*', admits Fielding; 'I thought it had been very well

¹⁹ Emma Tennant, *Emma in Love* (London: Fourth Estate, 1996), 3.

²⁰ Wagner, "Rewriting Sentimental Plots," 222.

²¹ On 1990s Darcymania see Imke Lichterfeld, "Mr Darcy's Shirt – An Icon of Popular Culture," in *Pride and Prejudice 2.0: Interpretations, Adaptations and Transformations of Jane Austen's Classic*, ed. Hanne Birk and Marion Gymnich (Bonn: Bonn University Press, 2015), 189-205.

market-researched over a number of centuries'.²² Ian McEwan, more recently, called *Atonement* (2001) his 'Jane Austen novel'. Like Sybil Brinton, he draws on several Austen creations: he adopts the particulars of the cross-class romance seen in *Pride and Prejudice*, alludes to passages in *Mansfield Park* and *Northanger Abbey*, and even takes his epigraph from the latter.²³

A decade earlier, in Christine Brooke-Rose's *Textermination* (1991), Emma Woodhouse, along with Tristram Shandy, Huck Finn and others, faced the horrifying premise that literary characters die when they are not read. Even earlier, a self-styled barbarian took a similarly threatening stance on Austen's property in Angela Carter's *Several Perceptions* (1968): as an expression of hostility to his Janeite girlfriend, Joseph sets fire to a library copy of *Mansfield Park*. To be sure, Austen's property has been ransacked for the titillation of other audiences, most obviously in erotic rewrites targeted at a post-*Fifty Shades of Grey* readership, including a mashup attributed to 'William Codpiece Thwackery' (an amusing lampoon of the Victorian humourist William Makepeace Thackeray), *Fifty Shades of Mr Darcy* (2012). Even pornographic adaptations of Austen's works, mocking or otherwise, are not a recent invention. Grania Beckford's *Virtues and Vices* sauced up *Persuasion* in 1980. Fantastical versions are not a new phenomenon either. S. N. Dyer's 1996 *Resolve and Resistance* imagines a widowed Elizabeth Darcy using Pemberley as the base for a guerrilla insurgency against Napoleon's occupying army.

Lost sex scenes keep surfacing (Arielle Eckstut's *Pride and Promiscuity: The Lost Sex Scenes of Jane Austen* [2001], most obviously). Weary of 'the compulsive heteronormativity of classical literature' (according to the authorial blurb), Kate Christie's *Gay Pride & Prejudice* (2012) expands the sexual preferences of Austen's characters. There have been fairy-tale makeovers. Nina Clare's *Beloved* (2017) is one such "retelling" of *Northanger Abbey*, to use her term. There have been Amish variations.²⁴ Lev Raphael's *Pride and Prejudice, or The Jewess and the Gentile* (2011) recasts the Bennets as a Jewish family struggling against anti-Semitism. Debra White Smith recalibrates Austen novels as present-day romances expressly for Christian readers in such works as *First Impressions* and *Reason and Romance* (both 2004). Authors of young adult (YA) fiction routinely relocate the books to American high schools and

²² Quoted in Natalie Tyler, *The Friendly Jane Austen* (New York: Viking, 1999), 274. See also Emily Auerbach, "Pride and Proliferation," in *The Cambridge Companion to "Pride and Prejudice"*, ed. Janet Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 186-201.

²³ Rachel M. Brownstein traces some Austen allusions in *Atonement: Why Jane Austen?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 186-93.

²⁴ Sarah Price, *First Impressions* (2014), *The Matchmaker* and *Second Chances* (both 2015).

related places in popular publications such as Elizabeth Eulberg's *Prom and Prejudice* (2011).²⁵

Mashups

Alongside what Gerard Genette calls proleptic continuation (i.e. what will come *after*) and elliptic continuation, namely the “filling in” of perceived blanks or missing scenes, a third major form of rewriting, “mashups”, indicates the presence of a less benign form of rewriting typically seen in JAFF.²⁶ In particular, the rise in genre-hopping mashups marks a yet bolder reversal of Susan Ferrier's and Helen Fielding's authorial indebtedness (or authorial hijacking, depending on your point of view), or Tennant's and Aiken's property extensions (or trespasses).²⁷ Austen's corpus has withstood relentless attacks from the undead – an invasion rather than a completion. It has also battled with murderous marine life, mummies, werewolves, aliens, pirates, and witches.²⁸ Austen has been outed as a vampire by Janet Mullany and Michael Thomas Ford.²⁹ There have been murders at Longbourn (in 2009), Mansfield Park (in 2010), and Netherfield (in 2014).³⁰

Unruly characters – typically Lydia – have been released into other books.³¹ Billed as the second heroine of *Mansfield Park*, Mary Crawford, came centre stage in a 2015 trilogy by C. M. Mitchell (*The Moving and the Immovable*, *Rash and Rationality*, and *Rest and Restlessness*). Lost sisters, unknown offspring, and hangers-on crop up each passing year. Unmarried characters have been married off (in Laurence Fleming's *The Heir to Longbourn* [2003] and *The Will of Lady Catherine* [2010]). Love rivals have been given fuller attention.³² Even the iconic romance between Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy has not been safe from the paranormal, as Karalynne Mackrory's *Haunting Mr. Darcy - A Spirited Courtship* (2014) proves. All of this, if a defence is needed, might be taken as the logical endpoint of the

²⁵ Andrea Coldwell, “Imagining Future Janeites: Young Adult Adaptations and Austen's Legacy,” *Persuasions On-Line* 35.1 (2014).

²⁶ Gerard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. by Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997; first published in 1982), 175-81.

²⁷ Wayne Josephson's *Emma and the Vampires* (2010), Amanda Grange's *Mr. Darcy, Vampyre* (2009), and Seth Grahame-Smith's *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2009).

²⁸ Ben H. Winters's *Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters* (2009); Vera Nazarian's *Mansfield Park and Mummies* (2009); Adam Rann's *Emma and the Werewolves* (2009); Jonathan Pinnock, *Mrs Darcy Versus the Aliens* (2011); Kara Louise's *Pirates and Prejudice* (2013); Beth Deitchman's *Mary Bennet and the Bloomsbury Coven* (2014).

²⁹ Janet Mullany, *Jane and the Damned* (2010) and *Jane Austen: Blood Persuasion* (2011); Michael Thomas Ford, *Jane Bites Back* (2010) and *Jane Goes Batty* (2011).

³⁰ Tracy Kiely, *Murder at Longbourn* (2009); Lynn Shepherd, *Murder at Mansfield Park* (2010); Carol Hutchens, *Who Murdered Mrs. Wickham* (2014).

³¹ Natasha Farrant, *Lydia: The Wild Girl of Pride & Prejudice* (2016).

³² Elizabeth Aston, *The Second Mrs. Darcy* (2007).

so-called tampering with Austen's property that began in earnest with Sybil Brinton's *Old Friends and New Fancies* more than a hundred years ago. But the extent of the tampering has clearly ramped up several notches. In 2013 alone, Darcy became an assassin (Leo Charles Taylor's *A Darker Darcy*), got steampunked (Monica Fairview's *Steampunk Darcy*), and was repeatedly disrobed (Karen Doornebos's *Darcy Undressed*). In a sort of personality undressing, moreover, Amanda Grange's *Mr Darcy's Diary* (2006) finally revealed, or we might say overshared, his points of view.³³ (Grange also gave us George Wickham's diary in 2011: 'Why should I be beneath Fitzwilliam', Wickham complains, 'I am just as handsome as he is'.) Lizzie Bennet, meanwhile, started vlogging in 2012 (*The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*).³⁴

Gothic and horror, crime fiction, queer fiction, heteronormative romance, pansexual erotica, YA fiction, religious and social commentary: genre writers continue to find much with which they can engage in Austen's novels. Even Austen's letters have been incorporated wholesale into modern books, as in Hazel Holt's *My Dear Charlotte* (2009).³⁵ Setting aside foreign-language reworkings, as well as translations, in English alone there currently exist thousands of Austen continuations, completions, parodies, and (to use an increasingly common term) variations.³⁶ Beyond novels, novellas, book-length poems, and anthology stories, a plethora of text-heavy merchandise and semi-textual spin-offs, such as video games (*Ever Jane*, for instance), comics, adult colouring books, BabyLit (*Emma: An Emotions Primer*), self-help manuals (*Jane Austen's Guide to Dating* or *The Jane Austen Writers' Club*), recipe books (*Dinner with Mr Darcy*) and guides to knitting patterns (*Pride and Preju-Knits*), and the like, raise the figures further still.³⁷ As Eckart Voigts-Virchow puts it: 'Austen is not so much a literary author, but a meeting ground, an affinity space, a textual as well as a contextual, cultural and social universe'.³⁸ Unique among reading communities, JAFF displays an intimate

³³ A partial list of diaries attributed to Darcy, beginning with *The Diary of Henry Fitzwilliam Darcy* (1997), is given in Auerbach, "Pride and Proliferation," 188.

³⁴ See Elena Baeva, "'My name is Lizzie Bennet, and this is my [vlog]'- Adaptation and Metareference in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*," in *Pride and Prejudice 2.0*, 151-65, and Silke Jandl, "*The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*: Adapting Jane Austen in the Internet Age," *AAA – Arbeiten aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 40 (2015): 167-96.

³⁵ See Jan Fergus, "Hazel Holt's *My Dear Charlotte*: A Novel Based on Jane Austen's Letters," *Persuasions On-Line* 30.1 (2009).

³⁶ French reworkings appeared as early as 1815: see Isabelle Bour, "The Reception of Jane Austen's Novels in France and Switzerland: The Early Years, 1813-1828," in *The Reception of Jane Austen in Europe*, ed. Anthony Mandal and Brian Southam (London: Continuum, 2007), 21-25.

³⁷ On comic-book adaptations of Austen see Janine Barchas, "Pow! Marvel Comics Adapts Jane Austen," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 37.2 (2013): 120-25.

³⁸ Eckart Voigts-Virchow, "Pride and Promiscuity and Zombies, or: Miss Austen Mashed Up in the Affinity Spaces of Participatory Culture," in *Adaptation and Cultural Appropriation: Literature, Film, and the Arts*, ed. Pascal Nicklas and Oliver Lindner (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 34-56 (38). On filmic adaptations see also Deborah Cartmell, *Screen Adaptations: Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice": A Close Study of the Relationship between Text and Film* (London: Methuen, 2010).

knowledge of Austen's works while also engaging in the larger commodification of the author. Judy Simons puts it well: 'The intimacy once associated with the act of reading has been displaced by a project of shared recovery'.³⁹ As a rule, posits Juliette Wells, 'writers inspired by Austen do not "talk back" to her so much as converse with her'.⁴⁰ Frequent complaints among readers that a story is OOC (Out of Character) indicates that producers and consumers (or prosumers) of fanfiction tend to be highly conservative in their relationship with the original property.

Fanfiction can also be transgressive, even critical. Alternate Universe stories move across boundaries of space and time, though JAFF rarely pushes this beyond familiar limits. Diana Peterfreund's *For Darkness Shows the Stars* (2012), a lively exception, reworks the class machinery of *Persuasion* into a Wellsian future in which human society has become a genetic hierarchy: a ruling class, the Luddites, who had disdained technology, and the Reduced, who are capable of only rudimentary language and repetitive tasks on the Luddite estates. The book's hero, Kai Wentforth, is a Post, a rare individual with the cognitive abilities of a Luddite but the legal status of the Reduced. The heroine, Elliot North, is a conscientious member of a Luddite family in dire need of income. Slash fiction, such as Ann Herenden's *Pride/Prejudice* (2010), re-orientates characters' sexual preferences, or, arguably, articulates hidden desires more explicitly. We also have in-filling, where the backstory behind characters, situations, and events can be mapped out more fully than the pages of the Austen novel had space to permit. This permissive approach to in-filling relies on a faith in what Peter Lunenfeld calls 'an aesthetic of unfinish'. The Austen Project curated by The Borough Press puts a face to a different concept, one that has always been sited within the larger world of JAFF in some form or other: professional rewriting, in which commissioned authors pay homage to and co-exist with Austen.

The Austen Project

The authors in The Borough Press's The Austen Project (2013-) present themselves as both Austen enthusiasts and established writers. But they are not slavish to the original. As Joanna Trollope indicates in an appended interview printed within her version of *Sense & Sensibility*: 'I could immediately see that her characters and her narrative would translate absolutely

³⁹ Judy Simons, "Jane Austen and Popular Culture," in *A Companion to Jane Austen*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson and Clara Tuite (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 467-77 (472).

⁴⁰ Wells, *Everybody's Jane*, 16.

seamlessly to 2013 – which, indeed, they have’.⁴¹ Of the four novels published so far in the series, Curtis Sittenfeld’s *Eligible* is the most distanced from Austen’s original, in appearance at least: it is the only one to fashion a new title, first of all, and only the US book cover softly announces (in small dark ink against a bright red background) that it is a “modern retelling” of *Pride and Prejudice*. The prefatory notice in Alexander McCall Smith’s *Emma* meanwhile draws an explicit connection between the heroine’s father and the secondary author (‘Like Mr Woodhouse, Alexander McCall Smith is the father of two daughters’), which matches his take on the material insofar as he opens the story on Henry – not Emma – Woodhouse, and proceeds to pad out the pre-history to Austen’s original by interviewing Miss Taylor for the position of governess, and the like.⁴² A touch less explicitly but no less emphatically, Trollope’s biographical notice emphasizes a common theme of her eighteen bestselling novels (as of 2013): ‘the nature of relationships, particularly within families’. As the eldest of three children, a mother, a stepmother, and a grandmother, ‘Joanna’s family is hugely important to her’. Significant attention is duly given to the mother of Elinor, Marianne and Margaret (‘Belle Dashwood continued to gaze longingly at the view’). Mrs Dashwood is more than merely a widow.

Like many JAFF rewriters, Val McDermid, in her Acknowledgements, thanks Austen, ‘without whom this book could never have come into existence’. ‘I’d like to think there’s a quantum universe somewhere’, she continues, gleefully, ‘where she is getting her own back reimagining Tony Hill and Carol Jordan’. What do these intensifying bonds of intimacy with Austen in modern rewritings signify? Here, McDermid at once hails Austen as a reader’s joy (‘She’s given me countless hours of pleasure’) and a colleague of sorts, a theme she extends in an afterword (‘Austen was one of a handful of writers that I turned to as a sort of DIY masterclass’). Sittenfeld takes a similar approach in the Acknowledgements for *Eligible*, which closes the book. In the final line, like McDermid, she thanks Austen, ‘whose books have brought delight to many readers, including me’. She even refers to her own ‘Austen book club’, the hallmark activity of an Austen prosumer. For McDermid, as for Trollope, the appeal of Austen is her essentialism: ‘What makes Jane Austen as relevant today as when she was scribbling quietly in a corner of the drawing room is that she understood what makes people tick’. Trollope, in the Q&A at the back of her novel, comments at length on Marianne’s

⁴¹ Joanna Trollope, *Sense & Sensibility* (London: The Borough Press, 2013), 404.

⁴² Alexander McCall Smith, *Emma* (London: The Borough Press, 2015), biographical note.

compelling modernity, allowing for some explicit authorial recalibration (what the character would call sensibility, we recognize as entitlement, Trollope argues).

Trollope retains the metonymic conflict of Austen's original, between sense (the cooler Elinor) and sensibility (the more romantic Marianne). The terms of the debate were already outdated by the time Austen queried them, but Trollope deftly illustrates the universalism innate to the conflict; the sisters are not merely embodiments of these behavioural states but also representations of the effects of adolescence on character development. In Austen's original we are more accustomed to hearing Elinor's position ('Elinor saw, with concern, the excess of her sister's sensibility'). 'You wouldn't know real feeling, real passion it if hit you on the head with a hammer', Trollope's Marianne yells at Elinor – an indication of the secondary author's recalibration. Routine verbal outbursts aside, Trollope's post-millennial teenagers are comparably less verbose than their forebears: Elinor shrugs with indifference and Marianne makes "W" signs with her fingers to denote a laconic "Whatever". A modern downplaying of the articulation of teenaged angst offsets a doubly necessary up-playing of the original scandals for a readership already familiar with Austen's novels as well as the click-baiting tactics of the internet age. As Trollope says in the paratextual Q&A, 'the outrages – Willoughby's impregnating of Eliza, say – have to be updated to convey the same level of shock'.

For these secondary authors Austen is at once timeless and in need of updating, a seeming contradiction that speaks to concerns long raised against the value of rewriting established literary property. Terry Castle famously cast doubt on extensions as they can only disappoint the readers' expectations. 'A sequel can never fully satisfy its readers' desire for repetition', she avers; 'its tragedy is that it cannot literally reconstitute its charismatic original'.⁴³ Seen from a different perspective, professional fanfiction can agreeably agitate an informed reader's expectation. McDermid's modern makeover of *Northanger Abbey* wittily overwrites, without erasing, its hypotext. Appropriately enough, she relocates the original's exploration of affective reading from Regency-period Bath to present-day Edinburgh, a UNESCO City of Literature and a home to many bookshops and festivals. Catherine Morland has become Cat Morland 'on the basis that nobody should emerge from their teens with the name their parents had chosen' – or, indeed, with the name their author-parent had given them.⁴⁴ Catherine's reading of eighteenth-century Gothic is replaced with (or, rather,

⁴³ Terry Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnavalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), 134.

⁴⁴ Val McDermid, *Northanger Abbey* (London: The Borough Press, 2014), 1.

augmented by) Cat's reading of one of its hideous progenies: nineteenth-century and contemporary vampire romance. Letters have morphed into text messages. Google and Facebook exist. Isabella has become Bella, who still enters (or again enters) into a short-lived relationship with Catherine's brother James (or 'Jamie', much to Cat's bemusement), who remains (or becomes again) an Oxford student.

As in the original, Bella's (Isabella's) belated revelation about her dalliance with the heroine's brother – 'don't pretend you didn't know' – highlights Cat's (Catherine's) naivety. If we have read the original, we certainly knew (unless we second-guessed a departure from the source). If we had not read the original, we might have guessed the development quite easily anyway. There is a pleasing lack of insider hierarchy among readerships here. There is also a charming sense of bathos in the 2015 *Northanger Abbey* that is utterly consistent with the original and yet will resonate with our collective experiences of modern life. 'No golden coach with white horses was laid on to transport Cat to Edinburgh', we are told. 'Instead, she faced the prospect of spending eight hours confined in the back seat of Susie and Andrew Allen's Volvo estate'. No plush Georgian carriage awaits our heroine, only a crummy car.

McDermid regularly dismisses Austen from the book, gently, when confirming the existence of her works in this new universe: 'Who on earth was that?' Bella says of Ellie. 'She acts like she's in *Pride and Prejudice*'. Even the ending of the story departs from, without redacting, the original. Austen's narrator decides to 'leave it to be settled by whomsoever it may concern, whether the tendency of this work be altogether to recommend paternal tyranny, or reward filial disobedience'. McDermid's narrator retains this moral probity but evinces an even greater scepticism about the value of novel-reading: 'The moral or message of this story is hard to discern. And that is at it should be, for as Catherine Morland found out to her cost, it is not the function of fiction to offer lessons in life'. One could argue that, in this deflationary gesture, McDermid firms up a larger theme of Austen's novel: lampooning any lingering anxieties surrounding the adverse effects of reading certain books (gothic literature, old or new). The 2015 *Northanger Abbey* is, in short, a novel of augmentation rather than usurpation, one that remains faithful to the scope of the original and yet finds ample room for appropriate modernization.

The conundrum in updating and yet remaining faithful is skilfully buttressed by frequent allusions to the ubiquity of secondary reworkings today (in various manifestations), from the audio tape of *Dracula* playing on the car journey up to Scotland to the in-novel existence of the real-life novel *Pride & Prejudice & Zombies* (a separate engraftment that has itself been adapted into a graphic novel and a studio movie). McDermid even refers to one of

the most celebrated works in this mode, the unnamed *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) by Jean Rhys ('I read this novel last year, it was, like, a prequel to *Jane Eyre*, you know? It was kind of the story of the madwoman in the attic?'), a salient reminder that the rewriting of established literary property is not a recent invention, nor does it always exist in a quiet mode.⁴⁵ The weighty reference to *Wide Sargasso Sea* makes plain the different approaches taken to the source material by secondary authors past and present. Rhys battles with Charlotte Brontë over the character of Bertha Mason, the first wife of Mr Rochester. Rendered violent and mute as The Madwoman in the Attic at Thornfield Hall in *Jane Eyre* (1847), in the unauthorized prequel she is developed more fully as Antoinette Cosway, a beautiful creole heiress yet to take up her ill-fated residence in England. By contrast, McDermid's Cat Morland happily coexists with Austen's Catherine Morland, like an independent clone. Both characters are keen and vulnerable readers. Both are driven by a needful curiosity, however outlandish their ideas.

McCall Smith's Emma is a close rendition of Austen's original character, similarly. As in the first text, the author employs free indirect speech to convey the eponymous heroine's thoughts and feelings ('She wondered why this should be so; was it modesty on Jane's part?'). But he develops in more detail the characters in whom he has more interest, most obviously Mr Woodhouse and Miss Taylor. Although introduced as merely 'Emma Woodhouse's father' in the opening three words of the book, his life story unfolds before us: born during 'those final nail-biting days of the Cuban Missile Crisis' to a chronically anxious mother, Florence Woodhouse, in a small country hospital in Norfolk; educated as a design engineer before joining a small firm in Norwich; married to 'a warm and personable society beauty with a considerable private income of her own'; father to two daughters, Isabella and Emma; widowed when the children were small. Throughout these experiences, he consistently (perhaps narrowly so) remains a nervous person.

Married off at the beginning of Austen's *Emma*, the governess Miss Taylor has a small but significant role: a successful model of the heteronormative marriage plot. McCall Smith takes us back in time, to the job interview itself, which serves to illustrate further Henry Woodhouse's anxiousness and Ann Taylor's ambitiousness ('He had not imagined that the person he had invited for interview would end up lecturing *him* on how to behave'). The Miss Taylor to whom we are introduced in Austen's original had, after sixteen years of service, become more of a friend to the girls than their governess ('the shadow of authority being now long passed away, they had been living together as friend and friend very mutually attached,

⁴⁵ McDermid, *Northanger Abbey*, 45.

and Emma doing just what she liked'). McCall Smith finds space in which to chart this shifting relationship over time ('Seventeen years could do that; could bring about unspoken understandings between two minds').

At the end of his novel, McCall Smith dwells on the titular heroine's attitudes to love, inviting us to take her views as more sophisticated than we are accustomed to in the original. Austen provides, in delicately economic prose, a wedding 'very much like other weddings', that of Emma and George Knightley. That seems to be a drab, unsatisfying culmination of Emma's story. Certainly Tennant's *Emma in Love* attempts to infuse life into the eponymous character's marriage plot, but ultimately presents the heroine as a bored housewife. This misjudges Austen's irony. Importantly, the main details of the wedding as we see it in *Emma* emerge out of second-hand gossip: 'Mrs Elton, from the particulars detailed by her husband, thought it all extremely shabby, and very inferior to her own'. A fancy wedding does not mean a happy marriage. That is, 'in spite of these deficiencies, the wishes, the hopes, the confidence, the predictions of the small band of true friends who witnessed the ceremony, were fully answered in the perfect happiness of the union'. *Perfect happiness* is of course a redundant and therefore highly contestable phrase, leaving us in further doubts about Austen's message. Lying beyond the confines of her pages, the marriage, like all marriages, is a process not a package, she seems to suggest – a simple idea but one surprisingly hard to convey with sincerity.

McCall Smith does not even give us the Knightley wedding, though readers of Austen might well anticipate it happening beyond the close of the text. Instead we quickly glimpse the union between Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill, which eventually takes place off-book in Western Australia. McCall Smith's Emma does not gain perfect happiness. Rather, we are told more abruptly, 'Emma was happy'. 'She realised that happiness is something that springs from the generous treatment of others, and that until one makes that connection, happiness may prove elusive'. A true student of Austen, though, McCall Smith leaves us with a seemingly pat sentiment that is packed with irony: '*You do it too*', a self-aggrandizing message wordlessly conveyed to Emma from a seventeenth-century painting of a young woman holding, and cherishing, the hand of a young man. Partly an undoing of *Emma in Love*, whether knowingly or otherwise, McCall Smith's modern makeover needfully coexists with Austen's original, querying but not quibbling its portrayals of marital and paternal love of all kinds. Emma remains Emma: a young woman who does not quite know herself. Meanwhile, Mr Woodhouse has developed; but he is still a recognizable type of fretful father.

Sittenfeld's *Eligible* updates some character names but retains others. Charles Bingley is now Chip Bingley, a doctor and a reality TV star on a dating show that shares a title with the

novel in hand. His aloof friend Fitzwilliam Darcy remains aloof Fitzwilliam Darcy, though now he is an aloof neurosurgeon. (In Bonavia-Hunt's *Pemberley Shades*, published 67 years prior, Elizabeth has come to terms with the more familiar 'Fitz'.) The Bennets, now hailing from New York, remain as charming and confused as ever. Like many but by no means all JAFF rewritings of *Pride and Prejudice*, *Eligible* revolves around heterosexual desire. There are new love rivals (Jean-Pierre Babineaux, a courtly French financier, for Jane; Cousin Willie for Liz, much to her displeasure), but the original romances ultimately play out as we anticipate. The opening line is familiar enough, though, unlike scores of other rewritings, it eschews Austen's famous phrasing: 'Well before his arrival in Cincinnati, everyone knew that Chip Bingley was looking for a wife'. (Against the recent spate of Darcy-focused reorientations, such as Janet Alymer's *Darcy's Story* – another HarperCollins publication, as it happens – and the post-1990s wave of Darcymania, Sittenfeld literally makes Bingley the star of the show.)

There are no zombies. Or vampires. But there are gynaecological examinations. And publicists. Liz and Jane take morning runs before breakfast. Text messages ping throughout the book ('Wait like *KISSED* kissed??' Charlotte Lucas writes to Liz). Modern tinkering aside, *Eligible* recalibrates some of the characters while keeping many of the original story arcs. At the end of *Pride and Prejudice*, as Austen's narrator outlines the present and future affairs of many of her players, we learn that 'Mary was the only daughter who remained at home'. No longer compared with her sisters, she still must placate her fidgety mother. Mr Bennet suspects Mary is happier now ('it was suspected by her father that she submitted to the change without much reluctance'). Occupying a small paragraph in Austen's original, Mary comes centre stage for the entirety of the final chapter of Sittenfeld's novel. Still happily single, the modern Mary delights more overtly in pleasure without the rigmarole of courtship ('really, what was the point?'). Fleshed out in a little more detail, Mary remains Mary. But the Gardiners are nowhere to be seen. Lady Catherine's peevish dissent has gone. Rewriting entails losses as well as gains.

Austen at 300

What will Austen rewrites look like over the next fifty years, ahead of the 250th anniversary of Jane Austen's death, in 2067? Or, by the 300th anniversary, in 2117? Or beyond that? For all the transgressive possibilities raised by modern multimedia fora, published engagements with Austen's literary property have been comparatively conservative over the past two centuries. Regency redoes or modern makeovers, on the whole. Austen rewrites invariably emulate broader social attitudes, as seen, for example, in the sexually more diverse characterization of recent novels. Invasions from the undead and the supernatural reflect the popularity of YA

gothic and horror fiction today. Above all, the locales remain familiar rather than fantastical: the American campus or the British countryside, sometimes a desert or the Outback, rather than Mars or the Moon. As humans expand their settlements beyond the stars, an Austen-like book set on an alien planet would seem entirely ordinary, even banal. The rise of new fictional genres may impact Austen studies in hitherto unimagined ways. What is more certain is this: there will always be a Pemberley, whatever it might be called in next-generation adaptations on the page, the screen, or elsewhere.

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