

1997

The Resurgence of Jane Austen in Today's Popular Culture

Heather Rimer

Follow this and additional works at: https://knowledge.e.southern.edu/senior_research



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Rimer, Heather, "The Resurgence of Jane Austen in Today's Popular Culture" (1997). *Senior Research Projects*. 110.
https://knowledge.e.southern.edu/senior_research/110

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Southern Scholars at KnowledgeExchange@Southern. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Research Projects by an authorized administrator of KnowledgeExchange@Southern. For more information, please contact jspears@southern.edu.

The Resurgence of Jane Austen
in Today's Popular Culture

by Heather Rimer

Honors Project
for Southern Scholars
April 1997

The Resurgence of Jane Austen in Today's Popular Culture

The "Janeite phenomenon." "Austen mania." Ten years ago these phrases would have meant nothing to the average reader. Today, though the general public may not be familiar with these exact phrases, rare is the person who has not been exposed to either a Jane Austen novel, film adaptation, or magazine article about Jane Austen. The twentieth century's fascination with one of the 18th and 19th century's most popular female authors, Jane Austen, appears strange and unaccountable at first glance. How popular is Austen today?

Consider the sheer number of movie adaptations of Austen's novels on the market. Since 1990, cinema and television have adapted four of Jane Austen's novels into a total of six screen versions (Churchyard). Jack Kroll, in his article "Jane Austen Does Lunch," says, "The BBC telecast of *Pride and Prejudice* in England drew up to 11 million people for each weekly episode--the highest-rated costume drama ever in England" (67). Two of Austen's novels-turned-cinema, *Persuasion* and *Sense and Sensibility*, rated among *Time Magazine's* best of 1995 ("The Best of 1995: The Arts" 138). Austen herself was named #10 in *Entertainment Weekly's* 1995 Entertainers of the Year ("EW Entertainers of the Year: Jane Austen").

As Douglas McGrath, director of the motion picture *Emma*, was quoted in the *New Yorker* as saying, "It's funny, because first there is no Jane Austen and then it's *raining* Jane Austen" (Haden-Guest 55). Mary Brennan calls Jane Austen "the Elvis Presley of English literature." In Brennan's article "See Jane Surf; Surf, Jane, Surf!", a special to *MSNBC*, she says Austen has been "dead for 179 years, an unfortunate condition which has done her career nothing but good" (2). It seems to have done the film industry and others like it nothing but good as well.

However, Jane Austen's appeal is not limited to movie-goers alone. Avid readers are joining the craze and buying Austen's novels. According to Mary Brennan, "Austen's

novels are back on the bestseller lists as well. Sales are up 40 percent at Penguin, a long-time Austen publisher" (2). Austen has also been on *USA Today's* best seller list (Dean 1).

Austen's selling capability has led Algonquin Books to recently publish the very first book Austen wrote, *The History of England*. This book, written when she was 14 years old, is Austen's comic idea of the type of serious history books she and other children of the time were required to read in school. Elizabeth Scharlott, publisher of Algonquin Books, says of the decision to publish this book, "We love to discover talented young writers, but it's not every day that we can present a young talent who is already the best known and most popular woman writer in the English language" (qtd. in Devereaux 44).

Austen's popularity has grown over time. Austen readers from the past include people like Charles Darwin, who enjoyed reading Austen's novels during his voyages, and Virginia Woolf and Rudyard Kipling, both of which loved Austen's writings (Ingalls B4). Today college students seem to enjoy Austen just as much as others have in the past. In a list of the top 10 books being read on college campuses in January 1996 (supplied by campus bookstores across the nation), Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* ranked number 10 (Gose A34).

Institutions of higher learning are recognizing students' desire to study Austen. For instance, Harvard University is offering an 8-week course this summer (1997) entitled "Jane Austen"--their only summer English literature course devoted solely to one female author (Clancy 22).

Some Jane Austen scholars are making good use of the excitement by using on-line information to teach Austen [in] the classroom (Gold B3). After all, a Jane Austen home page is available on the World Wide Web (created by Henry Churchyard), as well as at least one Jane Austen list serve, and according to Mary Brennan, home pages in Spanish, Polish, Swedish and German (2). In addition, the web surfers of today will discover that there are at least three Jane Austen Societies: The Jane Austen Society of North America

(JASNA), The Jane Austen Society (UK), The Jane Austen Society of Australia (JASA), and one in the making, The American Society of Jane Austen Scholars.

Film makers, book sellers, and educational institutions aren't the only ones getting in on the action. Numerous industries such as the record, fashion, and cooking industries are taking advantage of Austen's popularity. Record companies have been producing compilations of classical music such as Nimbus' "The Jane Austen Companion." Sony's classical soundtrack to *Sense and Sensibility* was on "Billboard's Top Classical Crossover chart for five months" ("Classical Keeping Score" 33). In fashion, due to all the new period films like Austen's *Emma*, the empire waist is back en vogue. There is even a new Jane Austen cookbook.

In the face of all this "Austen mania," the reader is tempted to ask Why all the fuss? Why is Jane Austen suddenly "hip" in the nineties, a hot ticket to success? Are there sociological explanations for our society's fascination with Jane Austen? It is easy to point out the current craze for Jane Austen and to show how popular she has become. However, it is more difficult to analyze the reasons *why* she might be so popular in today's culture. The possibilities are endless. Also, because the phenomenon is so recent, the majority of professional opinions on the topic have not yet been released into print. What is available are a smattering of articles, a scant few books, and some unpublished essays.

A variety of recurring reasons for Austen's resurgence are shared by numerous commentators on the phenomenon. Some of these reasons deal with what may be called "superficial" topics such as media exposure, the film industry, etc.; other reasons require more thought and deal with deeper topics like feminism and morality. All of these topics can be narrowed down to two categories. Jane Austen is popular today because she is a great writer and because her novels deal with issues today's society is concerned about: we are nostalgic for a simpler life, we long for a morality absent from 20th century society, and feminism and masculinity are ill-defined.

Jane Austen's popularity is due in large part to her being a great writer. Her novels have stood the test of time because of her special writing ability. She is able to take the norms of ordinary life and make it simply intriguing through her unique use of wit, language, and characterization. In his screen review of "Sense and Sensibility," Richard Alleva remarks that physical description was never Austen's "forte," but she was a "genius at characterization and plotting" (15). Others agree. From his book *The Creators*, Daniel J. Boorstin writes, "Sir Walter Scott acclaimed the 'nameless author' of Jane Austen's *Emma* (1816) for an 'exquisite touch which renders commonplace things and characters interesting.'" (93).

Austen's exceptional use of wit, language, and characterization can be demonstrated in any one of her novels. This discussion will focus primarily on probably the most famed of all Austen's novels, *Pride and Prejudice*. Delia Fine of *A&E* says that this book is so special because of the story. She goes on to say, "Lizzie and Darcy are two of the best loved characters in all of fiction. They are irresistible" (qtd. in Dean 1). When mentioning Austen's outstanding characterization, to whom can we liken Elizabeth and Darcy, the heroine and hero of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*? The two characters stand alone. Perhaps only their witty dialogue and word play can be compared to the fiery exchanges between Shakespeare's Beatrice and Benedict in *Much Ado about Nothing*. Elizabeth and Darcy are upright, moral characters who function well in their society of manners. They are *both* full of pride and prejudice, and yet, Austen uses their slowly evolving relationship as an example of what is necessary for a true loving relationship. These two characters of Austen's show through their dialogue that love is not a hasty decision but must be based on a realization and appreciation for who the other person is.

By contrast, Austen shows the dangers of quick marriages and not appreciating one's spouse by her witty character portrayals of Elizabeth's father and mother, Mr. and Mrs. Bennet. Mr. Bennet has gradually lost all respect for his wife, and so he constantly antagonizes her and disdains her company. In the first few pages of the book, Mrs.

Bennet is trying to convince her husband to pay a visit to the new and wealthy bachelor in town so that the five Bennet daughters may be introduced. She says, "Mr. Bennet, how can you abuse your own children in such a way? You take delight in vexing me. You have no compassion of my poor nerves." Mr. Bennet replies, "You mistake me, my dear. I have a high respect for your nerves. They are my old friends. I have heard you mention them with consideration these twenty years at least" (Austen 180). Austen uses this type of witty dialogue with a mixture of wonderful characters to produce highly entertaining novels.

In addition to the outstanding Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy and outrageous Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, Austen's characters like Mr. Collins, the clergyman who worships the regard of his patron, Lady Catherine, and Lady Catherine herself, who is a haughty, selfish woman with the only attribute of being rich, create humorous conversations and situations. The silly characters add to the richness of the main characters and increase the hold they have over the reader.

Not only her witty characters, but also Austen's use of language appeals to the reader of an Austen novel. By some stroke of genius Austen is able to turn her sentences into masterpieces. For example, Austen's first sentence in *Pride and Prejudice* is one that has been somewhat immortalized due to its unique form and unmistakable meaning. She writes, "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife" (180). Austen commands the readers attention with ease and her wit in her writing is intriguing. Consider this conversation taken from Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* between Elizabeth and Darcy about the idea of an accomplished woman. In reply to something Charles Bingley has said previously, Darcy starts with:

"Your list of the common extent of accomplishments has too much truth. The word is applied to many a woman who deserves it no otherwise than by netting a purse or covering a screen. But I am very far from agreeing

with you in your estimation of ladies in general. I cannot boast of knowing more than half-a-dozen, in the whole range of my acquaintance, that are really accomplished."

A few interchanges later after Darcy describes what he believes a woman must do to deserve to be called "accomplished", Elizabeth retorts, "I am no longer surprised at your knowing *only* six accomplished women. I rather wonder now at your knowing *any*" (196).

Notice Austen's word choices and phrasing in these passages. The reader easily recognizes the haughty tone of Darcy and the sarcasm Elizabeth rapidly fires back at him. Darcy's phrases such as "I am very far from agreeing," and "I cannot boast of knowing" are Austen's way of showing the reader to what extent his underlying pride dictates his reasoning. In the same way, it is readily apparent in this conversation that Elizabeth has no patience for the esteem in which Darcy holds his own opinions, and she therefore has no qualms in disagreeing with him. It is Austen's excellent choice of words that tell the reader intuitively how to feel about the characters in her novels.

Another example of Austen's superb use of language combined with wit is found when Elizabeth finally agrees to marry Darcy. The two are discussing what led them to fall in love with each other, and Darcy mentions Elizabeth's goodness was revealed to him when she took care of her sister who had been sick. Elizabeth playfully replies, "My good qualities are under your protection, and you are to exaggerate them as much as possible; and, in return, it belongs to me to find occasions for teasing and quarreling with you as often as may be" (Austen 356). Later, when writing to her aunt to disclose her engagement to Darcy, Elizabeth says, "I am happier even than Jane; she only smiles. I laugh. Mr. Darcy sends you all the love in the world that can be spared from me" (357). These passages show the reader Austen's sense of humor and her ease in using language to its full advantage. A reader is able to recognize immediately, even from just the two conversations submitted here, that the chemistry between Darcy and Elizabeth has

changed drastically from how their relationship started out. This is part of Austen's genius. She writes with an exceptional wit and word play that makes her works so very unique.

Austen's works are so well-written that time can only produce more relevancies to them, and their appeal continues into each generation. Some people might argue that Austen writes about a society gone by, one in which she portrays a class without problems similar to today's culture. Emma Thompson, star and screenwriter of *Sense and Sensibility*, refutes this idea. She says, "You don't think people are still concerned with marriage, money, romance, finding a partner? Jane Austen is a genius who appeals to any generation" (Kroll 68). The following opinion shared over the Internet is Mr. Ted Adams' explanation as to why today's society can relate to Jane Austen:

Ms. Austen's recent popularizations are nothing more than the current generation revisiting masterpieces. The difference between "true art" and "false art" can be constantly reinterpreted as the viewer/reader changes her circumstances. What we get out of "true art" is dependent upon what we bring to it in terms of our understanding of the world. "False art" has one interpretation that can be made out of it. We see/read/listen to it a second time and we see no more than we saw the first time. Every generation needs to revisit Austen, Shakespeare and Chaucer because they will see things there that those that preceded them did not see.

In light of this quote, it is important to note that an author's greatness depends not so much upon the somewhat untrustworthy test of time, but more so on how he/she changes or influences literature. Jack Kroll calls Austen an "enthraling artist" and states the fact that she is possibly the "chief creator of the modern novel" and a "progenitor of the soap opera, which is a diluted and debased form of her narrative of manners" (67).

As Ginia Bellafante puts it in her article "Sick of Jane Austen Yet?", "Where would late 20th century pop culture be without Jane Austen, literature's first great chronicler of

the young, the idle and the sardonic--not to mention the romantically addled?" Bellafante says, "Without Austen's fine-boned fiction we might never have had an Ethan Hawke, a Whit Stillman or an NBC Thursday-night lineup" (66).

Of course, Bellafante's sarcasm is strong, but there is truth in what she says. Austen *did* create a different kind of literature that has been copied in a variety of forms ever since she published her novels. Suzanne Juhasz writes, "Romance aficionados, if not literary scholars, *know* that Austen is the mother of their favorite genre" (Juhasz 28).

Capitalizing on Austen's unique writing style, the media has obviously played a great role in this resurgence of Austen. If so many of the movie versions had not been created, numerous newly-indoctrinated Janeites would not have emerged.

Why is Jane Austen so appealing to the film-makers? One reason, according to Sherry Dean of *CNN* is that "Her books are so old that they are no longer protected by copyrights. That means no fees must be paid to her heirs" (Dean 1). Also, as with other great novelists who died years ago, Austen can't protest, disagree, or dictate how she wants things produced or who will star. Producers can interpret the novels the way they want to (example: *Clueless*, the mall/ Beverly Hills version of "Emma").

Austen is also very appealing to film makers because as Richard Schickel says in his article "Kissing Cousins," somehow Austen "had mastered [film industry's] most basic conventions"--before the movie was even a genre to consider. He says that she crafted her novels so well by incorporating what is important for good films: bringing many people together in nice settings, creating misunderstandings, alliances, conversations and embarrassments, and somehow working everything out in the last chapter (72). In addition, her novels contain a large amount of dialogue that can be used virtually word for word in the screenplay. In brief, Austen fashioned her novels in such a way that movie producers today have little to change in order to produce a good film from her works.

Because Austen's works aren't the only ones being transposed into film today, the proliferation of what John Forde calls "costume drama or 'period pieces'" is very relevant

to the discussion of the resurgence of Jane Austen in popular culture. According to Forde, there is a current trend to revive other nineteenth-century novels and older classics into film (3). One has little difficulty in remembering various movies along these lines released in the past few years. Forde mentions *A Room With a View* (Merchant/Ivory, UK, 1986). Then there is Henry James' *The Portrait of a Lady* (recently released in the cinema) and the fairly plentiful versions of Shakespeare which have floated everywhere in movie theaters (*Othello*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Hamlet*, *Richard III*, and *Romeo and Juliet*).

Lindsay Doran, the producer of "Sense and Sensibility," attributes the number of period pieces in film today to the idea that film producers realized a movie like "The Age of Innocence" could be successful, "So they all just went to their favorite books." Doran also says, "It's like everybody in Hollywood went back to school" (Haden-Guest 55). While this may be true to an extent, the only reason producers are able to make these kinds of films is that there is an audience craving them.

What is it about these period pieces that attracts such large audiences that have suddenly become die-hard Jane Austen fans? It may be due to the fact that we are seeing an increased "nostalgia for 'simpler times,'" according to Dr. Norman Simms, a psychohistorian at Waikato University. Dr. Simms believes that this nostalgia is more of a regression into an "imagined version" of the past rather than a true representation. Psychohistorians like him attribute this phenomenon to the idea of 'group fantasy'--the idea that many people share the same fantasy (qtd. from Internet in Youdelman). That's what drives them to the movies in droves.

Dr. Simms also believes that Austen films are a part of a general regression into the 19th century, probably a repressed hostile reaction to high-technology (Youdelman). We live in a high-stress, computerized society in which we are supposed to make some sense out of the world of social climbing, complicated relationships, deadlines and bills. On one hand, we may be fantasizing about Austen's world, watching beautiful English

countryside in the films and believing it was much simpler then. Alternately, we may also be realizing that her novels deal point-blank with the very same problems we face today.

Laura Miller, in her article "Austen-Mania," puts it this way:

Although Austen's novels--subtle, ironic and confined to the genteel parlors of the British rural middle class of the early 1800's--hardly scream cinematic potential, the social climate she describes isn't that far from our own. Authority rests in the hands of a dubious elite, prosperity seems precarious and, most of all, parents are just not doing their jobs. Not a single Austen heroine enjoys the influence of a fully functional family. Their mothers and fathers prove negligent, over-indulgent, cynical, shallow, neurotic or simply absent. (2)

Does this sound all too familiar? The problems Austen wrote about in her society are referred to today as the deterioration of our society.

One of the contributors to the nostalgia for simpler times and pop culture's attraction to Jane Austen appears to be the longing we have for a morality absent from 20th century society. Diane Turbide says that Austen's popularity shouldn't be surprising at all. She writes, "In an age of tawdry talk shows and tell-all biographies give self-revelation a bad name, Austen's reserved 19th-century heroines are a joy to know" (93). David Ansen talks in a similar vein, saying that it may not seem like our age would be interested in "Austen's bracing ironies, her intimately calibrated dissection of manners or her finely chiseled moral distinctions." However, he attributes her popularity today to this very thing by saying "she's a splash of cool water on our morally groggy foreheads" (Ansen 78).

As Rick Troha mentioned over the Internet, people are getting tired of the disgusting perversity of idolized stars like Howard Stern (and numerous professional sports players), and the outrageous disrespect by other stars like Dennis Rodman. Many people are desiring a society that values courtesy and sexual restraint. As Edward

Rothstein says in his article, "Jane Austen Meets Mr. Right," people are trying to revive manners in society. He says, "It is no accident that her novels' finely detailed accounts of moral and social education should inspire such interest at a time when conservative criticism of American culture is increasingly concerned with failures in those areas." He later goes on to say that we are envious of the manners in Austen's novels (Rothstein 10).

Austen's novels portray a society where there are social evils to be avoided and passion to restrain. According to Richard Alleva, Jane Austen's female characters are always presented as moral agents (15). Austen's heroines are shown to be moral characters by their actions and their words. As Rachel Brownstein says regarding the Austen heroine, "A young woman is lost not by being taken or given, but by throwing herself away. . . . Her destiny is nevertheless her own responsibility, as her immortal soul is: her love story is the mirror of her soul" (95).

The director of the film adaptation of Austen's novel *Persuasion*, Roger Mitchell, attributes some of the attraction to Jane Austen from the sexual restraint in her novels. He says, "There's a whole new kind of film, where people don't kiss or have sex--a new kind of eroticism" (qtd. in Haden-Guest 55). Ang Lee, director of *Sense and Sensibility*, (another film adaptation of an Austen novel), agrees with the idea of restraint in Austen's novels. Regarding this idea, Lee says, "It's all about fate and wrestling with fate. And restraint. There are always restraints in Austen's world. And today you have new restraints--what with P.C. [Political Correctness], and all that" (qtd. in Haden-Guest 55-6).

Evan Thomas believes the idea of having some restraints is a good one. According to Thomas, "Jane Austen's characters may have been repressed and sometimes snooty, but we are right to envy their decorum, consideration, and restraint" (61). He later goes on to say that though our society may have eliminated manners, it has not removed "class distinctions." In fact, Thomas believes,

If anything, the country today has become more class bound, with the rise of the so-called overclass and a widening gap between rich and poor. The only difference is that one's class today is based on money and SAT scores, rather than birth and breeding. Arbitrary and unfair distinctions have been removed, but so, too, has a measure of grace and consideration. (61)

Therefore, by removing manners from our society, we have only done ourselves an injustice; it has not necessarily made us more an equality-based society, but rather one in which restraint is absent and no one is given respect.

Along the same lines we encounter another reason for Austen's popularity today. With our lack of restraint, morality, and manners, we have created a dilemma when it comes to defining femininity and masculinity in social relations. Austen's novels deal explicitly with the idea of marriage, and especially how the sexes are expected to conduct themselves in social relations.

The male and female characters in Austen's society know what is proper and they also know that in a relationship, each sex has a certain responsibility and role to play. Today, these roles are ill-defined and the cause of much confusion and complicated relationships. As Kroll says, "The popularity of Austen films in an age of marriage meltdown is fascinating. . . . If all this strikes you as a hypermassive dose of Jane, think of it as an antidote to the fungus infection of Joe Eszterhas (*Showgirls, Jade*)" (66).

Due to the ill-defined role women are expected to play in our society and to the changes in equality women have experienced over time, it is important to realize that Austen's heroines looked at marriage somewhat differently than women today might. In the early 1800's women were not given the choice of a profession; therefore, their livelihood depended on a good marriage. Finding the right partner was *not* to be taken lightly (Turbid 93). Today, we believe a woman has the advantage of a more equality-based society--one in which she may choose almost any profession and succeed. She is not required to marry for livelihood.

And yet, with all the freedom women have today, something is attracting them to the world of Austen. Elayne Rapping believes women are enthralled by Austen's novels "because of the guaranteed happy ending for those who did what was expected in a world in which 'what was expected' was clear and easy to understand and accomplish" (Rapping 37). The reason Austen's novels and movies are appealing to women today is because if a woman in an Austen novel played by the rules, she won the game and lived happily ever after. Sure, it may be a fairy tale, but what about those women today who would change their lives the way they are right now in order to live the "1950's stay-at-home life of June Cleaver?" *Parent Magazine* says that 55% of women in the age group between 25 and 45 feel this way (37). Why? Rapping believes it is because the marketplace, filled with uncertainties, provides no stability in the lives of women today, regardless of the gender equality they supposedly enjoy. So "leveling the playing field for women and girls is hardly going to make the struggle for equality worth the trouble" (37). On the other hand, it is not a leveling of the playing field at all when society expects a woman not only to continue her responsibilities as defined in the past (housekeeping, child-rearing, etc.), but also to win a job and compete in the marketplace as well. This is what is meant by the "ill-defined role" women are expected to play in today's society.

Though Austen's society had well-defined roles for men and women, it did not hold all the answers. Her society was in the midst of a change as well as ours has been. David Kaufman shows Austen as a "writer of and about modernity" (399). He means that Austen writes in a time of social upheaval and in that respect, she can be compared to our modern day. Kaufman says, "Her plots show the conflicts that seem inevitably to arise when the economic conditions which bring the language of rights to the forefront come into conflict with basic respect for these rights" (404). This is one view our "equal rights" society. While we speak of equality and the rights of every human being, our morality and manners no longer allow respect for the rights we are defending. So much for the definitions of femininity.

Of course, masculinity is ill-defined as well in our society today. The following, a quote from Austen's novel *Persuasion*, is Austen's own definition of the perfect man:

Every thing united in him; good understanding, correct opinions, knowledge of the world and a warm heart. He had strong feelings of family-attachment and family-honour, without pride or weakness; he lived with the liberality of a man of fortune, without display; he judged for himself in every thing essential, without defying public opinion in any point of worldly decorum. He was steady, observant, moderate, candid; never run away with by spirits or by selfishness which fancied itself strong feeling; and yet, with a sensibility to what was amiable and lovely, and a value of all the felicities of domestic life. (Austen 996)

Laura Miller examines this statement and remarks that Austen gives us this definition of a perfect man, challenging us to come up with such a man in our own social spheres. Miller continues saying, "Perhaps the yearning for such an individual inspires the current wave of Austen novels" (1). Elayne Rapping seems to agree. She says that the appeal of Austen's novels is not only due to the idea that if a woman follows the "rules of virtue and character" she will end up with the fairy tale ending. "Most importantly," Rapping says, "the appropriate, equally virtuous, industrious, and upstanding male counterpart would emerge to wed and provide [the woman] with a secure and meaningful livelihood" (37). If we live in a time where masculinity is in crisis, one of the contributing factors to this "crisis" is that masculinity is not defined in our society. Austen shows in her novels that "real" gentlemen live up to what their society expected of them in terms of a role to play. Unfortunately, the men of today are not expected to play a particular role, just as the women of our society are confused as to which role they should play.

This paper does not claim that reading Jane Austen will provide men and women of today's society the standards we are lacking. However, reading/watching Austen's novels can bring an awareness of what our society lacks. Thus, society today reads

Austen not only because she is a superb writer, but because it is easy to see desirable things in the society of her novels. Our nostalgia for a simpler life is based on the appeal of morality, manners, and clearly drawn lines in femininity and masculinity in Austen's novels. As Douglas Bush writes on the back of his book, *Jane Austen*, "The incomparable Jane Austen, who perfected, if she did not invent, the novel of ordinary life, continues to enchant each new generation of readers" (Bush, cover). Due to the 1990's resurgence of Jane Austen in popular culture, it is obvious our society is enchanted with her.

APPENDIX

Includes the following:

- ~Internet personal email sources
- ~World Wide Web sources
- ~Harvard summer class bulletin
- ~Unpublished essay courtesy of
John Forde and Dr. Linda V. Troost

Internet Personal Email Sources

Date: Fri, 21 Mar 1997 08:16:01 -0500 (EST)

From: RYoudelman@aol.com

To: hdrimer@southern.edu

Subject: Re Austen

Hello,

I saw your request for information regarding reasons for 'Austen mania.'

The Institute for Psychohistory in New York City studies, among other things, popular film and the cultural meanings reflected in them. The notion of 'group fantasy' --what happens when many people share the same fantasy (when something becomes widely 'popular') -- is important, and is what is happening here I think.

One of the members, Dr Norman Simms (from New Zealand) says that Austen films are a part of a general regression into the 19th century, probably a repressed hostile reaction to high-technology. Note other films such as Shakespeare adaptations, etc., all vaguely 'old' and 'English.'

Dr. Howard Stein (who teaches medicine in Oklahoma) says that 'displacement' is also at work (idealization of English culture).

In my own opinion, Austen stories in particular feature idealized male heroes, and we live in a time when masculinity itself is in crisis.

I hope this helps.

Rachel Youdelman

<RYoudelman@aol.com>

Date: Mon, 24 Mar 1997 09:58:19 -0500 (EST)
From: RYoudelman@aol.com
To: HDRIMER@southern.edu
Subject: About Austen



Hi,

I heard from Norman Simms about reasons for popularity of JA film adaptations. I've been investigating the subject myself.

He says he knows of no publications but suggests looking into Journal of Popular Culture (Bowling Green, Ohio) or other film journals.

He emphasizes that the current mania is not only for JA, but other 19th -c novels as well. Part of the reason is nostalgia for 'simpler times' and the easy way these narratives are transposed into film, as opposed to post-modern, 'internally-focused' narratives would. Also in our age, JA's wit & definite morality appeal because now we have vague morals and pseudo-seriousness.

But Mr Simms calls the above explanations 'superficial.'

analysis of a 'psychohistorical' sort will need to see the films in context of who produces them, what changes are made in text; who watches & why; what is the age, gender etc of those watching.

He says one should note key repeating imagery, speech changes; use of light & color; bared bosoms, focus on male crotches; contrast in 19th c sexual restraint & 20th c repression due to AIDS & feminist rejection of seduction, etc.

About regression into the 19th c: Mr Simms actually feels it is more a regression into an 'imagined version' of the past.

He says 'The important thing is to see these issues as multiple, using techniques of dream-and-fantasy analysis of condensation, splitting, displacement surrogacy, etc. The film can say several things at once, many of them 'logically incompatible'--and that is what makes the film so popular." (Norman Simms, English Department, Waikato University, Hamilton NZ)

hope this helps!

Sincerely,

Rachel Youdelman

Date: Fri, 21 Mar 1997 09:25:14 -0800
From: Ted Adams <teda@eos.com>
To: hdrimer@southern.edu
Subject: Austen Popularity

Dear Heather,

Patrick Farrell recently presented a paper to the Stanford Jane Austen Society on reasons for her recent promulgation in the popular press. I don't know if Patrick is wired. His snail mail address is 181 Del Medio, Mountain View, CA 94040. It was an excellent paper IMHO.

Adding my two cents to the subject, Ms. Austen's recent popularizations are nothing more than the current generation revisiting masterpieces. The difference between "true art" and "false art" is that "true art" can be constantly reinterpreted as the viewer/reader changes her circumstances. What we get out of "true art" is dependant upon what we bring to it in terms of our understanding of the world. "False art" has one interpretation that can be made out of it. We see/read/listen to it a second time and we see no more than we saw the first time. Every generation needs to revisit Austen, Shakespeare and Chaucer because they will see things there that those that preceded them did not see.

Regards,

Ted Adams
Los Altos, CA

(Patrick Farrell)
(415) 574-9232 - day phone
(415) 948-7515 - home
(415) 555-1212 - alternative

Date: Sat, 22 Mar 1997 08:31:59 -0500

From: Rick Troha <rickt@nwsup.com>

To: hdrimer@southern.edu

Subject: RE: AUSTEN RESURGENCE...request for help

Dear Heather:

I remember reading a very good essay in (I believe) Newsweek magazine just about a year ago which was about the recent popularity of Jane Austen.

My personal reasons for liking Jane Austen:

1. The quality of her language. I place her right behind Shakespeare in her use of the language.
2. The society she portrays is a refuge from our coarse, uncivil society that idolizes the likes of Howard Stern and Dennis Rodman.

Rick Troha

rickt@nwsup.com

World Wide Web Sources

what year?



[Return to the previous page...](#)

10 JANE AUSTEN

She doesn't go to the see-and-be-seen parties. She's reticent with the press. There are nasty rumors that she engaged in an incestuous relationship with her sister, for God's sake. And frankly, she could use a makeover. But in this year alone, four of her novels have been adapted for the big and small screens. And with numerous

World Wide Web sites devoted to her glory, she even holds her own with Internet pinup Brad Pitt (and they never caught *her* with her pants down, sunning herself on a Caribbean island). Not bad for a British broad who's been dead for 178 years.

Jane Austen's musings on the manipulations of the 19th-century landed class may involve more talk than action, and they may be proper, but they're never prim; '90s sarcasm's got nothing on Austen's perfection of mean-it-with-a-sneer, say-it-with-a-smile dialogue. And yes, they're formulaic--the aging, clever, not too beautiful girl *always* gets the guy, eventually--but that only suits Hollywood all the more. When Amy Heckerling, the *Clueless* director, first said that Cher, Alicia Silverstone's sweet but mall-maniac Valley Girl character, was based on Emma, the protagonist in Austen's 1816 novel of the same name, purists rolled their eyes. But look: There's Cher, in formal attire, presiding at the dinner table. There's Cher trying to fix all of her friends' lives while remaining blissfully ignorant of her own. There's Cher finally finding love right under her own nose. There's *Emma*.



Photo: Theo Westenberg

Should a more literal and literary adaptation be what you want, pouty and pale Gwyneth Paltrow plays Emma herself, opposite Jeremy Northam (*The Net*), in a film version of the novel due out next year. You should be able to wait that long for your next fix, assuming you caught this fall's acclaimed art-house hit *Persuasion*, in which poor little rich girl Anne Elliot--misunderstood by all but the reader (and author)--falls most indelicately for Captain Wentworth, whose charm is all he has to call his own when it comes to the standards of society.

Austen will draw bigger crowds thanks to Hugh Grant, Emma Thompson, and Kate Winslet in the Thompson-scripted, Ang Lee-directed *Sense and Sensibility*, a love story with just enough satire to give it bite. Finally, you can see *Pride and Prejudice* in January, when A&E and the BBC present a new TV version of this novel about the inner lives and outer trappings of five sisters.

Does this onslaught mean Hollywood is swearing off bombs and going by the book? Not until mild manners make more money than sweating studs. But with no options to buy and no contentious author around to throw hissy fits, Austen may offer a



Hollywood popularizes Jane Austen

January 14, 1996

Web posted at: 7:30 a.m. EST

From Correspondent Sherry Dean



NEW YORK (CNN) -- Hollywood, always quick to jump on a fad, has made Jane Austen one of the hottest novelists of the '90s. Although Austen, who wrote on romance with delicate humor, died 179 years ago, many of her books are current movie hits. In fact, one of the hottest contenders for best picture in this year's Academy Awards is expected to be "Sense and Sensibility," based on one of Austen's classic.

Thanks to Hollywood, Austen's now on practically every hot list. She's on Entertainment Weekly's top entertainers list and on USA Today's best seller list.

Rebecca Ascher-Walsh of Entertainment Weekly says Austen was an obvious choice for their top 10 list. "So many of her books are being made into movies this year and she has been dead for 200 years," she said.

That's another reason why movie makers love Austen: Her books are so old that they are no longer protected by copyrights. That means no fees must be paid to her heirs.

Emma Thompson, who wrote the screenplay for and starred in "Sense and Sensibility," calls Austen a genius and says her works survives because she wrote about subjects that never die. "Women still fall in love with the wrong guy," she said. "They still get jilted, they're still looking for people to marry."

Another Austen book, "Pride and Prejudice," described as the most widely read novel in the English language, is about to run as a miniseries on the Arts and Entertainment (A&E) network. The series recently aired on BBC to a phenomenal reception.



The last episode drew 40 percent of the United Kingdom's total television audience; the home video sold more than 100,000 copies and a companion edition of the novel sold out.

"Story, story, story," said Delia Fine of A&E when asked what made the book so special. "Lizzie and Darcy are two of the best loved characters in all of fiction. They are irresistible."

While "Sense and Sensibility" and "Pride and Prejudice" are probably two of Austen's most famous works, a limited-edition film of Austen's lesser known "Persuasion" has done extremely well in the United States.

"It's a Cinderella story," said Roger Michell, who directed "Persuasion." "It's boy meets girl. Girl loses boy. Boy finds girl."

Hollywood hasn't finished with Austen yet; "Emma" starring Gwyneth Paltrow, is now in the making.



Related Sites

- [Jane Austen](#)
- ["Sense and Sensibility"](#)
- ["Pride and Prejudice"](#)
- ["Persuasion"](#)
- [A&E](#)

Feedback

- [Send us your comments](#) - [Selected responses](#) are posted daily.

[CONTENTS](#) | [SEARCH](#) | [CNN HOME PAGE](#) | [MAIN SHOWBIZ PAGE](#)

[| CONTENTS](#) | [SEARCH](#) | [CNN HOME PAGE](#) | [MAIN SHOWBIZ PAGE](#) |

*Copyright © 1996 Cable News Network, Inc.
 ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.
 External sites are not endorsed by CNN Interactive.*

- masculinity
- society lacks

SALON CONTENTS | CURRENT ISSUE | TABLE TALK | NEXT

AUSTEN-MANIA

Issue no. 2
Tues, Dec. 12, 1995

<http://node54.salon1995.com>
comp2 dec1995/
buttonbar/
austen2.map?

Look out Michael Crichton:
Jane Austen is becoming filmdom's favorite novelist

By LAURA MILLER

"Every thing united in him; good understanding, correct opinions, knowledge of the world and a warm heart. He had strong feelings of family-attachment and family-honour, without pride or weakness; he lived with the liberality of a man of fortune, without display; he judged for himself in every thing essential, without defying public opinion in any point of worldly decorum. He was steady, observant, moderate, candid; never run away with by spirits or by selfishness which fancied itself strong feeling; and yet, with a sensibility to what was amiable and lovely, and a value for all the felicities of domestic life."



Thus Jane Austen defines an excellent man in her last novel, "Persuasion," and dares us to find his equal in our own public and private spheres: Bill Clinton? Ross Perot? Brad Pitt? Kurt Cobain?

Perhaps the yearning for such an individual inspires the current wave of Austen novels committed to celluloid. It began with the Alicia Silverstone vehicle, "Clueless" (a crypto-Emma), gathered steam with Roger Michell's fine

Austen-mania page 2

Although Austen's novels -- subtle, ironic and confined to the genteel parlors of the British rural middle class of the early 1800's -- hardly scream cinematic potential, the social climate she describes isn't that far from our own. Authority rests in the hands of a dubious elite, prosperity seems precarious and, most of all, parents are just not doing their jobs. Not a single Austen heroine enjoys the influence of a fully functional family. Their mothers and fathers prove negligent, over-indulgent, cynical, shallow, neurotic or simply absent.

And yet, all of these women manage to muddle their way to a sane and satisfying adulthood without recourse to sawed-off shotguns or a court of law. Austen had an idea of how to live in this imperfect world that comprised balance, moderation and consideration -- all sorely undervalued in our sensation-mad society or, for that matter, in her own.

Buyer Beware

How much would
an original Austen
set you back?
between \$6 & 18,000

No doubt if Austen were publishing "Sense and Sensibility" today, her agent would urge her to title it "Sense vs. Sensibility," so profound is our confusion of bunkered extremism with integrity, so great is our fascination with the intellectual equivalent of trial by combat. But by the end of Austen's first novel the two Dashwood sisters meet in the middle: the temperamental Marianne becomes more reasonable and considerate, and sensible Elinor warms.

In Marianne Dashwood, Austen satirized the Romantic cult of unrestrained emotional display. Today, that same mentality makes a suicide into a tragic hero -- provided he dies young and pretty. The sufferings of the aging and homely lack glamour.

By contrast, "Persuasion's" heroine, Anne Elliot, has lost her looks, which ought to disqualify her as the subject of any Hollywood movie (and perhaps it does; the film is a British production). In that novel, Austen ventures that true love arises from deep mutual respect rather than an instantaneous seizure of sexual passion. An unconventional assertion even in Austen's day, to suggest that one's inner landscape might matter more than physical beauty,

RESOURCE BOX

Everything you ever
wanted to know
about Jane Austen

inner landscape might matter more than physical beauty, that plain people can lead wonderful lives. It's a welcome respite in our image-besotted culture.

Finally, Austen's novels display the serene conviction that decency, civility and common sense will be rewarded. Not by the hand of God, but simply because they lead to warm and lasting relationships and lives free of turmoil, dissatisfaction and debt. What would she think of the

contemporary pressure to judge by appearances, seek our own advantage at all times, indulge our most childish caprices while conforming slavishly to trends, and equate material wealth with happiness? Probably that it was all too familiar and none too sensible. And perhaps we're beginning to suspect she was right.

[Email & Emma Thompson: An Interview with Sense & Sensibility Producer Lindsay Duran.](#)

[SALON](#) | [CONTENTS](#) | [CURRENT ISSUE](#) | [TABLE TALK](#) | [NEXT](#)

"Persuasion" (now in theaters), and will carry on through the December release of "Sense and Sensibility" (starring Hugh Grant and Emma Thompson) and a new BBC version of "Pride and Prejudice," concluding, fittingly, with a film version of "Emma" more faithful to the original.

Next page: A respite from an image-besotted culture

SALON | CONTENTS | CURRENT ISSUE | TABLE TALK | NEXT

See Jane surf: Surf, Jane, surf!

The cult
of Jane Austen
keeps the faith
on the Internet

By Mary Brennan
SPECIAL TO MSNBC

Novelist Jane Austen is the Elvis
Presley of English literature.



THE BETTMAN ARCHIVE

They like
to be called the
Janeites. Unlike the
members of many
other cults, they are
difficult to spot in
the wild. They have
no orange robes, no
shaved heads, no
Rajneeshi sandals,
no taste for tie-dye.
They do not travel
in caravans of
Volkswagen
campers or chant in

airports.

[Jane Austen Info Page](#)

[James Dawe's Jane Austen Page](#)

[Jane Austen - Lady Susan](#)

[Jane Austen Joke and Song Page](#)

[Jane Austen photo](#)

[Encyclopaedia Britannica: Jane Austen](#)

[Discover Hampshire - Jane Austen Country](#)

[Letters of Jane Austen](#)

[Jane Austen Society of North America \(JASNA\)](#)

[Jane Austen's Adaptations](#)

[Jane Austen: Harper Audio](#)

Make no mistake, though. They may be invisible, but they are everywhere. They are the passionate, the devoted, the true Jane Austen believers. Perhaps surprisingly, one of their chief haunts is the Internet.

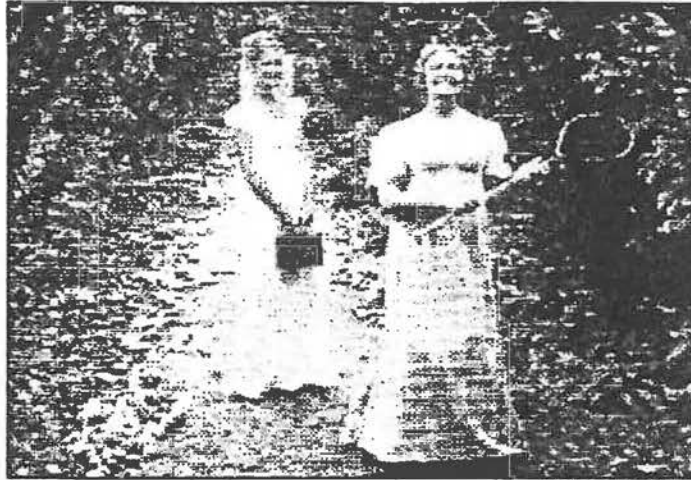
Austen, the Elvis Presley of English literature, has been dead for 179 years, an unfortunate condition which has done her career nothing but good. "Emma," fifth in a string of recent highly successful adaptations, opens this week. Last year's BBC mini-series "Pride and Prejudice" was a blockbuster on both sides of the Atlantic; "Clueless" (Emma Goes To The Mall) did so well (\$56 million) that Paramount is producing a TV version. "Persuasion" made many critical top-10 lists; "Sense and Sensibility" raked in \$42 million, an extraordinary amount for a period literary adaptation.

Austen's novels are back on the bestseller lists as well. Sales are up 40 percent at Penguin, a long-time Austen publisher. "Very, very strong sales," agrees a publicist for Amazon.com, which lists more than 200 Austen-related titles in its online catalog.

One might expect that the Janeites, as a group, would be more concerned with contemplating the deep mysteries of Fanny Price over cucumber sandwiches than with embracing new technology. But before Jane was everywhere, before she was applauded in People magazine and profiled on CNN, before Entertainment Weekly "photographed" her sitting poolside at a posh Beverly Hills hotel, the faithful were already worshipping at electronic shrines around the world.

It takes only a few minutes of surfing to pull up Austen home pages in Spanish, Polish, Swedish, and German. JASNA, the Jane Austen Society of North America, is online. A tourist page sponsored by the British government describes famous places from Jane's writings and her life.

Jane Austen films and books are hot stuff. "Emma," fifth in a string of recent highly successful adaptations of Jane Austen novels, opens Friday.



Miramax Films

The mother of all Austen pages belongs to a man by the unlikely name of Henry Churchyard.

(You may, for example, care to know that a pub called The Juniper Berry now occupies the site of one of Jane's former homes, or that the Dolphin Hotel, where Jane attended dances, still stands.) There are a vast number of academic and personal pages devoted to one Austen topic or another.

But the mother of all Austen pages belongs to a man by the unlikely name of Henry Churchyard. Appropriately enough, Churchyard is a distant relation of King Edward III. "But so are millions of people," he says, "So is Jane Austen."

Churchyard's page is staggering, an encyclopedic colossus packed with writings, illustrations, bibliographies, letters, juvenilia, genealogy trees of the Austen family, notes on Jane's mysterious seaside romance, the e-text of "Jane's wickedest tale," a list of sequels to the novels, a catalog of past and present movie adaptations, and endless links. "Promiscuous linking is the way of the World Wide Web," says Churchyard, a wry character whose site also includes a list of Jane Austen jokes.

The site "looks nice now," allows Churchyard, a linguistics graduate student at the University of Texas (in Austin, of course.) "But it took about two years." Churchyard professes himself "a weird kind of techno-Neanderthal," but in the next breath he is explaining, self-deprecatingly, how he didn't type all the text himself.

"You can write little teeny programs," he explains. The little teeny programs — written in Unix — help you to move text around.

Churchyard is surprisingly typical of the Austen

lovers on the Internet. Far from looking down their noses at Jane's current mainstream popularity, they seem to welcome fresh perspectives.

"I loved *Clueless*," says Jacqueline Reid-Walsh, an assistant professor at McGill University in Montreal. With the help of her husband, Reid-Walsh started an Austen mailing list, Austen-L, five years ago. The group is a mix of purists and pop culture hounds.

In the early days "people were nervous about technology," and contributions tended to be painfully brief. "Things like: 'how I named my dog Darcy' (a character in *Pride and Prejudice*)," says Reid-Walsh. Membership in the list now hovers around 900 — it has doubled since Jane-Mania began — and postings have grown longer and much more ambitious. "I feel we've re-discovered the epistolary art," says Reid-Walsh, who also heads the Montreal chapter of JASNA.

This October, JASNA will descend on Richmond, Va., for its annual convention. They will take afternoon tea, dress in Regency costumes, view Faberge eggs at a nearby museum, and, most importantly, talk about Jane Austen. Once again, scholars and pop culture junkies will rub elbows harmoniously.

Last year's convention topics included "Fanny Price in Cyberspace." This year's theme is "Jane Austen Among Men," and one of the featured guests is Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist Carol Shields, who will speak on "Martians in Jane Austen." Shields will use John Gray's best-selling "Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus" as a tool to examine romantic relationships in the novels.

In the lull before the convention, the Austen-L mailing list — scholars, shut-ins, avid readers, and film lovers from around the world — is abuzz with expectations about the movie version of *Emma*. "I love the Internet," concludes Reid-Walsh, "because it's a democracy."

© 1996 MSNBC

Jane Austen's novels: BBC and other Film/Video adaptations

"So she wouldn't be available for book signings?"

-- An anonymous American network executive (?), on being told that *Pride and Prejudice* was published for the first time in 1813.

"Seeing a movie or television adaptation of any of Jane Austen's works is like hearing a symphony of Mozart played on a harmonica."

-- heard on Swedish television's *Nattcafé*, late June '96 ☺



[Return to Jane Austen info page](#)



[Return to Jane Austen's writings](#)

- ➔ [Go to the Internet Movie Database for information about films from Jane Austen's novels](#)
- ➔ [Go to CNN article \(by Sherry Dean\) on the recent Austen movies](#)
- ➔ [Go to the *Pride and Prejudice* movie discussion bulletin board](#)
- ➔ [Go to parodic scheme for an "All Austen" cable channel](#)
- ➔ [Go to the "Photograph" of Jane Austen lounging at a Hollywood poolside <JPEG> \(as seen in *Entertainment Weekly*\).](#)

The following notes on film versions of Jane Austen's novels are mainly the personal opinions of Mr. Wentz (I myself don't even own a VCR, or subscribe to cable!). See the article "Jane Austen Adapted" by Andrew Wright (*Nineteenth Century Fiction* vol. 30, #3, December 1975, pp.421-453) for a list of earlier stage, screen, radio, and television adaptations of the novels.

Date: 31 Oct 95 10:56:13 EST

From: Charles Wenz <100517.405@compuserve.com>

Subject: BBC videos

Included below is a list of BBC videos of Jane Austen novels; I have no link with the BBC apart from a vague chauvinistic loyalty to the old values of the corporation, of which these videos are a fine example.

Among the other dramatizations of Jane Austen is the famously inaccurate but hilarious 1940's Hollywood movie of *Pride and Prejudice*, with Laurence Olivier and Greer Garson in their Victorian finery, which still gets an occasional airing on the movie channels (and some people still remain rather

fond of it). A recent film (*Clueless*) takes the plot of *Emma* into modern-day America, and the BBC's new version of *Persuasion* (last entry on the list below) is to be released in selected US cinemas. *Sense and Sensibility*, with Hugh Grant and Emma Thompson, has opened in the US, and a new adaptation of *Emma* for commercial TV by Andrew Davies (who was previously involved with the recently successful adaptation of George Eliot's *Middlemarch* with high production values) is under way.

He is also responsible for the successful adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* screened by the BBC in Britain in Autumn 1995. The last of the six episodes of *Pride and Prejudice* was allegedly watched by over 10 million British viewers. (The press managed to get a *Pride and Prejudice* angle on almost everything for the six weeks of the series; there was much discussion on topics such as period wallpaper, whether people still marry for money these days, what would have happened to the Darcy family wealth in the nineteenth century, why did the women in the TV series all seem to be wearing Wonderbras, why did *Radio Times* give the end away by showing Elizabeth on the cover in wedding dress, and a scandal because a village near Exeter couldn't receive BBC [channel] 1 properly and would thus be deprived of their right as Englishmen to view the denouement.) A video version was released (and sold out twice) before the last episode was first shown. The video (see below) joins the older and more literal version of *Pride and Prejudice* in the BBC catalogue. The older productions are a memorial to a tradition of BBC "Classic Serials", usually transmitted on Sunday afternoons for the improvement of the young, but now largely extinct due to costs. They (and Granada's *Persuasion*) are much closer to the original books than most modern TV writers would deem sensible. As such they have their attractions for aficionados.

(Dates in the list below refer to the date of the first availability of video, not to the date of original broadcast.)

- *Northanger Abbey*, BBCV4378 (1990). 90 mins.
Dramatised by Maggie Wadey, producer Louis Marks, director Giles Foster.
Starring Peter Firth, Googie Withers, Robert Hardy, Katherine Schlessinger.
The last of the six to reach the screens, and hardest to dramatised. Much of the gothic parody inevitably lost. Robert Hardy's jovial General Tilney is enjoyable.
- *Sense and Sensibility*, BBCV4332 (1990). 174 mins.
Dramatised by Alexander Baron, producer Barry Letts, director Rodney Bennett.
Tightly edited and with dubious sound quality; would benefit from a 'complete and digitally remastered' version as provided for *P&F*. The treatment of the Dashwoods' parsimony, and the outstandingly pedestrian demeanour of Colonel Brandon, remain in the memory.
- *Sense and Sensibility* [Recently released on video] (1995)
Dramatised by Emma Thompson, director Ang Lee
Starring Emma Thompson (Elinor), Alan Rickman, Kate Winslet (Marianne), Hugh Grant (Edward Ferrars), Greg Wise (Willoughby), Imogen Stubbs, Gemma Jones
➔ Go to the official Web site for this movie version of *Sense and Sensibility*; (other site)
➔ Go to an article on the current wave of "Austenmania" (including an interview with the producer of the new *Sense and Sensibility* film).
- *Pride and Prejudice*, BBCV4960 (1993). Double video, 259 mins. (previously, shorter version BBCV4331).
Dramatised by Fay Weldon, producer Jonathan Powell, director Cyril Coke.
Starring Elizabeth Garvie and David Rintoul.
Novelist Fay Weldon plays this one for laughs; Mr. Collins and Mary (with book permanently 18

inches from her nose) are prominent. Strong leads for Elizabeth and Darcy.

- Bad news: the longer remastered version of this video is not available in the U.S. I bought the remastered video at the BBC World shop in Bush House, near Kingsway in London. They are constantly being asked about US-compatible videos and simply give the CBS address (see at end). (Having flogged the rights, I suppose they can't then produce US versions themselves.) The address for mail order is BBC Video Ltd, BBC Worldwide Ltd, 80 Wood Lane, London W12 0TT. Phone is 0181-576-2000 and fax is 0181-576-3264, but be warned that European videos are in a format that generally cannot be played on US VCR's (PAL instead of NTSC).
- Pride and Prejudice, BBCV 5702 (1995). Double video, 301 mins. Adapted by Andrew Davies, producer Sue Birtwistle, director Simon Langton. Starring Jennifer Ehle, Colin Firth, David Bamber, Crispin Bonham-Carter and Susannah Harker. Darcy is seen fencing, and at Pemberley he is dripping wet in shirtsleeves, after an energetic dip in the lake, when he meets Elizabeth. These scenes, and others of Lydia and Wickham in London, are added to show the modern viewer that gentlemen did more than just dance, pose in drawing rooms and shoot wildlife. This production takes more liberties than the old Fay Weldon one did, but much can be forgiven in such a competent piece of TV drama. There's always the book.
 - This was first shown in America over the A&E cable network, on Jan. 14-16, 1996 (and has been reshowed there from time to time).
 - See also the Pride and Prejudice movie discussion bulletin board
- Pride and Prejudice, Warner Home Video / MGM / Loew's Incorporated (1940; video 1989), black-and-white. Screenplay by Aldous Huxley and Jane Murfin, producer Hunt Stromberg, director Robert Z. Leonard. Starring Greer Garson and Laurence Olivier. Yes, "that version" is available on video. As it says on the box, "when the proud, aristocratic Mr. Darcy condescends to enter the Bennets' lives by proposing marriage to Elizabeth, nothing but confusion follows". Mrs. Bennet, surely, is W. C. Fields in drag.

Date: Sun, 4 Feb 1996 15:22:46 -0500

From: RSMITH@RUNT.DAWSONCOLLEGE.QC.CA (Ray Smith)

Pride and Prejudice Casts and Production

Script	Aldous Huxley, Jane Murfin	Fay Weldon	Andrew Davies
Dir or Prod	Robert Z. Leonard	Cyril Coke d. Simon Langton	p. Sue Birtwistle
Role	1940	1985	1995
Elizabeth	Greer Garson	Elizabeth Garvie	Jennifer Ehle
Darcy	Laurence Olivier	David Rintoul	Colin Firth
Jane	Maureen O'Sullivan	Sabina Franklyn	Susannah Harker
Bingley	Bruce Lester	Osmund Bullock	Crispin Bonham-Carter
Mr Bennet	Edmund Gwynn	Moray Watson	Benjamin Withrow
Mrs Bennet	Mary Boland	Priscilla Morgan	Alison Steadman
Lydia	Ann Rutherford	Natalie Ogle	Julia Sawalha

Kitty	Heather Angel	Clare Higgins	Polly Maberly
Mary	Marsha Hunt	Tessa Peake-Jones	Lucy Briers
Mrs Phillips	May Beatty	Shirley Cain	Lynn Farleigh
Mr Collins	Melville Cooper	Malcolm Rennie	David Bamber
Mr Wickham	Edward Ashley	Peter Settelen	Adrian Lukis
Capt Denny	Marten Lamont	Andrew Johns	David Bark-Jones
Caroline	Frieda Inescourt	Marsha Fitzalan	Anna Chancellor
Mrs Hurst	_____	Jennifer Granville	Lucy Robinson
Mr Hurst	_____	Edward Arthur	Rupert Vansittart
Georgiana D	_____	Emma Jacobs	Emilia Fox
Col Fitzw'm	_____	Desmond Adams	Anthony Calf
Lady Cath.	Edna Mae Oliver	Judy Parfitt	Barbara Leigh-Hunt
Anne DeB'rg'h	Gia Kent	Moir Leslie	Nadia Chambers
Sir William	E.E. Clive	Peter Howell	Christopher Benjamin
Lady Lucas	Marjorie Wood	Elizabeth Stewart	Norma Streader
Charlotte	Karen Morley	Irene Richards	Lucy Scott
Mrs Gardiner	_____	Barbara Shelley	Joanna David
Mr Gardiner	_____	Michael Lees	Tim Wylton

- *Mansfield Park*, BBCV4333 (1990). Double video, 261 mins.
Dramatised by Ken Taylor, producer Betty Willingale, director David Giles.
Starring Anna Massey, Bernard Hepton, Nicholas Farrel, Sylvestra Le Touzel.
Sylvestra Le Touzel plays Fanny with a baffled air, like a mole just emerged into the light. But not without charm. The theatricals give the dramatisation a solid centre. Anna Massey is outstanding as Aunt Norris.
- *Emma*, BBCV4997 (1993). Double video, 257 mins.
Dramatised by Denis Constanduros, producer Martin Lisemore, director John Glenister.
Starring Doran Godwin, John Carson, Donald Eccles, Constance Chapman.
Solid adaptation. Harriet Smith stultifyingly dim, not a role for a young actress to kill for.

Date: Sun, 11 Aug 1996 09:48:28 -0700

From: Lura Raplee

Cast of 1972 BBC *Emma*
(now available on CBS Fox video)

Emma Woodhouse	Doran Godwin
Mr. Knightley	John Carson
Mr. Woodhouse	Donald Eccles
Miss Bates	Constance Chapman
Mrs. Weston	Ellen Dryden
Mr. Weston	Raymond Adamson
Frank Churchill	Robert East
Jane Fairfax	Ania Marson
Mrs. Elton	Fiona Walker
Mr. Elton	Timothy Peters
Harriet Smith	Debbie Bowen
Robert Martin	John Alkin
Mrs. Goddard	Mollie Sugden
Mrs. Cole	Hilda Fenemore
Isabella Knightley	Meg Gleed
John Knightley	John Kelland

Directed by John Glenister
 Produced by Martin Lisemore
 Dramatised by Denis Constanduros
 Designer Tim Hervey
 Costume Designer Joan Ellacott
 Music Arranged Tom McCall
 Dances Arranged Geraldine Stephenson

- *Emma*, initial release August 1996.
 Director: Douglas McGrath, Gwyneth Paltrow as Emma Woodhouse.
 ➔ Go to the official Web site for this movie version of *Emma*
- *Emma* (1996) 2hrs. (ITV)
 Adapted by Andrew Davies, produced by Sue Birtwhistle
 Kate Beckinsale as Emma Woodhouse.
 (Rumors of a BBC miniseries *Emma*, to appear in 1997, were based on the early plans for what later became the ITV *Emma*.)
 ➔ Go to official Web site for this movie version of *Emma* (was aired in the U.K. in Nov. 1996, in the U.S. on Feb. 1997)

Date: Tue, 19 Nov 1996 19:54:05 -0800
 From: S Bishop

CAST LIST

Emma Woodhouse Kate Beckinsale
 George Knightley .. Mark Strong
 Harriet Smith Samantha Morton
 Frank Churchill ... Raymond Coulthard
 Miss Bates Prunella Scales
 Mr. Woodhouse Bernard Hepton
 Mr. Elton Dominic Rowan
 Mrs. Elton Lucy Robinson
 Mrs. Weston Samantha Bond
 Mr. Weston James Hazeldine
 Jane Fairfax Olivia Williams
 John Knightley Guy Henry
 Isabella Woodhouse Dido Miles

- *Persuasion*, BBCV4996 (1993). Double video, 225 mins. (Originally produced by Granada Television in 1971 and 'bought in' to complete the set of six.)
 Adapted by Julian Mitchell, produced and directed by Howard Baker.
 Starring Ann Firbank and Bryan Marshall.
 A production as true to the book as the other five. Even older than the others, so production values now look rickety, but the content is there. Bryan Marshall stands out as being as handsome as the blond pretty-boy actors who play the hollow Willoughby, Wickham, and the younger Mr. Elliot in this selection of videos -- even though he is not the villain.
- *Persuasion*, BBCV5616 (1995), 102 mins.
 Screenplay by Nick Dear, producer Fiona Finlay, director Roger Mitchell.
 Starring Amanda Root and Ciaran Hinds.
 Good modern television drama, taken at a dizzying pace (less than half the length of the 1971 rendition). The media hype calculated to make the most of controversial aspects, such as the public kiss between Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth, marks a new approach to Jane Austen on TV.

→ [Go to the official Web site for this movie version of *Persuasion*](#)

This has now been released on video in the US with a hokey generic romance-novel cover which seems to have nothing to do with the movie: an unknown woman in very heavy makeup, and with a loose Hollywood interpretation of an 18th-century barmaid's costume slipping off her bosom, is being nuzzled by a very young man with a trendy asymmetrical Generation-X haircut. (If one were feeling somewhat charitable, one *could* choose to interpret this as a modernized, glamourized, spiced-up version of the first engagement between Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth in 1806, with Kellynch Hall looming in the background – though maybe not as ominously as it should loom).

In the United States, BBC videos are handled by CBS Fox Home Entertainment, 5th Floor, 1330 Avenue of the Americas, New York, New York 10019. The above is probably not a list of all available Jane Austen adaptations on tape, nor a promotion for the BBC, but a record of a series of 'true' and perhaps old-fashioned adaptations unlikely to survive the upcoming boom in new and glossy movie-style productions.



[Return to Jane Austen info page table of contents](#)



[Return to Jane Austen's writings](#)

Harvard Summer Class Bulletin

HARVARD

A black and white collage of Harvard University scenes. The top right shows the front steps of the Widener Memorial Library with its classical columns and the text 'WIDENER MEMORIAL LIBRARY' visible. The top left shows a building with a large 'H' logo. The middle left shows a rowing team on a pond. The middle right shows students walking on a path. The bottom half shows a brick gate with two towers and a person on a bicycle.

SUMMER SCHOOL

JUNE 23-AUGUST 15, 1997

Preview of Programs

Course Information

Harvard Summer School is in session from June 23 to August 15, 1997. Courses run for eight weeks and carry either four or eight units of credit. Most classes are held during the day; many are offered in the early evening. The maximum recommended course load is eight units. (Other subject areas or courses may be added; courses listed below are subject to change.)

Anthropology

Introduction to Social Anthropology
Rediscovering Past Societies:
Introduction to Archaeology
Field Methods in Maya Archaeology:
The Harvard Field School of Copán,
Honduras

Astronomy

Fundamentals of Contemporary
Astronomy: Stars, Galaxies, and the
Universe

Biology

Introductory Biology
Chemical and Biological Evolution
Biological Perspectives on HIV and AIDS
Marine Biology
Plants of the Tropics
Principles of Cell Biology
Principles of Genetics
Neurobiology
Principles and Techniques of Molecular
Biology
Introduction to Immunology

Celtic Languages & Literatures

Introduction to Irish Myth and Folklore
Introduction to Modern Irish

Chemistry

General Chemistry
Organic Chemistry

Chinese

Intensive Elementary Modern Chinese
Practical Chinese
Elementary Modern Chinese
Intermediate Modern Chinese

The Classics

Greek Drama
Greco-Roman Mythology

Comparative Literature

The Bible and Its Interpreters
Baudelaire, Ibsen, and Joyce: Sacred
Beauty, Moral Realism, and Modern
Literature
European Culture in the Latin Middle Ages

Computer Science

Microcomputers and Information
Technology
Elements of Computer Science Using
C++
Intensive Introduction to Computer
Science Using C++
Computer Science II: Implementation
of Abstract Models
Data Structures and Algorithms Using
C and UNIX
Java Programming
Database Management Systems
Object-Oriented Software Engineering

Dramatic Arts

Introduction to Acting
Workshop in Stage Design
Acting Workshop: Developing
a Character
Acting Workshop: Shakespeare
Directing Workshop
Comedy Workshop

Economics

Principles of Economics
Principles of Economics:
Microeconomics
Principles of Economics:
Macroeconomics
Introduction to Managerial Finance

Introduction to Capital Markets and
Investments

Microeconomic Theory
Macroeconomic Theory
Money, Banking, and Financial
Institutions
International Trade and Commercial
Policy
Understanding Japanese Business
Econometric Modeling and Business
Forecasting
Corporate Governance
International Business
Financial Accounting
Managerial Accounting
Managerial Finance
Capital Markets and Investments
Futures, Options, and Financial
Derivatives
Quantitative Methods in Economics
and Business
Doing Business with Pacific Rim
Countries

Education

Financial Management and Control in
Nonprofit Organizations

Engineering Science

A CAD/CAM Approach to Engineering
Design

English & American Literature & Language

Shakespeare
Modern British Fiction
Jane Austen
Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton
African-American Women Writers
The Literature of the American West

Expository, Creative, & Professional Writing

Expository Writing
Cross-Cultural Expository Writing
Expository Writing and Literature
Expository Writing and History
Writing about Current Social Issues
The Essay
Expository Writing

Creative Writing

Autobiography
Beginning Fiction
Beginning Poetry
Beginning Journalism
Beginning Scriptwriting
Writing Humor
Intermediate Fiction
Intermediate Poetry
Graduate Fiction Workshop

Professional Writing

Writing Grant Proposals
Principles of Editing
Legal Writing
Effective Business Communication
Desktop Publishing and the Internet

Fine Arts

The Architecture of Boston

French

Elementary French
Intermediate French
French Oral Survival
French for Reading Knowledge
Post-War French Thought: The Politics
of Poetics

Germanic Languages & Literatures

Elementary German
Introduction to German for Reading
Knowledge

Government

Introduction to Political Philosophy
Introduction to American Government
Introduction to International Relations
Modern Political Philosophy
Western European Politics
Ethnic Conflict
Judicial Politics
Urban Politics and Government
The Middle East in the Post-Cold
War Era
American Foreign Policy
War Crimes, Genocide, and Justice
Ukrainian Politics in Transition
State and Society in Contemporary
Ukraine

Greek, Ancient

Greek for Beginners

Hebrew

Hebrew and Its Culture

History

Western Civilization, 1500 to the
Present
United States in the Twentieth Century
Twentieth-Century Ukraine
The American Civil War, 1861-1865
Abraham Lincoln
Daily Life in the Shogun's Japan

History of Science

Darwin, Freud, and Einstein

Humanities

Introduction to Graduate Study in
Humanities

Italian

Elementary Italian

Japanese

Practical Japanese
Elementary Japanese
Intermediate Japanese
Advanced Japanese

Korean

Beginning Korean

Latin

Beginning Latin
Virgil: *Aeneid*

Linguistics

Introduction to Linguistics
Introduction to Syntax: Aspects of the
Structure of Language

Mathematics

College Algebra
Precalculus Mathematics
Intensive Calculus
Calculus I
Calculus II
Multivariable Calculus
Linear Algebra and Differential Equations
Quantitative Reasoning
Noncredit Course Offering
Mathematics Review for the GMAT
and GRE

Music

The Evolution of Modern Jazz through
Jazz-Rock and Fusion
World Music and Ethnomusicology

Near Eastern Languages & Civilizations

Intensive Ottoman Summer School in
Turkey
Field School and Education Program for
Ashkelon Excavations: The Leon Levy
Expedition

Philosophy

Problems of Philosophy
Introduction to Logic
Biomedical Ethics

Physics

Principles of Physics
Laboratory Electronics: Analog and
Digital Circuit Design

Psychology

Introduction to Psychology
Abnormal Psychology
Why People Change: Psychology of
Influence
Law and Psychology
Crime and Justice

Study of Religion

The Apocalyptic Imagination in *Fin de
Siècle* Japan and America

Russian

Elementary Russian
Intermediate Russian I
Intermediate Russian II
Advanced Russian

Sanskrit

Elementary Sanskrit

Social Sciences

Introduction to Graduate Study in Social
Sciences

Sociology

Gender and Culture
Family Violence and Legal Intervention
Health, Medicine, and Society

Spanish

Elementary Spanish
Intermediate Spanish
Spanish Oral Survival
Spanish through Media

Statistics

Introduction to Quantitative Methods

Ukrainian

Beginning Ukrainian
Intermediate Ukrainian
Advanced Ukrainian for Business
Twentieth-Century Ukrainian Literature:
Sexuality, Gender, and Politics

Visual & Environmental Studies

Introduction to Digital Media: Text,
Image, Motion, and Interactivity
Introduction to Still Photography
Crucial Issues in Landscape Creation and
Perception
Adventure, Fantasy, and Visual
Representation of Alternate
Topography
Principles of Graphic Design
Painting Studio
Figure Drawing
Classics of World Cinema
Social Documentary Photography

Women's Studies

Women, Feminism, and History
Women, Popular Culture, and the 1950s:
I Like Ike but I Love Lucy

Unpublished Essay Courtesy of John Forde
and Dr. Linda V. Troost

LINDA VERONIKA TROOST, PHD
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH
WASHINGTON AND JEFFERSON COLLEGE
WASHINGTON, PA 15301-4801
LTROOST@WASHJEFF.EDU

PHONE: 412-223-6144

FAX : 412-223-5271

March 27, 1997

Ms. Heather Rimer
C-328 Thatcher Hall
Collegedale, TN 37315

Dear Heather,

Here are the two essays I promised you about Austenmania. Both are still drafts (hence the rather messy and/or absent documentation), but I don't think that will cause you any problems.

The article by John Forde (john.forde@stonebow.otago.ac.nz) first appeared in a college magazine called Critic (1996), but I cannot give you any details on it. You might write him and ask if you really need to know (but you'll need their page numbers, too). I've left all the New Zealand punctuation as it is, and I should be getting a revised version in about two weeks (the content will be pretty much the same; the documentation and chronology will be the main changes).

The piece by Kristin Samuelian (ksamueli@osf1.gmu.edu) is also a bit rough (no works cited, for example, to go with the refs), but you can figure out what's what. Just bear this in mind when you quote so that no one looks too silly.

For documentation purposes, you can use the page numbers that the mss. use and list them in the bib as coming from:

Jane Austen Goes to the Movies. Ed. Linda V. Troost. Special issue of Topic: A Journal of the Liberal Arts 48 (1997), forthcoming.

You may need to check up on the latest form for this (not all the style manuals seem to address this format; I got it from the 1985 MLA Style Manual).

Good luck,

Linda V. Troost

Janespotting

(DRAFT)

John Forde

University of Otago

Dust off your teasetts and press your petticoats--the Jane Train is in town! The 18th-century vicar's daughter who seldom trod beyond her home town of Steventon, refused two marriage proposals and hid her manuscripts so visitors wouldn't know she was writing, is back--and she's HIP! Sure, she's been the literary pin-up girl for many an errant English lecturer, and she still gets the twin-set-and-pearl brigade moist with delight, but our Jane is now BIG. If she weren't dead, I've no doubt Jane would be making a killing from the talk-show circuit. Imagine it: '. . . and on today's episode, Oprah meets Jane Austen!' But to the present.

Over the last year, the tireless troupers at the BBC have made new adaptations of Emma, Persuasion, and Pride and Prejudice (which finished its triumphant televisual tour of duty in October). Simultaneously, Americans Sydney Pollack and Lindsey Doran produced a film version of Sense and Sensibility, directed by Taiwanese Ang Lee. Sense and Sensibility earned massive critical and box-office success, including every imaginable writers' award for Emma Thompson's screenplay. Thompson, the definitive chummy-old-Girls'-Own-brick, also turned in a fine performance as Elinor Dashwood, bagged co-star Greg Wise, and disposed of hubby Kenneth Branagh . . . but that's another story.

Then there's Clueless, the delightfully vacuous American teen flick, directed by Amy Heckerling and starring New-Stick-On-The-Block Alicia Silverstone as Cher, the modern day Emma. Austen's heroines don't completely equate with these pimple-free nose-jobbed cellphone-toting Beverly Hills Girls, but Jane is still there, somewhere. Just wait for the upcoming Hollywood Emma movie, with Gwyneth Paltrow in the title role. Jane in America?

'It is a truth universally acknowledged, dude, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a hamburger. . . .'

Jane Austen, Inc.

And of course, because we're living in a post-Star Wars generation, there is the merchandising! Austen's novels have hit the bestsellers' lists, tourist visitations to Austen's house in Hampshire were up 250% last October, the Jane Austen cookbook, period-music CDs and apron-and-tea-towel sets are selling furiously well. As you are reading this, dear reader, have no doubt that the Jane Austen ashtray and Jane Austen exercycle are in production.

Been Feeling A Bit Moist Lately?

Critics and reviewers report a wave of mass Jane-hysteria sweeping, virus-like, through the UK. 11 million UK television viewers watched the last episode of Pride and Prejudice. Highways were jammed with hysterical motorists, panicking that they wouldn't get home in time to see Elizabeth accept Mr Darcy. The video, released half way through the television screenings, sold out in two hours. Thousands of distressed punters rang up the BBC, tearfully imploring for assurance that all would end well for the lovers. Still more eyebrow-raising is the emergence of actor Colin Firth (who plays romantic lead Mr Darcy) as a sex symbol of epic proportions. Firth fled, confused, to Tunisia, whilst women paid £500 for his shirt, swapped fantasies over the Internet (the Colin Firth web site is <http://www.inpui.edu/rogersc/firth.html>--women only please--queer netters with a penchant for Le Firth must go elsewhere), and tabloids interviewed lorry drivers and insulation engineers named Darcy. Jennifer Ehle received a BAFTA award for her performance as Elizabeth. In her acceptance speech, she thanked her wig--an amusing detail, when we consider that Louis Menand, New York Times Review of Books reviewer, was 'crushed' to find Ehle a blonde in real life. English critic Martin Amis thought her smile was 'orgasmic'; as far as we know, Ehle doesn't fake her smiles.

All this from books which are over 200 years old, and films with no nudity, no sex

scenes, no swearing, no gunfights, where love and respectability are achieved with nary the rattling of a teacup. Jane has always been popular--since the publication of her biography by J. E. Austen Leigh in 1870, a cult following of devoted Janeites has sprung up. But is Jane truly 'the Quentin Tarantino of the middle classes' as BBC head of drama Charles Denton has said? Jane said in a letter in 1814, '3 or 4 families in a Country Village is the very thing to work on'. It seems she's been proved right. Then again, as I laughed my way through the film of Sense and Sensibility, I noted that the witty dialogue was more Emma (Thompson) than Jane.

So, what exactly about this strange anthropological phenomenon do we all find so intriguing, and why? I set out on a mission to explain the Plain Jane revival, and found a mammoth array of scholarly articles, columns and reviews--from the psychoanalysts to Sally Jessie Raphael, everyone wants to tell us why we love Jane Austen. There are many theories to explain the Jane revival--some convincing, some amusing, and some clearly fabricated by spaced-out academics desperately looking for an angle to hang their careers on.

Bring On The Cucumber Sandwiches

Firstly, there's no denying that costume drama or 'period pieces' are hugely popular. Think of A Room With A View (Merchant/Ivory, UK, 1986): a young rich girl with clear skin, eyes like ponds, and hair of dazzling beauty falls in love with a young brooding hero in Vaseline-splodged countryside and charmingly exotic subject people. Throw in Kiri Te Kanawa singing in Italian, and you have critics and audiences worldwide weak at the knees.

This worries some people. By romanticising and glamorising our history, we are ignoring all those messy, unpleasant things about the colonial past--sexism, racism, widespread poverty, environmental destruction, homophobia . . . you get the idea. The Jane revival is living proof that colonial cringe is alive and flourishing in New Zealand: we think British drama is better because it is more 'subtle' (ie, evasive, repressed and anally retentive). Honesty and emotional candour is just so . . . American, isn't it? We have a sneaking admiration, I suspect,

for the British prep-school/Hugh Grant crisis management technique: say nothing, cough politely, and ask Nanny. If that fails, pay a prostitute to give you oral sex in a taxi on Sunset Boulevard.

Critic Martin Amis calls this pattern 'post-Empire tristesse', and it's probably bad for us. Why reminisce about a society we're gladly free of, from a small island in the Northern Hemisphere? Aren't our own antipodean experiences more important? Why should we look back into a mythic past to search for meaning?

Other commentators argue that our renewed interest in period pieces is neither unusual nor criminal. Nicola Cummins, Janeite and Teaching Fellow in English at the University of Otago, suggests the revival is a reaction to 'millennium angst'. Millennium Angst? Namely, our anxieties and uncertainties following the breakdown of organised religion, nuclear testing, the greenhouse effect, AIDS, the ascendancy of Rupert Murdoch and the World Bank . . . Austen provides a bright and amusing world, where good behaviour is rewarded and happy endings are possible, without feeling like a disease-of-the-week movie.

Coming Out of the Corset

The new period piece carefully seeks to avoid the glamorising of history. We've learnt that IT'S BAD to enjoy films with pretty people and elaborate costumes, because we can recognise the negative consequences of such an idealisation. So the new period piece strains towards a new 'authenticity'. There is period horse shit in the streets being swept into the period sewers along with the period poor people. Elizabeth, Darcy, Anne, Wentworth, Elinor, Edward, and Marianne are now bored, limited and sexually repressed. Cue heaving bosoms, muted looks of lust, pregnant pauses and (Austen's favourite) the blush! In Persuasion, not only are the characters uptight, but they're not picture perfect: hair is limp, costumes are wrinkled. Anne is gaunt and pale, Wentworth looks as if he shaves in the dark with a blunt fruit knife, and they both look in desperate need of a good shag. Andrew Davies, the BBC scriptwriter for Pride and Prejudice, said 'There is a lot of repressed sexuality in Austen's

work, and I have let it out'. Go Andy go! Critic Martin Amis had some fun with this, writing: 'climbing from the bath, Darcy looks out of the window and sees Elizabeth romping with a dog. Returning to Pemberley, unshaven, with the hot horse between his thighs, he dismounts and impetuously jumps into a pond. Here, clearly we are moving away from Jane Austen, towards D. H. Lawrence. . . .'

It is a curious trade-off: we are allowed to wallow in the aesthetics of the past, but we are discouraged from nostalgia because we see the suffering of the characters. However, because it is fiction, the characters can escape. Lucy, Elinor, Elizabeth et al., are likable because they seem more like us--they challenge the limits of their own societies and display pioneering courage. It's an act of benevolence on our part, that we, a supposedly sexually enlightened society, can set history free from itself.

I Am Jane, Hear Me Roar!

Take caution though, that in our rush to revise the past, we do not forget that Jane was critiquing her society very perceptively. Her novels focus on the experiences of women, who are neither stunningly beautiful nor angelically virtuous--in other words, they seem real and identifiable. Elizabeth, Elinor, Marianne and Anne languish in genteel property, and must face the realities of survival by entering the only career open to them--marriage. Their struggles between desire and reason are universal and timeless, and, to a certain degree, intersexual.

Their Eyes Met Over A Sea of Teacups

Part of the Austen revival may be more simple than we care to admit: she tells a good love story, and provides us with happy endings without insulting our intelligence. Pride and Prejudice isn't exactly pro-feminist--women are still dependent on men, and all the novels' problems end in the supposedly idyllic state of marriage. Still Austen works well with her limitations: Elizabeth has the pleasure of turning Mr Darcy down, £10000 a year and all, and allows her female characters to achieve a (fictional) happiness.

Then, of course, there's Mr Darcy. After reading about British Darcymania, I wondered,

perplexed, how this could be. Then, one of my friends, also a Janeite, told me to take a closer look at Darcy. Tall, dark, handsome, brooding, witty, intelligent, and with £10000 a year. Hmmm! Almost sounds worth struggling into a corset for, really. My 'little people' in the tabloids tell me that Ehle and Firth 'sizzle' in Pride and Prejudice, and actually had an offscreen affair during filming. Tune in and watch the sparks fly, woof! woof!; that kind of thing.

Some critics have sneered that Austen is just soap opera for snobs, who like to think it's somehow more intelligent and challenging because the characters are in fancy dress and have BBC voices. Perhaps, perhaps not. But Jane is Jane is Jane: would we want Darcy and Elizabeth with anoraks and blue rinses, rasping 'Rack off, Sharon, ya slag!'

Skewering Them Sweetly

I believe Jane's fundamental attraction is her wit. She wrote within a social regime where revolution was impossible, and social change difficult to achieve. So, she survived and endured her society by subtly ridiculing it, as do her characters. We feel brainy when we watch and read Austen's stories, because she strips bare the outer layer of decorum, good manners and social pleasantries, to poke fun and ridicule it all. We think it especially clever if Jane and her characters can ridicule people and situations without being noticed. The small screen is especially good for this, as we can see Elizabeth's smirks, arched eyebrows, and sly smiles when the oily Mr Collins or the calcified Lady Catherine cannot. Join the conspiracy and laugh!

In Clueless, Cher says she and her friend Dionne are 'named after famous singers from the past who now do infomercials'. The camera pans over a painting of Cher's mother, 'who died tragically during a routine liposuction'. It's funny because Cher is blissfully unaware of her own ridiculousness but appealing enough to make us care about her and rejoice at her successful mating.

All Good Things Must Come To An End

So, to conclude. Jane Austen is hot. I've attempted to reason why this is but, like other critics, ended up asking if the revival is a good thing. Like the Trojan Horse, is Jane a nemesis to the 20th century, seducing us with romanticised repression and a foolish return to the mythical past? I think we are safe from the corrupting forces of Austen's BBC-promoted Mother England, if we recognise that these films are not history, but imagined historical fiction. They provide a way of looking at history, but one filtered through artistic and aesthetic agendas. So try not to take Jane, television or history too seriously, make some tea, and enjoy the fun!

John Forde was born in Invercargill, New Zealand. At 17, he realised his mistake and moved three hours north. He lives in Dunedin and is presently studying dead poets, weird foreign films (and law, for his sins) at The University of Otago. He is a contributing writer to Critic, the university publication, and his first short story was placed fourth in the 1996 Out and Proud National Short Story competition. He is not married, and does not have two children and a Labrador.

Sources more or less plagiarised from:

David Matthews, 'Austenticity', 'Real Time' 13, June-July 1996

Gabrielle Finnane, 'Remarks on Jane Austen and the Period Film' and Maila Stivens,

'Desperately Seeking Mr Darcy', 'Metro' (Australia), No. 106, 1996

Martin Amis, 'Persuasion Jane', 'HQ Magazine', April 1996

'The Concise Oxford Companion To English Literature', ed. Margaret Drabble and Jenny Stringer (Oxford University Press, 1985)

Richard Schickel, 'Kissing Cousins', 'Time', 19 February 1996

Works Cited

- Adams, Ted. <teda@eos.com> "Austen Popularity." Personal email. (21 Mar. 1997).
- Alleva, Richard. "Emma Can Read, Too." Commonweal 8 March 1996: 15.
- Ansen, David. "In This Fine Romance, Virtue Is Rewarded." Newsweek 9 Oct. 1995: 78.
- Austen, Jane. Jane Austen, Her Complete Novels. New Jersey: Gramercy, 1992.
- Bellafante, Ginia. "Sick of Jane Austen Yet?" Time 15 Jan. 1996: 66.
- "The Best of 1995." Time 25 Dec. 1995: 137-139.
- Boorstin, Daniel J. "Marriage, She Wrote." U.S. News and World Report 31 Aug. 1992 & 7 Sept. 1992: 93.
- Brennan, Mary. "See Jane Surf: Surf, Jane, Surf!" 1996 MSNBC
<<http://www.biddeford.com/~gwallace/surf.html>> (14 Apr. 1996).
- Brownstein, Rachel M. Becoming a Heroine. New York: Viking Penguin, 1994.
- Bush, Douglas. Jane Austen. New York: Collier Books, 1975.
- Churchyard, Henry. "Jane Austen's Novels: BBC and Other Film/Video Adaptations."
<<http://uts.cc.utexas.edu/~churchh/jabbccvid.html>> (14 Apr. 1996).
- Clancy, Kathleen, ed. Official Register of Harvard University. 1 Feb. 1997:22.
- "Classical Keeping Score." Billboard 22 June 1996:33.
- Dean, Sherry. "Hollywood Popularizes Jane Austen." CNN 14 Jan. 1996. <http://www-cgi.cnn.com/SHOWBIZ/Movies/9601/jane_austen/index.html> (14 Apr. 1997).
- Devereaux, E. "Austen's First, Wharton's Last." Publisher's Weekly 24 May 1993: 44-45.
- "EW Entertainers of the Year: Jane Austen." Entertainment Weekly Online
<<http://pathfinder.com/@@haaiJgQAe2.../features/eoty/307-308-EOTY10.html>>
1 Jan. 1997.
- Forde, John. "Janespotting." U. of Otago 1996.
- Gold, Joel L. "Heady Days for Jane Austen Scholars." Chronicle of Higher Education 9 Feb. 1996: B3.

- Gose, Ben. "Promoting Intellectual Life." Chronicle of Higher Education 8 March 1996: A34.
- Haden-Guest, Anthony, et al. "Austen Anew." New Yorker 21-28 Aug. 1995: 55-56.
- Ingalls, Zoe. "America's Largest Collection of Materials by and about Jane Austen." Chronicle of Higher Education 12 April 1996: B4.
- Juhasz, Suzanne. Reading from the Heart. New York: Viking Penguin, 1994.
- Kaufman, David. "Law and Propriety in Austen." ELH Summer 1992: 385-409.
- Kroll, Jack. "Jane Austen Does Lunch." Newsweek 18 Dec. 1995: 66-68.
- Miller, Laura. "Austen-Mania." Salon 12 Dec. 1995;
<http://node54.salon1999.com/02dec1995/buttonbar/austen2.map?>
- Rapping, Elayne. "The Jane Austen Thing." Progressive July 1996: 37.
- Rothstein, Edward. "Jane Austen Meets Mr. Right." New York Times 10 Dec. 1995, natl. ed., sec. 4: 10 & 14.
- Schickel, Richard. "Kissing Cousins." Time 18 Dec. 1995: 72.
- Thomas, Evan. "Hooray for Hypocrisy." Newsweek 29 Jan. 1996: 61.
- Troha, Rick. <rickt@nwsup.com> "RE: AUSTEN RESURGENCE...request for help." Personal email. (22 Mar. 1997).
- Turbide, Diane. "Sense and Sexuality." Maclean's 12 Feb. 1996: 93.
- Youdelman, Rachel. <RYoudelman@aol.com> "Re Austen." Personal email. (21 Mar. 1997).
- . <RYoudelman@aol.com> "About Austen." Personal email. (24 Mar. 1997).