



Signature's

Essential Guide to *Jane Austen*

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10 Lessons for 21st-Century Women from Jane Austen

by HELENA KELLY

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE INSTAGRAM-PERFECT TO MATTER.

Austen's female protagonists are seldom rich, fashionable, or jaw-droppingly beautiful. Lizzy isn't the prettiest of the five Bennet daughters, or the liveliest. Catherine Morland, in *Northanger Abbey*, only ever gets as far as being "almost pretty." Fanny Price is painfully shy. Anne Elliot is thin and faded. For Austen, they're all heroines.

WE ALL HAVE FLAWS.

Austen's heroines are far from perfect – and so are her heroes. Captain Wentworth is pigheadedly stubborn. Edmund Bertram in *Mansfield Park* is led astray by a pretty face and a charming wit. Darcy's manners leave a lot to be desired. What they share is an ability to admit to having made mistakes.

THE BEST PEOPLE – THE ONES WORTH SPENDING TIME ON – WILL TAKE YOU SERIOUSLY AND LISTEN TO WHAT YOU HAVE TO SAY.

Lizzy and Darcy spend a large proportion of their time verbally sparring with each other but they also take each others' arguments on board. Captain

Wentworth, having spent most of *Persuasion* determined to ignore Anne, admits at the end of the novel that he hears every word she says, no matter how quietly she speaks. Even Edmund Bertram, trainee clergyman, takes the time to ask Fanny for advice.

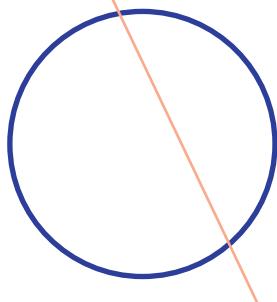
IT ISN'T JUST ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS THAT MATTER.

Austen's characters manage to maintain their true friendships under trying circumstances. Lizzy doesn't cut off Charlotte, in spite of disapproving of her choice of husband; Anne doesn't blame her godmother for persuading her to end her engagement. Austen, who had a large family and close friendships of her own, is very clear about the importance of relationships that aren't romantic.

DON'T MANIPULATE OTHER PEOPLE'S RELATIONSHIPS.

Think of the characters who try to break people up – Bingley's sisters, Emma Woodhouse with Harriet Smith, General Tilney in *Northanger Abbey*. Don't be like them.

YOUR MOTHER (MOSTLY) HAS YOUR BEST INTERESTS AT HEART.



We've all felt kinship with Lizzy Bennet in the scenes where her mother is being toe-curlingly embarrassing. But putting aside the embarrassing behavior and the favoritism Mrs. Bennet displays, she does worry about her daughters, and wants what she thinks is best for them.

DON'T BE SOMEONE'S REBOUND.

Unlike most other novelists in the period, Austen is very tolerant about characters who fall in love more than once. However, she's very clear that rushing from one relationship into another isn't a good idea, even if she leaves the exact length of time that's 'quite natural' and right up to her readers to decide.

JUDGE PEOPLE BY WHAT THEY DO, NOT WHAT THEY SAY.

Austen sees the need for white lies but she disapproves of hypocrisy. Mrs. Norris, in *Mansfield Park*, talks a lot about charity but seldom, if ever, reveals any impulse to it. We're told that Mr. Elton, in *Emma*, "may talk sentimentally but he will act rationally," thus joining Willoughby, Wickham, and other unappealing characters who talk a good talk but only ever act in their own selfish interests.

TIME SPENT READING IS NEVER TIME WASTED.

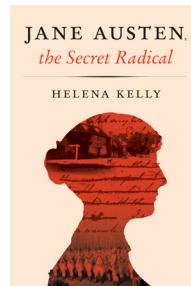
Nearly all Austen's heroines are big readers, of all kinds of books, not least novels. In fact, since very few of them have been to school, it's reading that has taught them most of what they know. Many of her heroes enjoy

reading too. As Darcy notes, extensive reading not only improves the mind but supplies you with plenty of material for conversation with other bookworms.

RELATIONSHIPS AREN'T THE ONLY SOURCE OF HAPPINESS.

Austen's novels are love stories, and marriage is always the goal that the characters are being worked toward, but that doesn't mean that's all they have to teach us. They represent years of hard work and dedication on the part of their author and two hundred years later they're still speaking to millions of readers around the world. Now that's really a goal to aspire to.

HELENA KELLY is the author of *Jane Austen, the Secret Radical*.



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Time After Time: Why Modern Authors Continue to Adapt Jane Austen

by HILLARY MANTON LODGE

I can't think of another author whose works have been adapted and re-adapted the way Jane Austen's works have. As readers, we respond viscerally to her stories, and it leads us to using her characters and tropes like paints and brushes to create our own versions. Working with a Jane Austen story is like recording a Beatles cover – you're working with top-notch material, but somewhere in your head, you know that you're working with something deeply beloved. There's a responsibility – but also joy.

Joy because the original material is so good. Austen renders her worlds with vivid characters and shining

prose. To work with it means you're working with the best – you don't have to throw glitter on it to make it acceptable.

There are dozens of reasons why Austen's novels have both attained and maintained the massive popularity they've enjoyed over the years. Her protagonists have an everywoman appeal; each English village is populated with characters who feel familiar. We all went to high school with a Fanny Dashwood and a Mr. Elton, listened to our best friends deal with Marianne Dashwood-level breakups. We see ourselves, our life – or the life we wish we had – in her novels.



BUT IT'S FOOLISH TO LOOK AT AUSTEN'S NOVELS AND SEE NOTHING BUT ROMANCES SET IN THE ENGLISH COUNTRYSIDE.

But it's foolish to look at Austen's novels and see nothing but romances set in the English countryside. Happily-ever-after is never truly the point – it's a byproduct. By the end of *Pride and Prejudice*, more pages are spent with Elizabeth and Darcy parsing their own regrets and bad behavior than their felicity at finding love with each other. That kind of three-dimensional characterization for a woman? Nearly unheard of in the fiction of Austen's day. But two hundred years later, it's why we attach to her characters deeply enough to adapt them.

What we do with the adaptations can vary wildly. Some are simply affection-fueled send-ups. Other adaptations take the material one genre into another. But the best adaptations use the original material to find something new to say. They'll pick and choose which parts to lean into, shedding light on the original in a new way.

The 2009 adaptation of *Emma*, written by Sandy Welch, is one of my fa-

vorite examples of a great adaptation. The prologue highlights how Emma, Jane Fairfax, and Frank Churchill all lost parents in their early childhood, and how their lives spun out in different ways. A scene shows Mrs. and Miss Bates sacrificing the little they have to support Jane. Most astutely, Welch's adaptation takes Mr. Woodhouse's quirky hypochondria and portrays it as very real clinical anxiety.

The result is a story full of dynamic characters. Emma and Jane's conflict hits harder because we see how similar and well-matched they could be as friends. Miss Bates's obsession with Jane's letters and successes makes sense because she's put everything she had into Jane's future. And we get to see Emma as more than a wealthy busybody. When she's not rearranging her friends' romantic lives, Emma is a full-time caretaker for her father. While she's devoted to her father, it's also a role that is generally taken for granted. Emma's world is small and Mr. Knightly is the only one who notices.

When I reworked *Sense and Sensibility* for my own novel, *Jane of Austin*, I wanted to keep the architecture of the original while still crafting something fresh. Telling the story from Marianne's perspective, I explored the idea that while Marianne has her flaws, martyr-like Elinor does too. In *Jane of Austin*, Celia goes through a breakup. In her grief she shuts out Jane and makes arrangements for the sisters to leave California for Texas. That rejection sends Jane careening

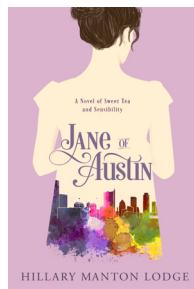
into a relationship with musician Sean Willis, and the cracks in the relationship between Jane and Celia only deepen.

And then there's Colonel Brandon. Austen herself sketches out his past lightly, but I wanted to unpack more of the emotional ramifications. After all, he was a second son, not expected to inherit. His sweetheart was married off, unhappily, to his older brother. And when he does inherit, he comes home to a mess. How does he handle that? What are the lasting effects?

In both cases, I worked to keep the characterizations and motivations rooted within the original, but enjoyed getting to dig deeper. Because the secret to Austen – why I think we keep coming back to her – is that every dive into her text results in trea-

sure. There's always a turn of phrase, a bit of characterization, a wry observation about humanity that's just as true today as it was two hundred years ago. All these years later, Jane Austen still has a handle on the state of humanity. Maybe in adapting her work, we're hoping to understand it better ourselves.

HILLARY MANTON LODGE
is the author of *Jane of Austin*.



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6 Jane Austen Novels Ranked by Their Sexiness

by LIZ KAY

It's possible that I watched too much "Moonlighting" as a child because it turns out I like my sexual tension heavy on the tension. Add in a sharp, funny narrator and a good dose of cultural criticism and I'm sold. In other words, I like to read Jane Austen, though not all of her novels completely hit the mark and some of them are, sadly, not even remotely hot.

Here, I rank the novels of Jane Austen in order of sexiness (defined, of course, by how much the characters hate each other at the opening).

of times and will very likely read it again. Still. As a love story, it's the least sexy book of all time. Fanny – stupid, naïve Fanny – is slavishly devoted to her older cousin Edmund who has "formed her mind" through many years of instruction that began when she was a child. Though Edmund quickly falls in love with someone else, Fanny is unable to stop herself from thinking about him and his (get this) moral center. The book is almost untenable but for the appearance of the delightful Henry Crawford who pursues Fanny essentially as a prank. He's a womanizer and a liar, but he ultimately falls in love with Fanny, though they're apparently not supposed to end up together. The book is basically a tragedy.

SUB-PAR SEXINESS



MANSFIELD PARK

The only good loathing in this book is mine for it. It would be hard, actually, to put into words how much I despise *Mansfield Park*, and I say that as someone who so loves the work of Jane Austen that I've read the book a number

NORTHANGER ABBEY

I adore this novel. Adore it. It's smart and funny and boasts the sharpest narration of her oeuvre. As with all of Austen's novels, there's a match being made, but while there's a bit of teasing

flirtation and the usual misunderstandings that crop up along the way, the pairing of Catherine and Henry Tilney is not revving anyone's engines. There's just nothing sexy about it as their relationship grows out of a quick mutual affection. This would normally be a flaw – mutual affection – but it's not sentimental or cloying and really not the focus of the book.

FAIR TO MIDDLING SEXINESS



SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

There's some definite sexiness to this novel, which follows two sisters, one who makes good decisions (Elinor) and one who does not (Marianne). You can guess for yourself which sister's story is any fun at all. There's an early accident in which Marianne falls and injures her ankle and the dashing (but ultimately untrustworthy) Willoughby carries her home in the rain, which is pretty fantastic. Eventually, there's some tension between Marianne and Willoughby though it unfortunately comes after he's broken her heart and not before. The novel gets bonus points for Colonel Brandon, who is a template for the patiently sexy older man every book should offer at least one of. And Marianne has some contempt for Brandon in the beginning, which is always a good indication that a couple belongs together.

EMMA

Hands down the finest of Austen's novels, it's only a little above aver-

age in sex appeal. Again, we have the patiently sexy older man in Mr. Knightley, and he's slightly hotter than Colonel Brandon in that while Colonel Brandon can see no fault in Marianne, Knightley sees many faults in Emma and he likes to tell her about them. Still, their relationship is founded in a sort of mutual admiration that is frankly a drag.

PEAK SEXINESS



PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

I know you were expecting this to be at the top, but it's not. We'll get to that. This is a wildly sexy novel in that Darcy and Elizabeth dislike one another outright, and in fact Darcy's initial admiration for Elizabeth seems to begin out of spite for another woman. *Is Darcy just a misogynist?* you might ask, to which I would answer, *Probably*. The loathing culminates in the most hateful proposal in English literature and a flat refusal by Elizabeth. Eventually, they work through all of that, but the extent of the anger at the core of their love story is delightful. Still, not the sexiest, the honor of which goes to *Persuasion*.

PERSUASION

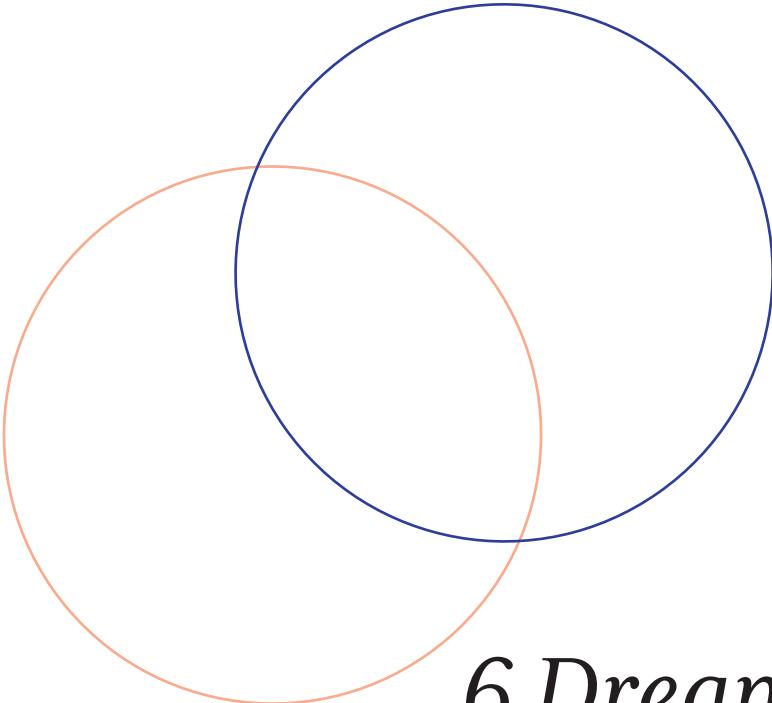
This is not the best of Austen's novels by a long shot but it is absolutely the hottest because it opens long after our heroine, Anne, has already broken Frederick Wentworth's heart. In her youth (which twenty-seven-year-old Anne has long since lost her grip on), she'd been convinced by med-

dling family members that the mostly penniless Wentworth wasn't a good enough match for her, and so *Persuasion* opens years after an abruptly broken engagement. Wentworth has returned having made his fortune, and he proceeds to pursue the attentions of other women just to piss Anne off. Wentworth hates Anne so very much that he can barely stand to look at her except for the obvious fact that he can't stop looking at her. Is it awkward that their utter estrangement forces the novel to progress through overheard conversations and the unwitting interferences of their many friends? Sure. Like I said, it's not her finest novel, but it's pretty damn sexy nonetheless.

LIZ KAY is the author of
Monsters: A Love Story.



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6 Dream Director-Jane Austen Pairings

by LISA ROSMAN

“Love and Friendship,” Whit Stillman’s 2016 adaptation of Jane Austen’s *Lady Susan*, was one of the best films of 2016. This was surprising not merely because *Lady Susan*, an epistolary novel that favors its wicked protagonist at the expense of its subsidiary characters, is easily Austen’s least-beloved book. It is also surprising because so few Austen adaptations live up to their source material. There is Ang Lee’s 1995 “Sense and Sensibility,” which, penned by Emma Thompson, boasts a delightful buoyancy. There is the BBC miniseries “Pride and Prejudice,” also from 1995, which launched Colin Firth as the dreamiest Darcy on both sides of the Pond. But for every Austen adaptation success story, there’s a film like the unfortunate

“Emma” (1996), in which Gwyneth Paltrow simpers over cups of tea for two hours, or, worse, the 2005 production of “Pride and Prejudice,” in which Keira Knightley dimples and bats her lashes as Elizabeth Bennet.

No decent portrayal of Elizabeth Bennet would entail dimples.

Yet given the general decline of Western civilization in both the U.K. and the U.S., I believe we need film adaptations of Austen’s work more than ever – films that uphold her wit, etiquette, and ethics. We just need good adaptations, which match the right director to the material.

Here are some dream teams sure to deliver more truth than treacle.

NORTHANGER ABBEY

+

LIN-MANUEL MIRANDA

Austen's most meta book may have been published last but it was written early in her career, when she still might have been musing on the format of the novel. Hence she references another book – the spooky *The Mysteries of Udolpho* – within what works as a juicy gothic read unto itself. (Some literary historians believe she first spun this yarn for her family.) Now that "Hamilton" creator and star Lin-Manuel Miranda has conquered Broadway, he may be ready to tackle Hollywood, and a meta-multicultural musical "Northanger Abbey" that comes correct on myriad levels seems like a terrific way to tell Austen's juiciest tale in a new medium.

PERSUASION

+

JANE CAMPION

Upon reflection, it's a bit shocking "Top of the Lake" show-runner Jane Campion hasn't directed any Austen before now. She tackled the Romantic poets with "Bright Star" in 2009 and 1800s culture with "The Piano," her New Zealand film about the most unlikely of arranged marriages, in 1993. Certainly with her penchant for brooding fare, she's the right helmer to tackle the edgier *Persuasion*, in which (apart from *Lady Susan*) Austen is at her most biting. As a bonus, Campion's spectacular eye would capture the seaside backdrop swooningly but never sentimentally.

EMMA

+

NICOLE HOLOFCENER

Granted, Nicole Holofcener is as well known for her original screenplays as she is for her directing, but I suspect she might make an exception for Austen's story of the beautiful, well-off, young woman who's sure she knows what's best for everyone around her. Holofcener brilliantly crafts comedies of manners, and, since "Walking and Talking," she's particularly shone when exploring the gaps between haves and have-nots – not to mention attractive narcissists. If Kate Beckinsale were still in her twenties (or even thirties), I'd cast her as "Emma." But Felicity Jones should do nicely, thank you very much.

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

+

MARTIN SCORSESE

Yes, you read that right. Mr. Mean Streets would do a terrific job autopsying Austen's careful dissection of the dichotomy between prudence and passion. (Come to think of it, that'd be another grand title for this story.) His adaptation of Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* proved that his knack for details extended beyond mafia rituals and the perfect marinara sauce, and *Sense and Sensibility*'s double narrative provides a plot structure that's a Marty signature. (Think "Casino" and "The Departed.")

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

+

MIRA NAIR

It is true that Nair's middling adaptation of Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* doesn't exactly speak highly of her ability to adapt nineteenth-century novels, but I've always felt that the film sagged under the weight of bad casting and a worse screenplay. From "The Reluctant Fundamentalist" to "Monsoon Wedding," the Indian director has proven to be a brilliant student of the intersection of social conventions, socioeconomics and gender, gender, gender. Her "Pride and Prejudice" would be as gorgeous as it would be clever, and she'd never burden us with the indignity of a dimpling Elizabeth Bennet.

MANSFIELD PARK

+

SALLY POTTER

About second chances and misconceptions, *Mansfield Park* is not Austen's most glamorous book but it may be her most soulful. Similarly, Fanny Brice may not be Austen's most charismatic protagonist but is one of her most stalwart. I just love the idea of British helmer Sally Potter – who directed the ahead-of-its-time "Orlando" as well as "Yes," which is almost entirely in iambic pentameter – breathing life into Austen's ugly duckling of a novel. And can't you just see Saoirse Ronan as Fanny?

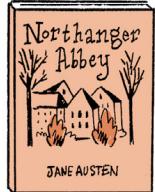
JANE AUSTEN

SECRET RADICAL

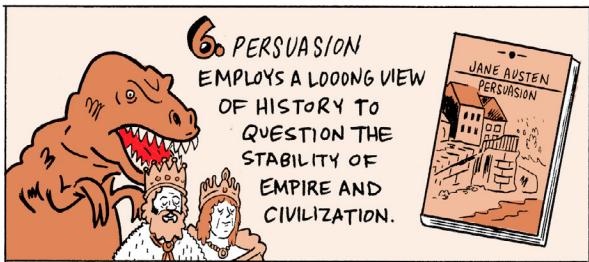
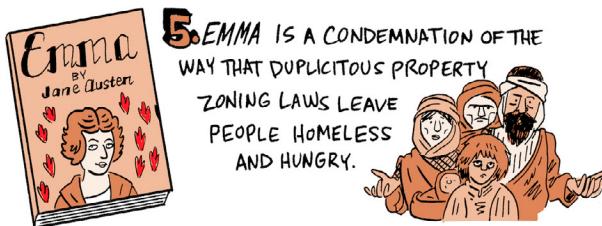
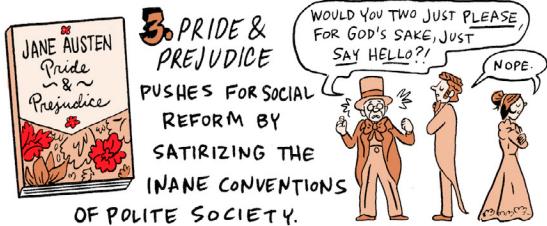
a book-by-book breakdown
BASED ON THE BOOK BY HELENA KELLY



drawings by NATHAN GELGUD



- 1. NORTHANGER ABBEY IS ABOUT THE POTENTIALLY LIFE-THREATENING RISKS OF MARRIAGE AND CHILDBIRTH FOR WOMEN, WHOSE SAFETY IS IN THE HANDS OF MEN.**



Jane Austen Secret Radical: A Book-by-Book Breakdown

by NATHAN GELGUD

There's a problem when it comes to Jane Austen. The problem has to do with Emma Thompson and Keira Knightley and a shirtless Colin Firth. It has to do with Bridget Jones and novelty coffee mugs and the BBC and even Bollywood. It has to do with zombies and a cottage industry built around the misperception of the value of Austen's work. Jane Austen's novels are not significant because they comprise the evolutionary pool out of which the contemporary romantic comedy crawled!

So says Helena Kelly in her book *Jane Austen, Secret Radical*, a novel-by-novel examination of Austen's work that serves as a sharp rebuke and smart corrective to the way we've been reading Austen. That is, if we're reading

her at all and not just streaming sexy adaptations and esteemed miniseries.

But before you think Kelly's book could have been alternately titled *Wet Blanket*, notice that Kelly is interested in making sure we understand that Austen's work is important because it's fierce and progressive. She's not just finger-wagging about the books being better than the movies, but giving the novels a close reading that makes them *fresher* than the movies. In each chapter, she gives a re-reading that reshapes the way we think about Austen. She shows, for example, the way in which a comedy of manners like *Pride and Prejudice* is actually a take-down of high class elitism, which implicitly posits a statement about demilitarization. Or the way

that *Persuasion*'s long view of history and evolution questions the validity and stability of the British Empire.

The cottage industry around Austen makes her quaint, cute. Important, sure, but not that interesting. Kelly's book makes Austen vital. You needn't worry about Kelly ruining the fun movies, novelty coffee mugs, or zombie mashups, if those are your thing. Kelly's book isn't really a take-down as much as an occasionally stern note that you could do better. It's not that you shouldn't like Jane Austen for whatever reasons you like her. It's that you could like her even more if you read her the way that Kelly does.

Desperately Seeking Jane: 10 Jane Austen Quotations for the Vehemently Single

by RACHEL JACOBS

The vehemently single can turn to Jane Austen for some inspiration in navigating the life of independence in a society that encourages coupledom – whether seeking a mate or not.

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

“In vain have I struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you.”

“A lady’s imagination is very rapid; it jumps from admiration to love, from love to matrimony in a moment.”

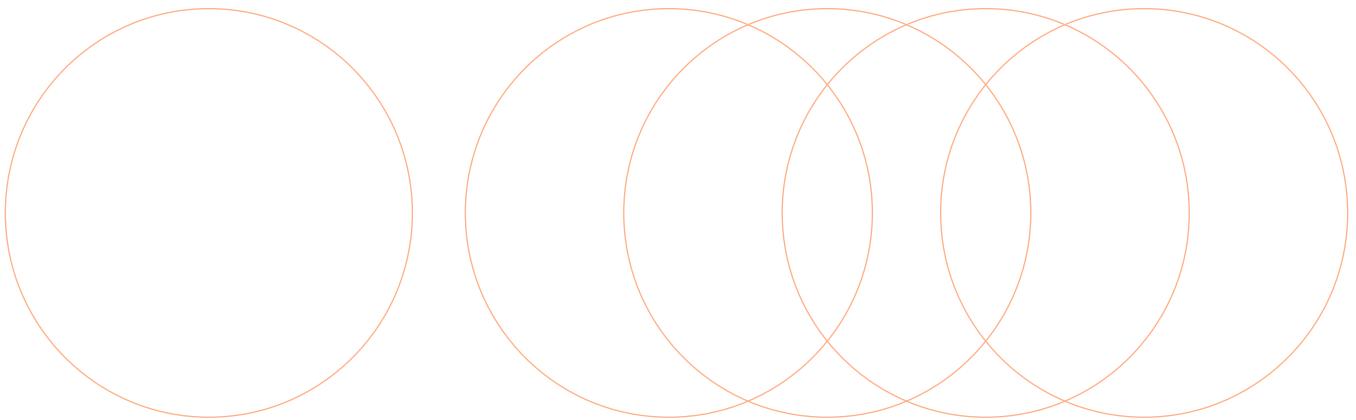
“It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.”

“Do not be in a hurry, the right man will come at last.”

EMMA

“Ah! There is nothing like staying at home, for real comfort.”

“Were I to fall in love, indeed, it would be a different thing; but I have never been in love; it is not my way, or my nature; and I do not think I ever shall. And, without love, I am sure I should be a fool to change such a situation as mine.”



SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

“The more I know of the world, the more I am convinced that I shall never see a man whom I can really love. I require so much!”

MANSFIELD PARK

“There will be little rubs and disappointments everywhere, and we are all apt to expect too much; but then, if one scheme of happiness fails, human nature turns to another; if the first calculation is wrong, we make a second better: we find comfort somewhere.”

NORTHANGER ABBEY

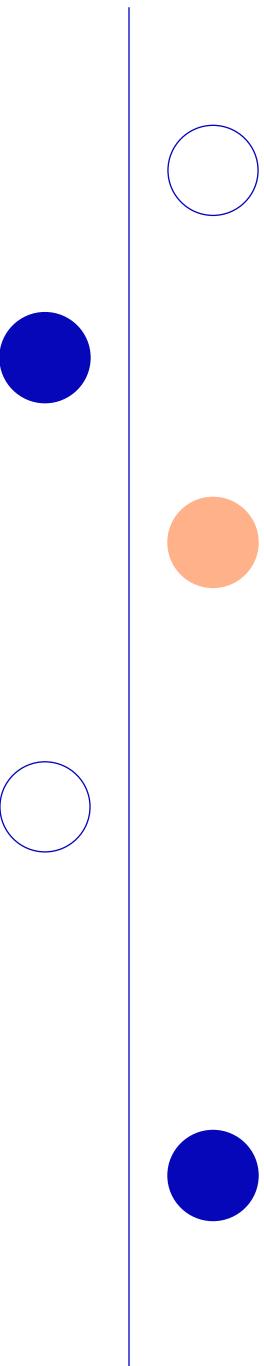
“Friendship is certainly the finest balm for the pangs of disappointed love.”

JANE AUSTEN’S LETTERS

“I do not want people to be very agreeable, as it saves me the trouble of liking them a great deal.”

A Q&A with Pride and Prejudice Author Jane Austen

by JAY FERNANDEZ



If anyone knows how to play the Hollywood game, it's writer Jane Austen. The young author's seven novels – *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1815), *Northanger Abbey* (1818), *Persuasion* (1818), and *Lady Susan* (1871) – have been turned into dozens of films and TV series over the last seventy-five years. From the first adaptation of *Pride* in 1940, starring Greer Garson and Laurence Olivier, through "Sense and Sensibility" (1995), "Emma" (1996), and "Pride and Prejudice" (2005), movies based directly on Austen's work have often drawn Oscars and other accolades, while a constellation of films – "Clueless" (1995), "Becoming Jane" (2007), "Austenland" (2013) – have used her life, letters, and influence as inspiration. "Pride and Prejudice and Zombies," the 2016 adaptation of Seth Grahame-Smith's popular, if profane, 2009 mash-up, placed the classic romantic travails of the five Bennet sisters in the context of a zombie apocalypse that prompted their father to train his girls in the martial arts.

Austen took a break from working on scripts for the second season of her

controversial Shonda Rhimes-and-Amy Schumer-produced ABC series "Image and Impertinence" to speak with Signature about the new movie and Hollywood's undying courtship.*

SIGNATURE: What was your initial reaction to Seth's mash-up?

JANE AUSTEN: "Mash-up"? I have not the pleasure of understanding you.

SIG: Was it jarring that Seth had shoved a zombie storyline into your witty novel of manners?

JA: Ah. Yes, quite. I admit I had not exposure to Haitian folklore or the undead during my formative years, though I certainly met no small number of suitors who could be mistaken for one. As it happens, my sister of letters Mary Shelley published her nerve-jangling *Frankenstein* reanimation story a mere five years after my *Pride and Prejudice*, so in a real enough sense this is a literary marriage destined for two hundred years. In any case, the average scene in our ongoing human satire is no less grotesque than one of these slobbering zombie fellows gnawing through a Regency corset. Upon reading an

early draft, my beloved sister Cassandra remarked disapprovingly of Mr. Darcy that he was “stiffer than a Scots pine,” and my youthful imagination fluttered obscenely for well on weeks.

SIG: Do you object to having your work appropriated like that without your permission?

JA: Really, it is not altogether different from abiding within the stultifying social customs that pervaded my station whence I was writing, and dating, originally. One had never truly the freedom to choose one’s marriage partner any more than I now am in a position to approve a writing cohort. And you forget: As a woman I was forced to publish anonymously. It was, quite literally, one hundred years until literary critics took note of my actual name, and only much later that it was publicly acknowledged I was a writer of some talent. So I suppose any time *Jane Austen* appears on a book jacket it is cause for celebration.

SIG: Were you resistant to selling the rights to *Pride*? Or nervous about what might become of it?

JA: From the very beginning – from the first moment, I may almost say – of my acquaintance with the industry, its manners, impressing me with the fullest belief of its arrogance, its conceit, and its selfish disdain of the feelings of others, were such as to form the groundwork of disapprobation on which succeeding events have built so immovable a dislike. I had not known Hollywood a month before I felt that it were the last enter-

prise in the world with which I could ever be prevailed to engage creatively. However, once my agent secured director approval my scorn diminished considerably.

SIG: There were reports in the trades that you felt the studio was meddling too much with your and Burr’s screenplay. Is that so?

I CANNOT FORGET THE FOLLIES AND VICES OF OTHERS SO SOON AS I OUGHT, NOR THEIR OFFENSES AGAINST MYSELF.

JA: There is, I believe, in every disposition a tendency to some particular evil, a natural defect, which not even the best education can overcome. In my day, receiving “notes” was occasion for gaiety and a delightful chittering among girlfriends. In the movie business, they arrive with all the fanfare of an outbreak of *typhus*. My goodness, the pretensions! It is a truth universally acknowledged that a studio executive in possession of a writer’s brilliantly original idea must be in want of more opinions. And more still.

SIG: But didn’t Sony ultimately counsel you not to kill off all the Bennet sisters, as you had originally planned in the adapted zombie version?

JA: I have faults enough, but they are

not, I hope, of understanding. My temper I dare not vouch for. It is, I believe, too little yielding – certainly too little for the convenience of the vertically integrated studio ranks. I cannot forget the follies and vices of others so soon as I ought, nor their offenses against myself. My temper would perhaps be called resentful. My good opinion once lost, is lost forever. All of that said, I find myself, in this case, admitting that the gormless chuffers were being entirely sensible. Despite myself, I have come to appreciate the word *sequel*.

SIG: So are you proud of how the movie turned out?

JA: Vanity and pride are different things, though the words are often used synonymously. A person may be proud without being vain. Pride relates more to our opinion of ourselves, vanity to what we would have others think of us. So while it may be said that I am indeed proud of our wicked little entertainment, I sincerely hope, should it make a provocatively handsome profit, that I am neither vapid nor vain enough to believe that Hollywood will not banish me immediately to a schlock ghetto fully dependent on genre tropes and corset porn for any future greenlight.

SIG: You've had a long relationship with Hollywood. Has your experience changed over the years, or the expectations you place on it?

JA: There are few films that I really love, and still fewer of which I think well. The more I see of Hollywood,

the more am I dissatisfied with it; and every day confirms my belief of the inconsistency of most movie-borne characters, and of the little dependence that can be placed on the appearance of merit or sense. Though I did quite fancy "Overboard." Oh! And that dashing Mr. Fassbender in "Shame" – a more *gentlemanly* caboose I have yet to perceive.

SIG: Jane Austen Societies have proliferated around the world, with your most fervent fans putting on period costume, holding balls and tea parties, and traveling repeatedly to places you lived in the hope of re-creating the romance of your work in their own lives. Is that flattering to you?

JA: I would much prefer they pursue their foolish adulation as Austenographers. It has *pizzazz*.

**This conversation is entirely imagined. Jane Austen passed away two hundred years ago. But if we were to chat with her about "Pride and Prejudice and Zombies," this is probably exactly how that conversation would go.*

Austen Heartland: A Guide to Jane Austen Houses and Places

by KEITH RICE

Scathing one-liners, spirited and witty narrators, complex characters, and, of course, a healthy dose of simmering sexual tension – is it any wonder the novels of Jane Austen remain well-read, well-loved, and surprisingly well-adapted? For those interested in exploring the real-life settings behind the works of Jane Austen, we've pulled together this list of destinations.



ST. NICHOLAS PARISH CHURCH

RG25 3BE, Steventon, Basingstoke, UK

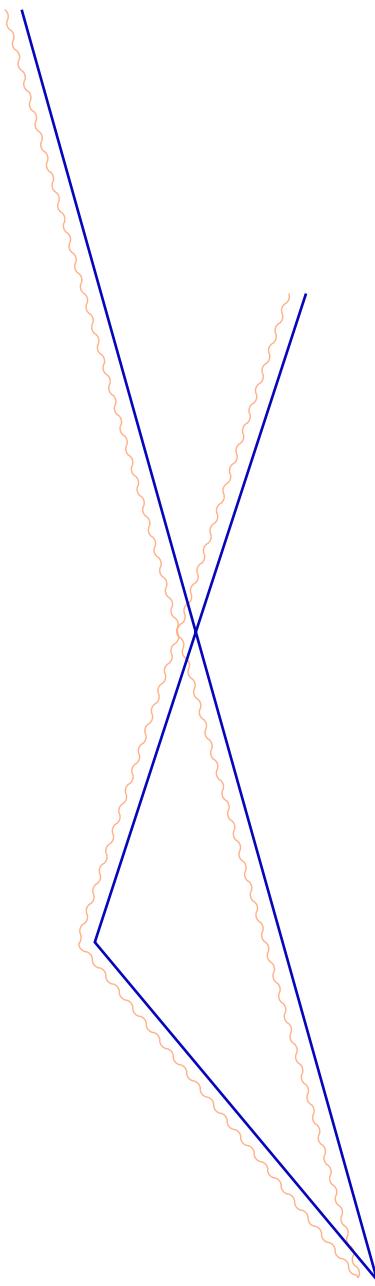


THE VYNE

RG24 9HL, Sherborne St John,
Basingstoke, UK

The rectory of this small parish church, where her father, the Reverend George Austen, served as Rector, was Austen's home for the first twenty-five years of her life. During this time, she wrote *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Northanger Abbey*. Unfortunately, the rectory has long since been demolished, but the footprint is an important site for Austen fans.

The Vyne is a sixteenth-century country house and a fixture of Austen's very active social life in Hampshire. She attended numerous balls and events at the house – and other large houses in the area – which undoubtedly provided the foundation for much of her work.



JANE AUSTEN'S HOUSE MUSEUM

GU34 1SD, Chawton, Alton, UK

Situated in a seventeenth-century cottage, the Jane Austen House Museum is the only house where Austen lived that is open to the public as a museum. Austen lived in the cottage with her mother and sister from 1809 to 1817. It features a collection of Austen's personal effects and features a rotation of Jane Austen exhibitions.



CHATSWORTH

DE45 1PP, Bakewell, UK

Chatsworth is a large English Country House and home to the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire. In *Pride and Prejudice*, before arriving at Pemberley, Elizabeth Bennet visits Chatsworth. It is also widely believed that Chatsworth itself was the inspiration for the fictional Pemberley. In the 2005 adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, Chatsworth even stood in for Pemberley.



THE RECTORY AT ASHE / ASHE HOUSE

Latitude: 51.2452 / 51°14'42"N; Longitude: -1.2358 / 1°14'8"W, Ashe, Hampshire, UK

Ashe House, a rectory, was the home of Anne Lefroy, one of Jane Austen's closest friends during her early years in Steventon. In fact, based on Jane Austen's early letters it is believed that there was a burgeoning romance that never came to fruition between Austen and Lefroy's nephew, Tom.



THE JANE AUSTEN CENTRE

40 Gay St, Bath BA1 2NT, UK

Following her father's retirement, the Austen family relocated to Bath in Somerset County. Situated in a Georgian Townhouse, The Jane Austen Center – just up the road from where the Austens lived for a time – features a full exhibition dedicated to the author, a waxwork figure of Jane Austen, and the Regency Tea Room. Bath served as a setting in both *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey*.



RESIDENCE AT 8 COLLEGE STREET

8 College St, Winchester SO23, UK

Jane Austen relocated to 8 College Street in Winchester shortly before her death in July 1817 to be closer to her physician. While the house is not open to the public, there is a plaque honoring Austen on the exterior of the house. This was, indeed, the place of Jane Austen's death.



BASILDON PARK

RG8 9NR, Reading, UK

Basildon Park is an eighteenth-century country house and was featured as the home of Mr. Bingley in the 2005 adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*. A National Trust property and open to the public, it sits on four hundred acres of parkland with gardens, picnic spots, and trails.



CLAYDON HOUSE

MK18 2EY, Middle Claydon,
Buckingham, UK

This eighteenth-century country house served as the location for the ballroom scene in the 1996 adaptation of *Emma*. The house and its grounds are open to the public. Fans of Jane Austen are welcome to visit the ballroom; you may even be able to sneak in a quick dance if you're so inclined.



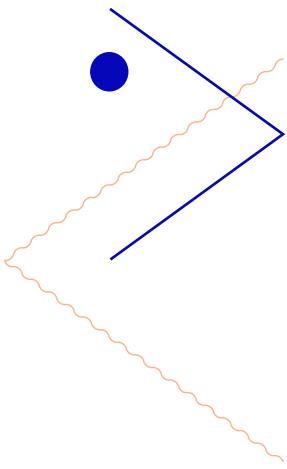
SALTRAM HOUSE

Plymouth PL7 1UH, UK

Saltram House was used in the 1995 adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility* and, like Basildon Park, is open to the public. But, more importantly for Austen fans, the house features a collection of letters written by Austen to Frances Parker, the second wife of John Parker, the Earl of Morley, who inherited Saltram House from his father.

On the Benefits of Editing Jane Austen

by JULIETTE WELLS



Jane Austen and Shakespeare are often compared, especially with respect to their astuteness of characterization and their ingenious use of language. Shakespeare's exuberant inventiveness with English words, combined with four hundred years of changes in usage, can cause great opacity for today's audiences, which editors and actors must take pains to mitigate. Austen, only two hundred years in the past, and having produced fewer dazzling new coinages, remains more accessible. Yet, as teachers know well, Austen's present-day readers can easily be thrown off by words they think they recognize, as well as by those whose meanings they wrongly guess. In *Persuasion*, for example, Captain Wentworth describes himself as having "had no society among women

to make him nice." A reader might reasonably assume from context that "nice" means "friendly," "pleasant," or "refined," but in this case the word actually means "choosy." Aboard naval ships for years, among men almost exclusively, Wentworth has been so starved of women's company that he is now ready – so he says, anyway – to marry anyone between ages fifteen and thirty who will have him.

In preparing my annotated editions of *Persuasion* and *Emma*, I aimed to anticipate and forestall such confusion by providing full, easily comprehensible glossaries. What I didn't anticipate was that my effort to clarify Austen's prose for readers would greatly deepen my own appreciation of her subtle, precise, and often wonderfully original word choices.

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Austen's editors have made widely varying judgment calls about how many words to gloss. R. W. Chapman, who edited the first scholarly editions of Austen's novels in the 1920s, considered very little explanation to be necessary, which arguably says as much about Chapman's views of women writers or of properly cultivated readers as about her prose per se. More recently, editions of Austen's

works designed for classroom use have tended to provide more support – though not as much, I believe, as is truly helpful for first-time and inexperienced readers.

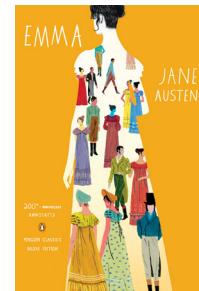
Having myself read – and written about – *Emma* and *Persuasion* many times, I was chagrined to realize how many of Austen's words I had not fully understood. Austen often doubles or triples her adjectives, as in the phrase “so proper, suitable, and unexceptionable a connexion” (which describes Mr. Knightley in *Emma*). This reinforced usage allows readers to glean the sense of an unfamiliar word from context, or – as in my case – not to realize that I didn't actually grasp a particular shade of meaning. The word “unexceptionable,” which turns up again and again in *Emma*, frequently in descriptions of male characters, is much more positive than I had imagined from the apparently negative prefix: It means “that which cannot be taken exception to.” I settled upon the phrase “perfectly satisfactory” for my glossaries.

One of the delights of exploring Austen's language is the discovery that she is the first author credited in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) with

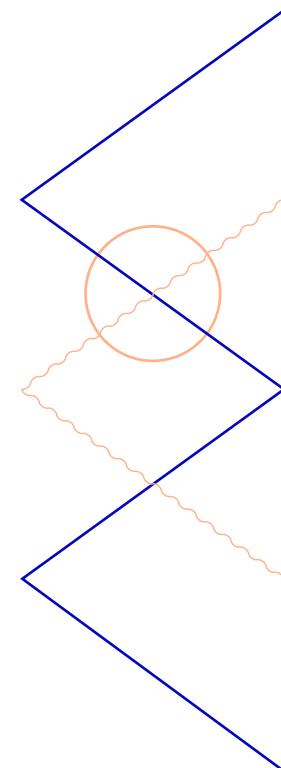
a particular usage – which, as I like to say in class, means that we get to yell “Bingo!” For instance, the narrator remarks in *Persuasion* that “[a]nother hour of music was to give delight or the gapes, as real or affected taste for it prevailed.” According to the *OED*, “the gapes” are “a fit of yawns,” and *Persuasion* is the first (of only two) works to feature this “humorous” usage. If you enjoy being systematic, you can look up all of Austen's “firsts” in the *OED* by searching first under “Sources” (Austen is #228 in the top 1,000) and then under “Quotations: first in entry” or “Quotations: first in sense.” What's remarkable, you'll find, is how many of the words listed still make complete sense to us today.

Paying close attention to Austen's language, word by word, results in both better comprehension and more admiration. In addition to savoring her finely turned phrases, you'll notice, as [researcher Ben Blatt has recently corroborated](#), how strenuously she avoids clichés. Austen's subjects – families and villages, love and marriage – may be ordinary, but the great care with which she writes about these unexceptional matters is unexceptionable.

JULIETTE WELLS is the editor of *Emma* by Jane Austen.



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Pride and Prejudice on Film: The Best – and the Not-So-Great

by CHARLIE LOVETT

Do you love classic Hollywood movies? How about BBC costume dramas? Bollywood musicals? Modern rom-coms? Fantasy time travel pictures? *Pride and Prejudice* can give you all of those and then some.

From the long list of adaptations, here are my favorites:

“PRIDE AND PREJUDICE”

BBC MINISERIES (1995)

I must admit, I am both proud and prejudiced when it comes to judging screen adaptations of Jane Austen's most famous novel. This miniseries stars not only Colin Firth (he of the famous wet shirt) as Mr. Darcy, but Jennifer Ehle as Elizabeth Bennet. Jennifer and I both grew up in Winston-Salem, we went to the same school, and she and my brother were good friends for many years. So perhaps I'm biased. But you won't have to look far to find other fans who think this is the best adaptation of Austen's novel. It's one of the most faithful, using much of Austen's dialogue; it has a stellar cast from top to bottom (the relatively unknown Ehle and Firth of course went on to very successful careers), and it has a marvelous richness of production – costumes, music, choreography, and great locations combined. While previous BBC adaptations (there had been five of them from 1938 to 1980) seem dated, this one has aged well. And while it's true that in the book Darcy never swims in the lake, none of the women in my household ever complained about Firth's famous scene.

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“LOST IN AUSTEN” (2008)

This clever four-part ITV miniseries follows the adventures of the contemporary heroine, Amanda Price, who steps through a door in her attic and into Longbourn in the midst of the Bennet family. While Amanda is wreaking havoc on the plot of *Pride and Prejudice* in the Regency period, Elizabeth Bennet stays in modern London and becomes a nanny. No matter how hard Amanda tries, she can't keep the plot of the novel from spinning out of control. There are several nice metafictional touches, including Darcy getting his hands on Amanda's copy of *Pride and Prejudice*. Jane Austen comes in for some criticism, too, as Amanda realizes that Wickham is a good man after all and that Jane never told the whole truth

about his relationship with Georgiana Darcy. It's a delightful romp that deconstructs and reconstructs the plot of Austen's novel, while staying true to the personality traits of her characters.

"BRIDE AND PREJUDICE" (2004)

For sheer joy it's hard to beat this Bollywood adaptation of Austen's novel. The plot actually stays very close to the original, despite the story's being set in modern-day India. With Darcy as an American businessman who does not appreciate Indian culture and Lalita as one of four daughters of a doting Indian father, the clash of cultures mirrors the clash of class in Austen's original. Best of all, the film is peppered with lavish, exuberant musical numbers. Even Jane Austen would have been dancing in the aisles.

HONORABLE MENTION:

"BRIDGET JONES'S DIARY" (2001)

I was a fan of the book and the film did a nice job of adapting the short diary entries into a fluid narrative – with the added benefit of some meta-Colin Firth humor.

And, while it's hard to completely ruin Jane Austen, there have been adaptations that don't quite measure up...

"PRIDE AND PREJUDICE" (1940)

STARRING GREER GARSON AND LAURENCE OLIVIER

This adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* is as classic as Hollywood gets with the classics in the 1940s. Not surprisingly, characters have been elimi-

nated, plot points changed, and even the time period moved forward so that MGM could show off its stars in the more elaborate costumes of the 1830s (the opening sequence feels like something out of *Gone With the Wind*). The film is completely of its own time – to me Olivier's Darcy is overplayed and Greer Garson is obviously too old to play Elizabeth. I find Edmund Gwenn as Mr. Bennet the gem of the piece – but this is due as much to Jane Austen as to anyone else. The screenplay was co-written by Aldous Huxley (whose niece once kindly gave me a tour of the little village of Addlestrop, where Jane Austen visited her maternal cousins). It will never be my favorite – being neither the best of classic Hollywood nor the best of Jane Austen, but it's worth a look.

"PRIDE AND PREJUDICE"

BBC MINISERIES (1980)

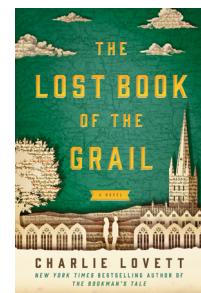
This one is worth a mention because it is available for streaming on Netflix. There is nothing grossly wrong with this miniseries but it pales in comparison to the 1995 version. Shot almost entirely indoors and with few long shots, it feels claustrophobic. Lizzy is too old, Darcy too unlikable, and Mr. Bennet so serious that his comments come off as rude rather than humorous.

"PRIDE AND PREJUDICE" (2005)

This adaptation with Keira Knightley gets a split decision in our household. My wife enjoyed this first feature adaptation since 1940. Its time constraint (two hours, nine min-

utes) keeps it focused and quick paced. But my daughter found Keira Knightley "whiny and complaining." Dutifully, my opinion falls somewhere in the middle.

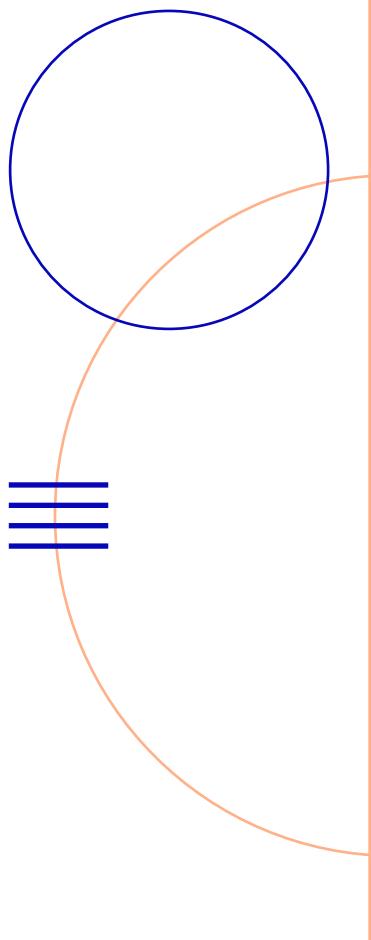
CHARLIE LOVETT is the author of *The Lost Book of the Grail*.



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The Cult of Jane Austen: 4 Books About a Literary Love Affair

by JOANNA SCUTTS



Jane Austen wasn't always the world's most popular novelist. At the time of writing her beloved novels, she was a fairly obscure figure, and it was only well into the nineteenth century, long after her death, that she began to be celebrated by the likes of Sir Walter Scott; Alfred, Lord Tennyson; and the bestselling novelist Margaret Oliphant (whose 1866 novel *Miss Marjoribanks* is closely modeled on *Emma*.) But even her biggest Victorian fans couldn't have foreseen the modern cult of Jane, fueled by film and television adaptations (not to mention Colin Firth's wet shirt), that has given rise to thousands of homages, rewrites, fan fiction, Regency costume balls at English country houses, and conferences and conventions all over the world. With that in mind, here are four books that look at the history and present state of Austen superfandom.

Susannah Carson quotes from one of the most famous opening lines in all literature for the title of her essay collection, *A Truth Universally Acknowledged*. In the book she presents a range

of different answers to the question of when and why Jane Austen ascended to the peak of popularity, and what it is about her characters and her writing that continue to charm and compel readers. Reaching back to early twentieth-century assessments of the novels, and surveying the field of fandom to the present day, Carson collects opinions from thirty-three writers on the puzzle of Jane's enduring appeal. Virginia Woolf and Eudora Welty rub shoulders with C.S. Lewis, Martin Amis and "Clueless" director Amy Heckerling as they reflect on Austen as a moral guide, a social critic, and a peerless entertainer.

The British short-story master and author of *The Jungle Book*, Rudyard Kipling, first coined the term "Janeites" for extreme fans of Austen in a story in his 1926 collection, *Debits and Credits*. But Kipling's superfans aren't women who like to dress up in Regency ball gowns; they're a group of young soldiers under fire in a World War One trench, who form a secret society based on the love of Jane. This

shared admiration bonds and comforts them under terrible conditions, and for them, she represents the pinnacle of the national culture they're fighting to defend. But there's a tragic twist – almost all members of the fellowship of Janeites are killed under fire, and the narrator is a survivor who bears deep psychological scars. Kipling had been a staunch advocate of war in 1914, but after his only son, eighteen-year-old John, was killed at the Battle of Loos, he began to question, in his poetry and stories, whether the cause was worth the cost. The Kipling story collection *The Man Who Would Be King* spans half a century and includes "The Janeites" among many better-known tales of adventure and faraway worlds.

Far removed from the WWI trenches, the modern lovers of Austen (or perhaps even more so, of Elizabeth and Darcy) are devoted to the point of obsession. In her warm and witty *Among the Janeites*, journalist and Jane Austen fan Deborah Yaffe follows the worshippers on their pilgrimages to the writer's home and other historic sites in England and attends the Jane Austen Society of North America's annual costume ball. She meets a huge range of characters – from fan fiction authors to literature professors to conspiracy theorists – who are united by their passion for Jane (and Lizzie, Emma, Fanny, Catherine, and Anne).

Along the way, Yaffe considers why Austen inspires such passion in so many people, asks whether the cult of Jane (with its tote bags, action figures,

and zombies) has gotten out of hand, and reflects on her own lifelong love of the books.

For a more scholarly take on the history of Jane Austen fandom, Rachel M. Brownstein's smart and eloquent history *Why Jane Austen?* analyzes the changing interpretations of the writer over time. She argues that readers and critics have embraced Austen for contradictory reasons – for her reassuring conservatism and for her political subversion, for cynicism and

HER BOOK ULTIMATELY WORKS TO RESCUE AUSTEN FROM THE WELL-MEANING CLUTCHES OF HER ADMIRERS.

romance, and for the narrowness and breadth of her creative vision. Brownstein, a professor of English at Brooklyn College, imagines what the cool and ironic writer might have made of the current mania for her work, and probes the strange intimacy and eroticism that drives her modern fans. Her book ultimately works to rescue Austen from the well-meaning clutches of her admirers, and restore her to a position that acknowledges all her complexity and intellectual brilliance.

Alexander McCall Smith on Why He Followed Miss Austen's Calling

by ALEXANDER MCCALL SMITH

It was to be a routine call. My agent, Caroline Walsh, comes to see me in Edinburgh from time to time, a four-hour train journey from London. At these meetings we talk about the sort of thing that all writers discuss with their agents: contracts, decisions that need to be made, plans for future books. But on this occasion, things took a different turn.

"Oh, there's something else," Caroline said.

"Yes?"

"I've been asked whether you're prepared to write a new version of Jane Austen's *Emma*."

I looked at her in astonishment. When people ask unexpected things like that, one's first reaction is to say,

"Me?" That, presumably, is what a new pope says when asked to take on the job. That must be what a presidential candidate says to backers when they first make the suggestion. Saying "Me?" gives one time to think.

But I did not say "Me?" Instead I said, "Of course."

And having said that, I immediately began to think about the arguments as to why one should not accept such an invitation. Jane Austen is an incomparably good writer; I, and others like me, are not fit even to gather the dust from her chariot wheels as she rides past. Jane Austen is an institution, and there are some institutions one does not meddle with. And finally, if there are lions' dens around – and the legions of Jane Austen fans around the world constitute a pretty impressive lions' den – then why wander into them?

I had made my decision, though, and felt that I should stick to it. Rewriting *Emma* would be a challenge, but a most enjoyable one. If there was pleasure to be had in reading the story

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of that particular Jane Austen character, then how much more pleasure would there be in actually writing the same story, but set in our own times? *Emma* has a cast of magnificent characters, Mr. Woodhouse, Emma's father, being one of the most ridiculous fusspots in literature. What a challenge it would be to re-create him in contemporary England.

And that aspect of the challenge particularly appealed to me. England today is not what it was at the beginning of the nineteenth century, but the human types are still there, and all one would have to do would be to modernize them. Mr. Woodhouse would not be afraid of draughts, but would be very fearful of viruses. Clergymen, who often do not come out well in Jane Austen's hands, would have become part-time and, in the case of Mr. Elton, the clergyman in *Emma*, would have developed a taste for fast cars.

I started to write the book almost immediately. In a sense it wrote itself, as I merely sat there and the whole thing came to the page with very little effort on my part. I enjoyed every moment that I spent in the company of the characters. I relished the opportunity to have exactly the sort of fun that I think Jane Austen would have had when she wrote the original.

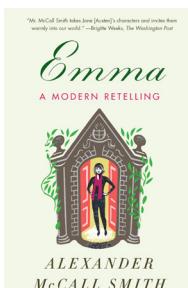
At the end of the process, I felt bereft. Jane Austen's world is so rich, so complete, so utterly enticing that when we finish an encounter with it we leave it behind us with regret. I would love to do the whole thing over again. And

as for the purists who may sniff at the thought of anybody doing anything with Jane Austen's novels, my response to them is that Jane Austen's stories have become like Greek myths – they belong to us all now, and provided one treats them with respect, there is nothing wrong in re-telling them. Indeed, in my view, the greatest tribute one can pay to that author is to do just that – to tell these exquisite, timeless tales again and again. Like the very best of vintage wines, they do not seem to have gone off in the slightest.

ALEXANDER MCCALL SMITH

is the author of

Emma: A Modern Retelling.



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