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Flipping the Jane Austen Classroom

Lynda A. Hall

KEYWORDS: adaptation, commodification, diversity, film, flipped classroom, pedagogy

ABSTRACT: The contemporary Austen classroom might appreciate cultural and racial diversity, examine popular culture's distortions of the original texts, and consider multimodal ways of reading. This paper reflects on a course that "flipped" the research process in order to "find" Austen and her works in the popular culture and to evaluate our understanding in the twenty-first century. Students discovered the commodification and distortion of "Jane Austen" and conducted research for creative projects to learn more about the social, cultural, and historical contexts of the written texts.

I recently won a gift basket at a local Jane Austen Society meeting, and in addition to a book, a T-shirt, a tin of tea, a travel mug, and a bottle of wine, I found a cake of “Ardently” soap, which came from Northanger Soapworks. The soap was delicately wrapped in a swatch of muslin that was sealed with wax: “Inspired by Mr. Darcy’s extraordinary words, this romantic artisan soap denotes those ardent feelings with a riot of red and pink hues: ‘In vain I have struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you.’” The soap’s paper sleeve continues: “In the 2005 film adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, Mr. Darcy proposes outdoors in the rain during his visit to Kent. This fragrance transports us to that beautiful rotunda in which they stood and felt so deeply.”

As a Jane Austen scholar and a professor of British literature, I am appalled by this poor reading, and I would not consider this first (rejected) proposal “romantic” nor the Kentish rain a setting from the novel. Cleary, as confessed in the promotional materials, this entrepreneur has been inspired more by the 2005 film than by the novel. But the soap smells heavenly, and the looks exquisitely designed, so I passed the Ardently soap around my Flipping Jane Austen college classroom. My students swooned over the scent and marveled at the details of the packaging, but they also bristled at the packaging.

Since this exercise came at the end of the semester, the students had at that point determined that Northanger Soapworks is typical of the marketplace of tchotchkes—inspired by but not necessarily reflective of the actual words written by Austen. After reading all six of the completed novels, studying various historical and theoretical texts, and perusing the world of Austen fandom, the thirteen students in my class became skeptical of anything from the consumer world that purported to be “Jane Austen.”

When I envisioned this course, I did not intend to produce a class full of skeptics. In fact, I was not sure what they would find when I set them loose searching for “Jane Austen” in the contemporary world. In an effort to answer this special issue’s question about the future of Austen studies, my initial questions were “Where will new Austen readers come from in the twenty-first century?” and “How does a teacher address these new readers?” The answers came through appreciating the cultural and racial diversity in recent adaptations, examining popular culture’s distortions of the original texts, and considering multimodal ways of reading, interpreting, and adapting the texts.¹

My first exposure to Austen, in the late 1970s, came in a college English course. I was hooked and signed myself up for an independent study to read the rest of Austen’s novels, eventually devoting my PhD research to the world of the Austen novel. But after several decades of teaching and three waves of film and television adaptations, I have observed that most of my students have come to first hear of Austen through film. I have thus been challenged to capture this audience and help them to read the words of the written texts more closely. Now, since most of my students no longer have a DVD player, nor do they subscribe to cable television, much of their entertainment and information comes through some form of Web streaming or browsing. I wonder, therefore, how might the classroom adapt to this new kind of media landscape, and how might Web series, social media, and consumer goods influence students’ concepts of “classic” literature? My goal when designing this course, then, was to track how the current college students discover Austen and what they might find if I set them to search for the mythical author in popular culture.

The students in the course were a mix of upper-division undergraduate English majors and graduate MA/MFA students. They all identified themselves as “millennials,” since they were

all born in the 1990s, and they had lived most of their lives with the Internet and social media. For several years now, I have integrated technology into my traditional literature classroom, even converting most of my courses to a “hybrid” format, or partially taught in the classroom and partially taught online. In some pedagogical circles, this is one of several methods that have become known as “flipping” the classroom.

According to the Center for Teaching Innovation at Cornell University, “[f]lipping the classroom is a response to the idea that class time can be used to engage students in learning through active learning techniques, rather than through delivering lectures alone. It is the process of replacing traditional lectures with more student-centered learning strategies.” Even though I titled the course “Flipping Jane Austen,” I was not trying to conform to a specific kind of flipped classroom, but I wanted to look at the broad issue of reimagining learning, since much of how we are understanding “Jane Austen” these days does not include the traditional classroom reading process.

The goal of this course was to “find” Austen (the author/celebrity/legend) and her works in various aspects of popular culture and to evaluate the way we understand the author and her works in the twenty-first century. In order to do this effectively, we also needed to understand those published works and the environment in which they were written, so face-to-face class time needed to be spent in a more traditional way—reading the published novels and discussing various historical, cultural, critical, and social contexts. Therefore, we embarked on a careful reading of the novels during the first week of the semester, beginning with the first published novel, *Sense and Sensibility* (1811).

Adaptation and Diversity

With our study of this novel, the first answer to my question about how new readers enter the world of the Jane Austen novel comes predictably from adaptations, but I was surprised to see that this was inextricably coupled with the need to show a greater diversity in the setting and casting. Serendipitously, a local repertory theater was presenting a staged adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility* during the month of September, so I arranged for the class to view the play during the second week of the term before we had discussed it in person (*Sense and Sensibility*, Stangl). This kind of simultaneous learning is another aspect of the flipped classroom. I was hoping, as Mary-Lynn Chambers explains, that “[t]his flipped approach prepares the students to discuss on a more critical level” (84). I was gratified by the results.

The week following the play, the students were expected to have finished reading the novel, and they were asked to view clips from various film adaptations that I uploaded to my online learning management system (LMS), in this case the course Blackboard site. The students viewed trailers and short clips from the Emma Thompson/Ang Lee 1995 film; the Andrew Davies/John Alexander 2008 miniseries; the Fina Torres/Angel Gracia update, *From Prada to Nada* (2011); and the Rajiv Menon/Sujatha “Kollywood” updated Indian-produced adaptation, *Kandukondain Kandukondain* (2000).² In lieu of a face-to-face discussion that week, students viewed the materials, and I set up an online discussion board. The discussion topics were prompted: I asked them to reflect on intended audiences for these adaptations, their expectations for “faithfulness” in adaptations, a comparison of film or television to live play, and which filmed version they might want to see in its entirety.

One of the unintended discussion points throughout the various prompts was the racial and ethnic diversity in these adaptations, beginning with the use of a racially diverse cast in the

traditionally set stage play. Most of the students who weighed in on this part of the discussion were supportive of the diverse cast. For example, Karina Trejo Melendez observed, “Jane Austen’s work transcends time and can also transcend the barriers of ethnicity. The themes discussed in the novel are very relevant to the human experience to this day. By choosing a diverse cast, people from all backgrounds can relate to the characters and see themselves in the situations presented by the plot.”³ And Hannah Teves agreed that the diverse cast helped her relate to the story better:

I felt that the diversity and inclusion of people of color in roles that would traditionally be taken by white people was something that made me enjoy both the novel and the play quite a bit more. I have never seen any adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility*, and had only read the book, and I do not think that I can ever separate the images of diverse people from the images of the original characters. From now on, these characters will remain people of color in my mind, and I am sure it is the same for many others in the audience.

Through Teves’s remarks we can observe how a twenty-first-century reader of Austen’s novel might be able to translate the story by considering how it might be understood in a post-racial community: “I heard several other people say that they had never even read the book, and I find it truly wonderful that these audience members may become future Austen readers and could continue to infuse these books with the modern inclusivity and diversity that has become increasingly important in the American theatre.” Ultimately, Teves argues, the audience still

receives the same messages, but a larger audience can see themselves on the stage and in the story.

Before the staging of the play, the director was present for a question-and-answer session with audience members. Chloe Kardosopoulos commented on this experience:

[Casey Stangl's] intention was to employ a diverse cast that would be reflective of present-day communities, thus binding the production with its 21st century audience. I noticed the script softened the 18th century language with more contemporary diction, a clear opportunity for this particular audience to engage deeply with the play. . . . I observed the play negotiating faithfulness to the novel and readability for a modern audience in the strategic subtleties throughout.

So the ultimate challenge with a nontraditional cast might be balancing these goals, and the students in my class found this to be successful.

The film clips I had chosen for the following week added to this investigation of racial diversity. Although I had not anticipated the diverse cast of the play, I was already familiar with the settings and characterizations in the two updated adaptations in the learning module. Students were intrigued by these modernizations, and since some of the students came from the communities in which these films were set, they felt an investment in the authentic representation. For instance, Jasmine Serna commented about the added theme of embracing one's cultural heritage in *From Prada to Nada*: “[T]he movie also addresses what it means to go back to your roots and embrace where you came from, something the novel does not do. . . . The

movie portrays social hierarchy in view of wealth and poverty amidst the Latino community, and the poverty side of things can be frightening.”

In addition to the students who were intrigued by a film set in the Mexican American community of East Los Angeles, which is only about thirty miles from our campus, Malvica Sawhney, an international student from India, was able to weigh in on the “Kollywood” film. She explained the difference between “Bollywood,” a term that many American audiences use to categorize any Indian-made musical film, and “Kollywood,” which is in the Tamil language and is not really targeting American or British audiences. In fact, Sawhney saw the film in India as a child and wrote that she would like to watch it again, since she had now read the novel: “Having grown up watching Tamil and Hindi films and the adaptations, I’m able to recognize and distinguish the tropes they resort to for their audiences and how authentic they’re being to the source material. Of the Austen ones I’ve seen, this one is the most earnest and really captures the characters’ quirks and traits while in a different cultural context.” An important component that Sawhney contributed in this discussion was her ability to understand the nuances of this film: “[T]he music complements the story’s key moments really well. While the picturisation may seem a tad exaggerated, the lyrics and the accompanying music is captivating and well-matched. Also because this film offers its audience a chance to see how universal Austen’s stories are and how they can fit in seamlessly in another culture, language and time-period but still be relevant.” Many of the students appreciated the period-set adaptations but were not impressed by the lack of creativity that goes into those pieces. They felt that updating the setting and characterization is a better way to read the novel that is more relevant to the audience.

This two-week experience, beginning the class with attending a play, an online learning module, and an online discussion board, revealed that not only were the students eager to

embrace this nontraditional “flipped” form of learning, but they were also eager to embrace new ways of understanding a British novel that is over two hundred years old.

Popular Culture’s Distortions

The next answer to my questions about new readers came through the growing Jane Austen marketplace. I was inspired to include this aspect of the contemporary world of Austen appreciation by the 2016 exhibit at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, DC. The “Will and Jane” exhibit Web site boasts, “From portraits to porcelain collectibles, branded merchandise, and gravestone rubbings, these two authors have traced intriguingly similar arcs in their posthumous fame.” Janine Barchas and Kristina Straub, the curators of the exhibit, explain their inspiration for the exhibit: “Although separated by 200 years, the objects that embody the ‘It’ factor of celebrity for William Shakespeare and Jane Austen tell strikingly parallel tales about how objects for all kinds of audiences—high-, low-, and middlebrow—are employed to make and market literary celebrity” (3). Barchas and Straub began with portraits and biographies—genuine and imagined—and then worked with the vast collections of “stuff” predominantly amassed by Henry and Emily Folger (Shakespeare) and by Alberta and Henry Burke (Austen). Their exhibit ultimately revealed that “literary celebrity is tied to material objects and includes a powerful duplication effect that proves and reinforces mass-market idolatry” (9). This “stuff” eventually comes to represent the author in the popular culture and reflects the concept that “literary celebrity is created when a writer’s texts are not merely venerated as great literature but also treated as launching pads for performative cultural events that celebrate the present as much as the dead author” (11). Therefore, considering the objects

representing the author alongside “performative cultural events” while reading the texts and studying various theoretical perspectives could be a new kind of pedagogical inquiry.

I aimed to embrace this world of “stuff” as a part of the search for “Jane Austen” in my course, so the first in-class meeting of the semester—usually devoted to syllabus reading and introductory activities—began with a tea party. I brought in my hot pot, disposable cups, and a box of tea bags that had been purchased from an online store and given to me as a gift. Each tea bag was hand sewn and had a different quote on the paper wrapping. Each student picked a tea bag, and each was tasked with locating the source of the quote. Short oral reports on their findings were due during the next face-to-face class meeting—in three weeks.

With these five-minute reports, many discovered something they had not anticipated: some of the quotes attributed to Jane Austen were not hers at all—they were from the film adaptations. For example, “You have bewitched me, body and soul, and I love, I love, I love you,” was attributed to “Jane Austen.” This quote is not in any Austen novel, minor work, or letter. It is from Deborah Moggach’s screenplay for the 2005 film adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*. Web searches will discover this quote commodified in various ways: as a coffee mug, a T-shirt, and even a large print to hang over the headboard in the bedroom. Deborah Yaffe’s December 19, 2013, blog post asks the question, “Could we please stop attributing movie stuff to Jane Austen without first checking to make sure it’s in the book?” Apparently, the maker of the tea bag gift box (as with the maker of the “Ardently” soap) did not read this blog.

The other thing the students realized in their search for the “original” source of the tea bag quotes is that many of the quotes are really the opposite of what Austen probably thought; they come from an ironic viewpoint. One quote says, “[A] large income is the best recipe for happiness,” which is from *Mansfield Park*’s Mary Crawford (Austen, vol. 3, 213). Another quote

reads, “There is nothing like staying at home, for real comfort,” which comes from *Emma*’s Mrs. Elton (Austen vol. 2, 274) Austen wrote these words, but are they the opinions of the author? Since each of these characters acts as a foil to the heroine, it is not at all clear that Austen would think these are “truths.” But as with her “truth universally acknowledged” in the first sentence of *Pride and Prejudice*, she does seem to be reflecting conventional wisdom from her neighbors and friends.

My students referred to these as “ironic quotes.” Austen’s ideas were being misrepresented in the rush to commodify her words, which raises some interesting questions: How much can we trust Web search engines for pithy quotes to use in our Etsy creations, our Pinterest boards, or even in our writing or public speeches? How much has the popular culture that has commodified all things Austen become a substitute for the novels she published and the other works we know she actually wrote?

This early assignment was helpful for multiple reasons. First, it gave the students a chance to dig around in the Internet world and discover the wealth of information and misinformation about Jane Austen, what she wrote, who she was, and how she is interpreted. Second, it reinforced the importance of careful reading. We are all guilty of remembering best what we experienced last, and for years I assumed that Mr. Collins was a diminutive man. But I was reminded by a recent reading of *Pride and Prejudice* that Austen’s description does not match most of the actors who have been selected for that role in the film adaptations. Austen wrote, “He was a tall, heavy looking young man of five and twenty” (Austen, vol. 2, 64), but most of the actors portraying this character are smaller and older: Melville Cooper from the 1940 MGM film was forty-four, David Bamber from the 1996 miniseries was forty-two, and Tom Hollander from the 2005 film was thirty-eight. I am not sure of the heights of these actors, but

none of them is “heavy looking.” Only twenty-six-year-old Hubbell Palmer from the 2003 *Pride and Prejudice, A Latter-Day Comedy* seems to fit Austen’s description.

The short reports, therefore, led us to a larger discussion about the intersection between reading a text and the various interpretations we might see in the popular culture. Mid-semester, when I handed out quotes and illustrations from a set of Austen playing cards, the students were prepared for more intense sleuthing. This assignment came during the first week of our reading of *Mansfield Park*, and my intention was twofold: send the students searching for the “real” Austen from the quotes and illustrations on the cards, and learn to play Speculation, the card game described in the novel, in order to better understand how the card game can influence character development.

The students discovered a few things with their research: First, many of the illustrations are in some ways a distortion or misrepresentation of the original. In one case, the card depicts *Persuasion*’s Captain Wentworth leaning over a writing desk and placing his hand on some papers. The original illustration is from Hugh Thomson’s 1897 drawing of Captain Wentworth placing his letter of proposal in front of Anne Elliot. Though the distortion is not material—we still know that this character is supposed to be Captain Wentworth—the context is important. This illustration represents arguably the most pivotal scene in the novel and maybe the most romantic scene in all of the Austen novels, but the playing card just reveals a man leaning over a desk. The Thomson illustrations, however, have become somewhat synonymous with the “look” of the Austen novel, and as Devoney Looser explains, “[t]hey propelled readers and future illustrators in new directions of emphasis, promoting an Austen more widely perceptible as fashionable rather than old fashioned, comic rather than serious, social rather than intimate, and gently satirical rather than gently sensational” (60). More than one hundred years later, however,

the illustrations seem quaint, but distorting them to remove the context of the scene removes most of the meaning and flattens the interpretation.

The students found that the quotes on the Austen playing cards—unlike the tea bags—were all words that could be found in the novels. “I had not known you a month before I felt that you were the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed on to marry,” for example, is from Elizabeth Bennet’s famous response to Mr. Darcy’s first proposal of marriage in *Pride and Prejudice* (Austen, vol. 2, 193). Chloe Kardosopoulos said that when she first read this scene, she had been cheering for Mr. Darcy, since she knew through Austen’s dramatic irony what Elizabeth did not yet know—that Mr. Darcy was interested in her. But when Darcy makes his dreadful proposal that demeans Elizabeth and her family, Kardosopoulos reported that she felt let down and understood Elizabeth’s reaction. She liked the complexity of the scene, and Elizabeth’s reaction to this insulting proposal sets her up to be one of the most admired heroines in literature. Thus, this quote is important and is not necessarily ironic, but it is not one that has been overly commodified.

Another student chose a quote that comes from Emma: “Full many a flower is born to blush unseen, and waste its fragrance on the desert air” (Austen, vol. 4, 282).⁴ Meg Boyles discovered that it is not to be attributed to Jane Austen, but in fact comes from Thomas Gray’s famous poem “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” and is slightly misquoted: “Full many a flower is born to blush unseen, / And waste its *sweetness* on the desert air” (emphasis added). In the context of the playing card, most people might assume that these words were written by Austen, but if they know the poem, they may also assume that Austen misquoted the poem. And if we add to that realization that the poem is not misquoted by the narrator but by the nefarious Mrs. Elton, we might also conclude that Austen knew she was misquoting to further characterize

Mrs. Elton. Further research, however, reveals that this misquote of the Gray poem can also be found in *Northanger Abbey* as one of the maxims that young Catherine has memorized in her quest to be a heroine: “so serviceable and so soothing in the vicissitudes of their eventful lives” (Austen, vol. 5, 15). Can we assume, then, that Austen has misquoted Gray’s poem twice on purpose, or has she mis-memorized it herself? The lesson here is that we cannot ever know the intention of the author—an important message for students.

One final quote from the playing cards reveals how some millennial students tend to read the novels—with a feminist understanding. Annie Mullee chose a quote *from Sense and Sensibility*: “He was not an ill-disposed young man, unless to be rather cold hearted, and rather selfish, is to be ill-disposed” (Austen, vol. 1, 5). Mullee quickly identified this as the narrator’s description of Mr. John Dashwood, but her simple and definitive interpretation of this description revealed both her thorough understanding of the character and her feminist viewpoint: “He was only important because he inherited and is a dude.” Perhaps this is a twenty-first-century statement to echo Austen’s “truth universally acknowledged”?

Beyond the design of the cards themselves, playing a game with the cards was another way we utilized face-to-face class meetings in a new way. In volume two, chapter seven of *Mansfield Park*, the narrator tells us that Lady Bertram asks her husband if she should play Whist or Speculation, and we learn that “after a moment’s thought, [he] recommended Speculation” since “[h]e was a Whist player himself, and perhaps might feel that it would not much amuse him to have her for a partner” (Austen, vol. 3, 239). Twenty-first-century readers who know little to nothing about either card game may not understand the distinction here. But looking more carefully at the development of this scene and investigating these two games can give readers a more complete understanding of the subtle character development.

First, Whist, a game that requires partners and some strategy, evolved into what we now know as Contract Bridge. Speculation, on the other hand, is a game that requires little skill, can be played with an odd number of players, and only necessitates that the player guess and gamble in order to play. Neither Fanny nor Lady Bertram had played before, but we learn that “it was impossible for Fanny not to feel herself mistress of the rules of the game in three minutes,” while Lady Bertram soon declares it “a very odd game. I do not know what it is all about. I am never to see my cards; and Mr. Crawford does all the rest” (240). Even without playing the game, readers can compare Fanny’s progress in learning the rules with Lady Bertram’s, and we understand the simplicity of both the game and Lady Bertram’s character.

In order to play the game in class, I looked up the rules, brought poker chips for betting, and separated the students into two groups. In a few minutes we were all laughing and talking about the fact that it would not be a good idea to bet more on a card than one might possibly win in the kitty. Then we talked about the scene in the novel. While playing the game, Mary, Edmund, and Henry discuss the physical improvement of Edmund’s parsonage house, Thornton Lacey. Henry suggests, after driving by the house, that “there will be work for five summers at least before the place is live-able,” to which Edmund replies that the prospect is “not so bad as that” (241). Throughout the discussion, Henry is describing expensive renovations that will make the house seem less “a mere Parsonage House” and take on more the “air of a gentleman’s residence” (243, 242). While Fanny listens and “trie[s] to hide her interest in the subject,” Mary turns the discussion to a remembrance of their visit to Sotherton the previous summer (244). Readers will remember that Henry’s attention was less on the grounds at Sotherton and more on the engaged Maria, but the allusion is neither lost on Henry nor Fanny. Henry “add[s], in a low

voice directed solely at Fanny, ‘I should be sorry to have my powers of *planning* judged of by the day at Sotherton’” (245).

In addition to the discussion of Thornton Lacey, the allusions to “improvement” and to the look of the place are distracting to Mary. She has long argued with Edmund about his future as a country clergyman, wanting him instead to have the appearance of someone much grander. So her brother’s attempt to “improve” the look of Edmund’s home is important to her, so much so that though she wins the game, “it did not pay her for what she had given to secure it” (243). Speculation is clearly the life-game that the Crawford siblings are playing: bidding on cards or people whom they cannot really see until those cards are revealed.

By playing Speculation for a few minutes in the classroom, the students were better able to recognize the nuances of the game that Austen’s contemporaries might easily understand. Investigating the commodification of Austen quotes and the novels’ illustrations, however, revealed the distortions present in the Austen merchandise explosion.

New Ways of Interpreting and Teaching

The final answer to my questions about new readers of Austen came through the non-academic-paper assignments and presentations during final exam week.⁵ We had another tea party, and I baked Austen silhouette shortbread cookies to reflect back on the first class session and to not minimize the fact that the world of Austen scholarship is necessarily infused with Austen fandom. Students presented their final projects to the class, several of them reimagining Austen’s fiction through their own creative writing. The first came from Josh Medrano and Zack Amin. They imagined what other characters might have been thinking during the climactic Box Hill scene in Emma. Amin began with Jane Fairfax’s inner dialogue. He imagined that Jane might be

focused on the believability of Frank's supposed dream: "Are these people so gullible that they believed he had it seen it in a dream? Perhaps the intellect of this group does not match their sophistication. But then again maybe they did not believe him?" Then, after the letters for spelling "Dixon" are chosen by Frank with the tiles, Jane thinks, "I seriously do not know what to say. What can I say? I cannot validate this nor can I speak on the matter. I simply have to sit here like a schoolgirl and act as if I have no idea what is going on. I need to look like Harriet whom I believe truly has no idea what is going on."

In response, Medrano, then, imagines the scene from Frank's point of view: "Though his countenance betrayed no perturbation, save for a good-humoured chuckle, seemingly at the peculiar coincidence of his dream and Miss Bates's corroborating account, Frank Churchill was indeed lost in a pang of mortification that he could only hope would go unnoticed by the rest of their company, despite Miss Bates's well-intentioned exacerbation." Amin and Medrano said that this project helped them to realize how difficult it is to capture Austen's language, that her use of free indirect discourse was more evident to them when they were trying to replicate it, and that their creative interpretation necessitated more careful research than their previous analytical essays written for the class.

Natalia Sanchez also was challenged to capture Austen's language and cadence in her short story written from Margaret Dashwood's point of view. She takes her first trip to London with Mrs. Jennings a few years after the setting of *Sense and Sensibility*:

Though Elinor had promised of great walks in the lively city, Margaret longed for the towering oaks and the echoes of the sea while in the mass of ladies and

gentleman encircled by brick. As her vision fell on the length of curricles and petticoats and cravats, Mrs. Jennings ushered her into a quaint dress shop.

Margaret traced her hands along the seams of a muslin dress displayed in a corner of the shop. Mrs. Jennings had wandered off in search of the shopkeeper, only to find Margaret moments later standing transfixed. Mrs. Jennings motioned to the shopkeeper who nodded in assent and so the dress was delivered to Berkeley Street so the ladies may continue their afternoon errands.

Ultimately, though, Margaret finds her true love on the dance floor:

A clearing of a throat led Margaret to turn from her new acquaintance unto a man good looking and gentleman-like. Though soft spoken, he had a pleasing countenance and easy manners. He held out a hand with the question of a dance floating in the air between them. After a moment's hesitation, she placed her hand in his and was led into a dance.

Sanchez's project suggests that the romantic vision of the Austen novel is not lost on the millennial reader.

Malvica Sawhney captures some of this romantic vision from Anne Elliot's point of view in her visual poem that resembles a fallen leaf:

Autumn

If only I were a nut.

Now, in the Autumn of my life I feel myself fading. It is one thing not to have loved at all, but to love and to have lost. To live in spring and bloom, then just not. Nothing could devastate me more. Once just a rosebud who dreamt of being in bloom someday. What becomes of you when the bloom has all but disappeared and you feel yourself wilting away. Every day in this house I struggle to maintain, I stroll around and keep myself busy and though I'm quite alone, I feel I'm haunted.

By my past.

By my regrets.

By myself.

Sawhney's poem is inspired by the full characterization of the heroine, but it captures the essence in two pages.

Sierra Ellison's script dramatizes a television game show called *The Persuasion Game*. It focuses on Liz Bennet, who chooses a date from three male characters trying to "persuade" her, but she decides she would rather take the money and live on her own:

BACHELOR NUMBER ONE is a brooding sort who also has a soft side. He has a very refined taste and enjoys riding horses. He is not a huge fan of dancing, but enjoys going to parties and having in-depth conversations. He cares very deeply for his family and although he is shy at first, he is a great listener and opens up when you get to know him. Bachelor number one, please join us!

A very nicely dressed gentleman in a deep blue suit and dark, thick hair walks slowly out onto [the] stage. His shoulders are pulled back. As [he] crosses to the first chair, he nods lightly at the crowd and sits.

Ellison's script imagines characters from various novels intermingling. Although she is presented with three interesting choices in men, the modern Liz determines that she does not need men for money. A conclusion that might be drawn here is that the millennial reader might like to think about romance, but she has other options in the twenty-first century.

The remaining students presented visual projects. Karina Trejo Melendez translated *Northanger Abbey* into the twenty-first century by imagining the story told through a series of text messages presented as PowerPoint slides. For example, when Henry catches Catherine snooping around Northanger Abbey's rooms through a tweet she posted, she replies, "I may or may not think your dad killed your mum. . . ." She ends her text with a crying face emoji.

Ultimately, of course, Henry proposes via text message: "A wealthy man fell from heaven and has married Eleanor. My dad is happy with that and now that he knows you are not dirt poor he'll allow our marriage." He ends with a kiss-blowing emoji.

All of Melendez's slides looked like actual text messages, and she explained how she had to create fake contacts and take screen shots from her and her friends' phones to complete the assignment. The writing of the texts might have been easier than the creation of the slides, but the biggest challenge was in condensing the story and determining what was most important to include to capture the main plot points and themes.

Jasmine Serna's project found a similar challenge. She asked all of us to bring our chairs to the center of the room, then read us her version of *Northanger Abbey* from a handmade pop-up

book. Serna said her ten-year-old sister was interested in reading the original book but found it “boring,” so Serna created this book. Each page of her book had interactive elements, including a carriage with a pull tab to make it move across the page.

In preparation for her presentation on Jane Austen festivals, Meg Boyles baked apples from a Regency recipe. Her project investigated the 2013 film *Austenland* and how real-life Austen gatherings tap into the same yearning to actually live in an Austen novel. Her baked apples are a reflection of something modern Janeites like to do—sample the food of the time. Boyles’s conclusions about these festivals show the nuanced connection between the popular culture “Jane” and the world of Austen academic studies, which can bring “[a] unique mingling between scholars and ‘amateur’ Austen lovers, a romanticization of the Regency Period . . . with its darker reality, a deeper understanding of Austen’s novels by experiencing their context, [and a] closing [of] the distance between Jane Austen and her modern readers.” Boyles quotes Claudia L. Johnson’s book, *Jane Austen Cults and Cultures*:

Most of these activities can seem trivial, unprofessional, and even chastening to academic scholars—how mortifying to encounter one’s own earth-shattering essay on Austen printed alongside a recipe for white soup, as somehow equivalent exercises—but they also produce real information and knowledge along with a sort of pleasure that Clara Tuite has brilliantly described as “period euphoria.”

(Johnson 11)

Imagining “Jane Austen’s World” might be fulfilling a fantasy for some, but it is also a useful way to contextualize the deeper messages that scholars locate within the novels.

Juxtaposing academic research with Austen fan paraphernalia was also the focus of Chloe Kardosopoulos's project: she created a Web site that considers how *Pride and Prejudice* lives on in the popular culture. She looked at various film adaptations, comparing them to the text of the novel, and also investigated consumer items such as home goods and clothing. She analyzed the text used in these works and considered how one might understand that *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* advances the female character, while decorating the home with *Pride and Prejudice* tchotchkes could warm the heart.

One possible "home good" that could be commodified in the future is Alex Athanail's board game *In Want of a Husband*. His written rules imagine various levels of play: "As a young, unmarried woman, you must compete with the other ladies in ___shire to acquire a husband who will lead to a secure, rewarding, and happy marriage." He explains, "In addition to the players, there will be six Gentleman tokens set at the top of the board. . . . Once every player has determined their traits [wealth, intellect, manners determined by random drawing of cards], three cards will be drawn at random for each of the Gentlemen—these will be kept face down and remain hidden until revealed by gameplay." The "gameplay" alternates between "Regular Play" and "Balls." First, players work to "gain influence," but at the balls, the players can meet the gentlemen. The winner is determined based on marriage and happiness points, which "will be calculated according to how compatible each of the player's traits is with their Husband's corresponding trait." Athanail's board game rules are intricate and show a careful reading of the novels and their historical context.

Careful reading is also necessary for successful illustration. Hannah Teves and Samantha Mbodwam created a poster about the graphic-novel format retelling of *Northanger Abbey*. They explain, "The visual aspect of the graphic novel allows for an author or illustrator to place

significance on an object which repeats throughout the novel, or is important to a particular character or scene.” On this poster, they cite various critical works about graphic novels and trace the Gothic elements in the graphic adaptation of *Northanger Abbey*. Teves and Mbodwam conducted a visual analysis of a visual adaptation of Austen’s written text. Through their presentation, students could see how translating Austen’s words into pictures could tell the story in a new and more expressive way.

This is the first time I have given so much creative license to the students as they prepared an academic project. The freedom they had, however, did not make this an easy project, because they needed to find a way to make the project relevant. Since we spent the semester thinking and talking about how the popular culture plays a role in how we read and understand the works of Austen, each of these projects took all of that seriously.

The future for Austen in the college classroom must therefore take into consideration a diverse, updated, and multicultural understanding of her. The commodification of everything that even remotely connects to Austen must be considered, and in some cases disposed of, since sloppy interpretations can distort the plots and themes and cheapen the texts. Beyond the Austen classroom, however, I have determined from this experience to create assignments in all of my literature courses that encourage students to go beyond theoretical interpretations and close readings. Conducting research for creative projects can inspire students to learn more about the social, cultural, and historical contexts of the written texts and read those texts more closely. Flipping the Austen classroom may have first been intended to encourage multimodal learning, but it also taught me much more about Austen, her writing, and her world than I expected when I began the course. The future of Jane Austen, I have discovered, will continue to evolve with the cultural evolution and the technological innovations we have not yet encountered, so it is up to

us to embrace those changes and learn to understand Austen and her works through ever-changing lenses.

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NOTES

1. Other resources for teaching Jane Austen courses can be found in the MLA Approaches to Teaching series: *Pride and Prejudice*, 1993; *Emma*, 2004; *Mansfield Park*, 2014; and the forthcoming *Persuasion*, for which I have contributed an essay. Another helpful series of essays and an annotated bibliography of teaching resources can be found on the Romantic Circles Web site at www.rc.umd.edu/pedagogies/commons/austen.
2. “Kollywood” is a name often given to the South Indian Tamil film industry.
3. Each of the students referred to in this essay have given permission for their names and words to be used in this context, and the research performed has met the requirements of Chapman University’s Institutional Review Board.
4. The playing card deck designated each suit as a different novel: the diamonds are *from Sense and Sensibility*, the hearts are from *Pride and Prejudice*, the clubs are from *Emma*, and the spades are from *Persuasion*.
5. Photos and details of each of these projects can be found on the class blog: <https://sites.chapman.edu/majorauthors/>.

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