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Abstract: *This essay seeks to establish whether portrayals of Jane Austen on screen serve to reaffirm a sense of the author's neoconservative heritage, or whether an alternative and more challenging model of female authorship is visible. Does this particular, and arguably defining, moment in Austen's legacy offer new and diverse perspectives on the author and her Romantic and post-Romantic contexts? Both films raise troubling questions about adapting (and appropriating) Austen in the twenty-first century, with wider implications for the study of female authors and artists on screen. However, as I hope to demonstrate, the Austens of these biopics are neither reactionary heritage reproductions nor 'authentic' Austens.* Miss Austen Regrets *and, to a lesser but still evident degree,* Becoming Jane *are in a generative cinematic conversation with Austen's past 'lives' and the author's present popularity as well as with the narrative style, mood, and tone of her fiction. In other words, 'Austen', as the name has come to signify her literary works and the cultural stories she has become the adoptive author of, reads the biopics even as they read her. Austen's 'authorship' in the twenty-first century rests on and is transfigured by a rapidly evolving and mutually informed nexus of co-readings between text and screen.*

Title: Revisiting Jane Austen as a Romantic Author in Literary Biopics

This essay seeks to ascertain whether portrayals of Jane Austen on screen – specifically Julian Jarrold's *Becoming Jane* (2007) and Jeremy Lovering's *Miss Austen Regrets* (2008) – are, for the most part, neoconservative iterations of a proliferating Austen industry, or whether an alternative and more challenging model of female authorship is visible.[1] Does this particular, and arguably defining, moment in Austen's legacy offer new and diverse perspectives on the author and her Romantic

and post-Romantic contexts? Criticism on this topic has tended to focus on the presentation of Austen's authority, or lack thereof, as a woman writer in the early nineteenth century. An issue underpinning the perceived shortcomings of these films is the extent to which the value and significance of Austen's authorship is diminished on screen by a cultish devotion to her life and work as 'romantic'. Critics have employed a range of feminist approaches when considering these biopics and other screen versions of women writers and artists. On the one hand, Margarida Esteves Pereira analyses "the way these two films refashion, or fail to refashion, the biopic from a female perspective": ultimately, Pereira finds *Becoming Jane* wanting, "the kind of postfeminist film that […] performs a silencing of feminism", whereas *Miss Austen Regrets* "assumes a clear feminist point of view and works to transform the conventions of the female biopic".[2] Bronwyn Polaschek, on the other hand, argues for the disruptive pleasures that can be gained through interrogating male and female spectatorship in postfeminist biopics like *Becoming Jane*.[3] Such debates continue to set the parameters for how we engage with Austen adaptation and they have informed the approach adopted here. The argument that follows is not so much a critique of these valuable positions, but an analysis of whether the prevailing focus on gender politics and genre might be usefully augmented or rethought. This essay poses and offers possible answers to the questions: what are the benefits for Austen studies, as well as for the study of celebrated writers more generally, if literary biopics are considered as enriching chapters in an author's cultural afterlife; what might these films 'add' to the ways we read, research, and teach Austen's writings?

For Sonia Haiduc, "the heroine of Miramax's *Becoming Jane* is, in effect, turned into the mother of chick lit", as Austen's life is configured through her most popular novel, *Pride and Prejudice*.[4] Haiduc is not the first critic to bemoan the repackaging of Austen as "chick lit", or supermarket shelf romance, as a result of *Pride and Prejudice*'s cultural omnipresence and neither is Jarrold's film unique in presenting Austen's writing as a mode of autobiography that serves as imaginative recompense for a frustrated love life. Chris Noonan's film, *Miss Potter* (2006), which was released the year before *Becoming Jane*, visually correlates a woman's creativity with heartbreak.[5] Where the young Beatrix Potter looks out of her window to the animated scene of her parents' carriage pulled by rabbits and driven by mice, the grown woman looks out of her window to watch the man she loves depart in an actual

carriage. This filmic echo implies that the relative 'realism' of adult romance has replaced childhood fantasy. Drawing and writing offer an outlet for Beatrix Potter's grief, after the sudden death of Norman Warne, but composition is now a substitute for longings that cannot be fulfilled. Artistry is shaped through suffering. In Lovering's BBC biopic *Miss Austen Regrets*, Austen is similarly occupied with authoring the happy heterosexual unions that she will not experience. When called upon to advise her young niece, Fanny Knight, about a suitable husband, Austen, played by Olivia Williams, reflects on as she also re-encounters some of the former suitors she could have married.

Persuasion, Austen's last complete novel, is presented as a panacea for the author's failing health and disappointed romantic hopes in *Miss Austen Regrets*. Austen reminisces with an elegiac wistfulness to equal the mood of her last novel and acute illness punctuates her final outpourings of lyric intensity. The author is presented as experiencing shuddering pains immediately after she is inspired to write some of the most passionate passages in *Persuasion* – among them, "the over-powering, blinding, bewildering, first effects" of Anne Elliot's encounter with Captain Wentworth following a separation of seven years.[6] Yet the film is not burdened by the shadow of her imminent death, signalling something of a departure from screened lives that habitually fabricate a tale of the fatal artistic temperament.[7] The range of Williams's portrayal of Austen nuances any sense of regret; her "age of emotion", as Austen describes Anne Elliot's reacquaintance with a now matured romance, is not all "misery" as counterbalance to her heroine's eventual "delight" (*P* 46, 165). This is an Austen for whom the freedom to write is bound up with the familial responsibilities of choosing not to marry. This is an Austen who deflates the doomed romance surmised in *Becoming Jane* with a dismissive comment about Tom Lefroy: "…it hurt me for about five minutes and then it passed". It is such moments of professed indifference and, at times, witty if wounding insensitivity which guard against both the sentimentality and solemnity that Austen's writings satirize. This is evident in the following scene which scoffs at the 'regret' of the film's title:

> Jane: "The truth is…I am she that loved and lost".
>
> […]

> "I loved and lost, and pined, and yearned. And then swore myself to solitude and consolations of writing about it instead".
> Fanny: "Did you really?"
> Jane: "You read too many books".

This exchange alludes to Austen's own work through the teasing admonishment of quixotic women readers. Whilst Fanny's spirited naivety references the author's heroine, Catherine Morland, the cultural reach of the scene extends beyond *Northanger Abbey*. This screen Austen seems archly aware of her part in a franchise that assumes a starry-eyed audience on the one hand and a cynical audience on the other. Inferred, perhaps, in the lighthearted reproof, "You read too many books", is a joke at the viewer's expense – "You watch too many (Austen) films".

The exchange above also invokes the work and reputations of contemporary authors, with the phrase "swore myself to solitude". Later in the film, Austen bemoans the fate of her novels – "I send them out into the world to compete with the likes of *Sir* Walter Scott and *Lord* Byron" (original emphasis) – which chimes with the intertextual dialogue over fellow Romantic writers in *Persuasion*. *Miss Austen Regrets* channels the author's appraisal of what she deems to be, with semi-ironic misgivings, the "first-rate poets" (94) of the age when she denounces the public demand for 'serious' romance, quipping about Byron and his popular poems: "I prefer to let other people's pens dwell on guilt and misery".[8] But, as in *Persuasion*, this screen Austen's finely-tuned tone takes some of the sting out of her anti-Byron barb. Paraphrasing the opening of the last chapter of *Mansfield Park* brings the author close to a satirically self-aware Byronism as the line toys with cliché and mocks an apparently realist agenda. Interlaced with her own writing, Austen's dialogue in the film, while distinguishing her from a celebrity cult of the aristocratic writer, root the author in charged Romantic conversations about readership, reputation, and literary taste.

Historical and cultural exactitude is not perhaps something the twenty-first-century viewer has come to expect of costume drama. Does an audience's concern with accuracy – in terms of appearance, dialogue, manners, and setting – amount to more than a relatively general evocation of the past? To what extent are period

dramas de-periodized by a homogenizing view of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and by market pressures to appear 'relevant' and 'fresh' to a twenty-first-century audience? Such questions are at the heart of ongoing debates about heritage films. They also have, as I hope to demonstrate, a specific relevance to biopics and to Austen biopics in particular. For Toby R. Benis, writing on the films *Amazing Grace* (2006), *The Duchess* (2008), and *Bright Star* (2009),

> …a variety of Romantic-era figures and causes have come to be viewed through the prism of what might be called the Austen effect. The success of screen adaptations of Austen novels has been followed by a generation of films set during the Romantic period that treat a variety of causes and figures, from the abolition of the slave trade to the life of Keats, as if they circulated in a novel of manners.[9]

Karen Gevirtz subscribes to a similar notion of the "Austen effect".[10] Austen adaptations are regarded, by Gevirtz, as largely responsible for the liberties taken with recent dramatizations of eighteenth-century novels – among them, *Crusoe* (2008-9) and *Gulliver's Travels* (2010). What is regarded as a limiting reconstruction of literary history, in which the past serves a present-day agenda and satire is invariably replaced by a sanitizing romance, is exemplified for both Benis and Gevirtz in the encoded autobiography of *Becoming Jane*.[11]

There is no doubt that the plethora of Austen adaptations over the last two decades engage in historical revisionism. Indeed, many of the recent Austen spin-offs and mash-ups are invested in an ironic interplay between 'originals' and updates. For example, the collective cultural memory of *Pride and Prejudice* now encompasses Andrew Davies's 1995 BBC adaptation, with Colin Firth's star turn as Mr Darcy a seemingly inescapable point of reference for reimaginings of Austen's novel on the page and in performance. The Pemberley pond sequence, in particular, has been creatively and comically recreated in, among others, the *Bridget Jones* franchise (1995 – to date) and *Lost in Austen* (2008), loosely-inspired homages to the Austen/ Davies partnering which spawned their own interrelated iconic moments.[12] Do these multidirectional, transmedia interactions, which take familiar reference points from yet gently satirize and expand on the conventions of costume drama, over-extend the

entangled relationships between the historical context being depicted and the contexts in which that depiction was initially produced and subsequently reproduced?

A visual parallel is generated between a scene in *Miss Austen Regrets*, where Austen runs through the streets of London to find a doctor for her brother, and a scene where Anne Elliot runs through the streets of Bath after Captain Wentworth in an adaptation of *Persuasion* (2007) that aired the year before *Miss Austen Regrets*. These films emphasize the active independence of the heroine and the exhilaration, as well as bewilderment, that such brief moments of liberty bring. Both scenes, neither of which has a basis in biography or literary text, convey a sense of historical accuracy (through period setting and detail) whilst simultaneously aligning the female protagonist with current attitudes about self-expression and fulfilment. Are scenes like these aimed at an audience for whom, according to John Wiltshire, "the historical past is (much like the interior life of another person or subject) alien and inaccessible", or for those who, according to Haiduc, "enjoy a light dose of retroactive social criticism served up with their love story"?[13] Regarded in a different light, are they reflective of what Marcia Landy refers to as the layered "sheets of history", whereby the complexities of the context in which a novel was written are inflected in, and reinscribed by, the competing claims of contemporary retellings of a woman writer's life and works?[14] Landy's reading of biopic as palimpsest begs the question whether audiences are critically alert to the subtle negotiations involved in constructing and reconstructing narratives about and by a female author. Such concerns raise a related if broader and more pressing question: what might the study of Austen biopics tell us about the gendering of reception history?

Miss Austen Regrets draws on an appetite for nostalgic screen romance as it also depicts a talented yet frustrated woman writer through the lens of twenty-first-century feminism. The account of financial negotiations over a publishing deal for *Emma* and *Persuasion*, from which the author is excluded, excites audience sympathies about historic and present-day gender inequalities, as well as adding an element of social realism to the depiction of London in 1815. Further instances of 'inter-contextuality', an approach advocated by Gevirtz, emerge in understated ways through the aforementioned conversations about Byron and Scott. These exchanges borrow from chapters 11 and 12 of *Persuasion* wherein Austen connects the events in

the seaside resort of Lyme with Captain Benwick's predilection for Romantic poetry. It is a populist regard for Byron's poems, narrowly understood in these scenes as "the impassioned descriptions of hopeless agony" (*P* 94), that is heard in the divided response of silent despair and histrionics when Louisa Musgrove falls on the breakwater. Austen cautions against the dramatic agitations and near-sighted misreadings that lead up to this accident; and yet, what she hails here as the "richness of the present age", in terms of poetic sensibilities, infuses the novel.[15] Likewise, in *Miss Austen Regrets*, although the author distances herself from the prevailing appetite for Byronic "guilt and misery", a sense of Romantic solitude surfaces at intervals throughout the film. Austen is shown basking in an autumnal glow when left to roam her brother, Edward's, house and gardens, accompanied by a voice-over taken from the author's letter of 3 November 1813 to her sister Cassandra: 'I am all alone. Edward is gone into his Woods. —At the present time I have five Tables, Eight & twenty Chairs & two fires all to myself'.[16] While the interruption of her writing by a former suitor, the Reverend Brook Bridges, is not altogether unwelcome, the author relishes rare moments of privacy. Williams's Austen is not indulging in the affected gloom and introspection of Byron's fictional acolyte, Captain Benwick, but rather enjoying the bliss of being alone. This portrait of self-reflective quietude, an inwardness that is not inconsiderate to the feelings of others, brings Austen into close proximity with contemporary writers as it also maintains a distinctness about her own character, circumstances, and the tenor of her later writing.

Where Lovering's *Miss Austen Regrets* invests in an inter-contextual dialogue with Romantic poets that references *Persuasion*, Jarrold's *Becoming Jane* invents a scene in which Austen meets a fellow novelist, Ann Radcliffe. The connections invariably rehearsed between these authors centre on *Northanger Abbey* and Austen's wry regard for Radcliffe's popular gothic romances. The latter's influence on the former is a positive one, as presented in Jarrold's film, with Radcliffe ostensibly offering an example to Austen of a successful (and married) woman writer. It is partly the encounter with Radcliffe and the advice she receives that stimulates Anne Hathaway's Austen to begin writing "First Impressions", the manuscript that would be revised, well over a decade later, as *Pride and Prejudice*. The scene between Radcliffe and Austen, and its implications for positioning Austen as an author, is more involved than has hitherto been acknowledged. Radcliffe is solicitous to

discover what Austen intends to write about (directing her to the imagination when reality fails to inspire) and the latter is pictured looking up to the former as she leaves. But it would be overly simplistic to read the scene as one of sorority.[17] Austen's eagerness to encounter a role model is mixed with a sense of unease. In some respects, Helen McCrory's portrayal of Radcliffe as idiosyncratic does little to dispel the biopic's ready conflation of a writer's personality with their work. Yet Austen struggles to reconcile her idea of Radcliffe as the author of gothic fantasies with the Radcliffe she experiences in a domestic setting speaking of the 'cost' of female independence to her husband and her reputation. That Austen's desire for affinity with a fellow female writer is met by estrangement disrupts the film's framing of an author as the heroine of her own life, an effect that is repeated, more dramatically, later in the film.

At Lady Gresham's house, after Austen returns to Hampshire, conversation soon turns to this person of intrigue, with John Warren addressing Austen and the gathered company: "So, the famous Mrs Radcliffe. Was she really as gothic as her novels?" Austen replies, in quieter tones: "Not in externals, but her inner landscape is quite picturesque, I suspect". The sequence of shots that follow this exchange is remarkable in terms of the film's cinematography. The camera pulls back to observe Austen through a window, after panning across to her mother and sister. She then looks straight at the camera, an arresting moment, which is subsequently blurred by beading precipitation on the glass windowpane.[18] Almost as soon as we are invited to focus directly on Austen, torrential rain obscures and dissolves the author's potentially authoritative gaze.

A specific inter-contextual link can be made between this screen moment and a critical approach to Romantic women writers from the 1980s. In 'The Woman at the Window: Ann Radcliffe in the Novels of Mary Wollstonecraft and Jane Austen', Marilyn Butler examines these authors' shared preoccupation with issues of female self-control in extreme settings (either exotic or domestic). At this point in *Becoming Jane*, when possible happiness and fulfillment fade from view, Austen appears visually along the lines of what Butler argues are the "feminist connotations" of Radcliffe's "definitive portrait of the subjective heroine" – "reduction to the inmost core of being, the point at which rage, inadequacy, and threatened identity become

felt as sufficiently real to blot out external reality".[19] The social and familial pressures that threaten Austen's prospects and physical composure during this scene, effectively erasing the compositions she has yet to write, are directly comparable with the "oppressive, coercive environment" that Butler regards as characteristic of a Radcliffe novel. From this perspective, then, Radcliffe's presence in Jarrold's film, as in Austen's work, moves beyond the occasional ironic reference and the shared obstacles facing women writers in the late eighteenth century. Most significant is the mapping of a Radcliffean psychological terrain (in which the female self is under constant threat) on to Austen's personal and professional maturation. The literary-filmic-critical prism outlined above invites the viewer to reassess Austen's debt to Radcliffe as a writer.[20] Put another way, in relation to this encounter in *Becoming Jane*, the biopic acts as a prompt for critical thinking on the literary interactions between Romantic writers.

Windows as a filmic device for constructing and deconstructing identity is not limited to Austen biopics. For instance, in the opening of the 2008 BBC version of *Sense and Sensibility*, Colonel Brandon's ward is observed through a window as she submits to Willoughby's advances.[21] The effect of viewing physical intimacy through cross-hatched windowpanes heightens the intrigue of what we are seeing as it also imprisons Eliza within the act of seduction from which Willoughby then departs. Although an eroticized politics of viewing is a common feature of Andrew Davies's screenplays, from his seminal adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* onwards, here the use of windows and vistas reflect Romantic sensibilities and shades of a darker interiority. That Davies's adaptation inclines towards sensibility is evident when Hattie Morahan's Elinor Dashwood seeks refuge in a cave that frames the sea beyond as the passionate feelings 'sense' has hitherto suppressed well up like the waves that crash onto the shoreline.

In relation to Austen biopics, and specifically *Becoming Jane*, the growing attraction between Anne Hathaway's Austen and James McAvoy's Tom Lefroy can be read through scenes that foreground windows and doorways as can the former's development as a writer. Hathaway's Austen is visually placed as a writer from the opening sequence and positioned, as the viewer might expect, within the rectory at Steventon, surrounded by typically English countryside. And yet the anticipated

bucolic atmosphere is disrupted by a filmic equivalent of pathetic fallacy; writer's block is conveyed through the slow dripping of water and the chiming of a clock. The camera moves from a side shot of Austen playing the piano to roam through the upstairs, only returning to Austen, and a frontal view of her, when she is content with her work. As Austen's piano playing awakens the house's inhabitants, the camera recedes through the open door to show Austen from the rear. We enter and exit the house with camera shots of Austen that trace successive moods of composition.

The cinematic techniques employed to observe and identify with Austen are resumed later in the film when the author decides not to elope with Lefroy and dutifully returns home. Once more, we hear the steady thud of the clock as Austen moves through the doorways of her domestic enclosure; and, once more, the camera views Austen at the piano from the rear. The portrait of Austen working on her craft, as she looks out at the idyllic landscape beyond, is in some respects a standard heritage shot with the author as the main selling point of what has now become a lucrative brand. Yet it is her writing, superimposed across the front of the rectory, that ascribes significance to the place and her situation within it. Austen is framed through the window from the front as she drafts "First Impressions", and her narration of the resulting novel accompanies the wedding of her brother Henry. Austen assumes a degree of creative control over the script that she has, at the very least, co-authored in the writing of the biopic's *urtext*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and has hitherto been playing a part in. This sequence effectively rewrites the film's formula of reading an author's life through what can be extrapolated from their fiction.

The scene that follows extends these screen motifs of performed composition and agency. Austen's internal dialogue merges aurally with the voice of an opera singer whilst, visually, the barred effect of the window Jane writes at is seen against the mosaic floor on which the opera singer stands. What have previously been viewed as the restricted circumstances of the young author are initially projected onto the scene. The imagery of imprisonment soon fades, however, as the camera focuses on a stained glass window in the ceiling that radiates a luminous light onto both the singer and a now older Austen in the audience. It is during this rapid and complex sequence that a professional woman artist speaks, or more literally sings, to another through a cinematic register of apertures and achieved aspirations. The biopic opts, predictably,

for a conservative ending, with Henry attempting to safeguard his sister's propriety in public (instead of the alternative ending, included in the "Deleted Scenes" section of the DVD's Special Features, where the opera singer acknowledges Austen and the audience applauds both artists). Furthermore, the final words of the film's 'summing up' are "neither Jane nor her sister Cassandra ever married" – the sobering 'reveal' of the biopic is a non-event. But the final scene works to counter this sentence: as Austen reads aloud from *Pride and Prejudice*, with an approving Lefroy and his daughter among those gathered to hear, the film affirms that her fiction is her lifetime's achievement and her legacy.

Miss Austen Regrets is equally, if perhaps more subtly, engaged in locating and identifying with the author. Camera shots of Austen looking out of windows, and being looked at through windows, are invariably connected with place in Lovering's film. While *Miss Austen Regrets* satisfies many of the expectations of heritage drama – when, for example, Austen looks on at her brother's property – subsequent discussions of estate and entailment deal with practical money matters (and the impending absence of it). Williams's Austen writes out of economic necessity as well as ambition and her attachment to the cottage in Hampshire is driven by pragmatic concerns over her work. Austen's association with property is complicated from the opening sequence of the film in which the author looks back at Manydown House after rejecting a proposal of marriage. It is during this hurried departure that the audience is first invited to view Austen through a window, in this instance the carriage window, as we hear her internal dialogue. Glass as a translucent yet visible medium enables the audience to observe the author whilst also entering into the private interiority of her thoughts. This expressive surface filters and formulates Austen's self-reflections, an effect that is generated through handheld (or breathing) camera and point-of-view (POV) shots. The film's distinctive treatment of windows also conveys a visual impression of omniscience, enabling, for the audience, a dual perspective of empathy with, and a degree of detachment from, what we come to comprehend as Austen's partial viewpoint.

The cinematic techniques employed in *Miss Austen Regrets* are detectable, to some extent, in *Becoming Jane*. The camera lens sketches aspects of Austen's interiority when she sets out to elope with Tom Lefroy and then reconsiders her

decision. As Hathaway's Austen watches McAvoy's Lefroy recede into the background, through the narrow frame of the carriage's rear window, the viewer is temporarily situated inside the carriage and immersed in her mood of desolate resignation (before we again see, as Austen does, the light from her beloved woods). The shifting position of the camera in relation to the protagonists and the carriage windows arguably has the effect of free indirect discourse on film; POV shots shuttlecock between the suggestive longings of a direct perspective and an indirect viewpoint. These scenes might be said to visually repurpose Austen's prose, with POV shots imitating the supple bifurcation of a narrative style that withstands fixed opinion. This filmic encounter with Austen commentates on the textual qualities of her novels, redirecting the viewer to what is distinctive about *reading* Austen. The screen Austen, rather than replacing or erasing the writer Austen, seeks to converse with, produce artistic simulacra of, and pay homage to her fiction.

What I take to be a cinematic form of free indirect discourse in these biopics is most apparent and innovative in the final scenes of *Miss Austen Regrets*. As the camera moves briskly from shots of Williams's Austen viewing the garden to her wandering in the garden, her creative process moves from internal dialogue to the writing of *Persuasion.* During a sequence that interleaves 'strict' POV shots with extreme close-ups of Austen's eyes, reflective surfaces focalize both the author's and the viewer's perspectives as we become immersed, initially at least, in the "wide quietness" of Austen's "rosy sanctuary". A sense of intimacy is established between the author and the viewer, with the camera tracing the stimuli and functionings of the imagination, what John Keats describes, in "Ode to Psyche", as the "wreathed trellis of a working brain".[22] The audience observes Austen as she, literally and metaphorically, "awakens to transitory brightness"; the interplay of the camera lens and light effects on windows and eyes intimate phases of a Romantic inspiration that, as delineated in "A Defence of Poetry", "fades and changes as it is developed".[23] Percy Bysshe Shelley's poetic "mind in creation [] as a fading coal" is a tacit point of reference in these later scenes, particularly when Austen struggles to maintain momentum in her writing amidst the mounting domestic interruptions and clutter of the household.[24] The audience is moved and exhilarated by the "senseless joy" (*P* 158) the author imagines for her heroine, Anne Elliot, as she unfurls like a long-awaited flower into bloom. And yet we are also aware that this flower is instantly a

"feeble shadow" ("DP" 697) of its fruition, recalling the "dread" (*P* 236) reportedly suffered by the heroine at the prospect of a future war in the closing lines of *Persuasion*. Impatiently seeking an elusive seclusion whilst knowledge of her own decline intrudes on moments of unalloyed happiness, Austen writes: "the room seemed full—full of persons and voices—but a few minutes ended it" (*P* 56). The fate of the author and her creation converge in mutually illuminating ways; for both Austen and Anne, the brilliance of "original purity and force" ("DP" 697) – in terms of the heroine's epiphanic emotions as they are eagerly imagined by the writer – succumbs to happenstance, the "tax of quick alarm" (*P* 236), and fears of mortality. The closing scenes of *Miss Austen Regrets* animate the deeply felt Romantic consciousness that permeates *Persuasion* and extend the sophisticated intertextual conversations that feature prominently in her last novel.

This essay has sought to establish an alternative approach to biopics of Jane Austen. It may be the case that Jarrold's *Becoming Jane* and Lovering's *Miss Austen Regrets* offer simplified versions of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century cultural history, a charge often levelled at period dramas; and they may, as Gillian Dow and Clare Hanson put it, "position[] Austen as an Austen-like (or Austen-lite) heroine" in portrayals of her life on screen.[25] Both films raise troubling questions about adapting (and appropriating) Austen in the twenty-first century, with wider implications for the study of female authors and artists on screen. Any film, moreover, that tries to uncover the 'truth' about an author's life through their fiction raises ideological problems for the literary critic, as Deborah Cartmell has argued.[26] However, as I hope to have demonstrated, the Austens of these biopics are neither flat heritage reproductions nor 'authentic' Austens. A film might open or reopen debates about Romantic writers, their works, their posthumous identities, and their aesthetic affinities with and divergences from contemporaries. Biopics of Austen invite the viewer to revisit the author's Romantic contexts whilst promoting and speculating on a post-Romantic inheritance that has proven to be commercially and culturally profitable. *Miss Austen Regrets* and, to a lesser but still evident degree, *Becoming Jane* are in a generative cinematic conversation with Austen's past 'lives' and the author's present popularity as well as with the narrative style, mood, and tone of her fiction. In other words, 'Austen', as the name has come to signify her literary works *and* the cultural stories she has become the adoptive author of, reads the biopics even

as they read her. Austen's 'authorship' in the twenty-first century rests on and is transfigured by a rapidly evolving and mutually informed nexus of co-readings between text and screen.

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Notes

[1] *Becoming Jane*, dir. by Julian Jarrold, screenplay by Kevin Hood and Sarah Williams, starring Anne Hathaway and James McAvoy (HanWay Films; UK Film Council, 2007); *Miss Austen Regrets*, dir. by Jeremy Lovering, screenplay by Gwyneth Hughes, starring Olivia Williams and Greta Scacchi (BBC, 2008).
[2] Margarida Esteves Pereira, "*Austenmania*, or the Female Biopic as Literary Heritage," *Adaptation, Intermediality and the British Celebrity Biopic*, ed. Márta Minia and Maddalena Pennacchia (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014) 115-27 (116, 125).
[3] Bronwyn Polaschek, *The Postfeminist Biopic: Narrating the Lives of Plath, Kahlo, Woolf and Austen* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave, 2013).

[4] Sonia Haiduc, "'Here is the story of my career…': The woman writer on film," *The Writer on Film: Screening Literary Authorship*, ed. Judith Buchanan (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013) 50-63 (57).
[5] *Miss Potter*, dir. by Chris Noonan (Phoenix Pictures; UK Film Council, 2006).
[6] Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, ed. Gillian Beer (1818; London: Penguin, 1998) 165. Subsequent references are taken from this edition and will be given in the main text.
[7] A recent example is the literary biopic of Emily Dickinson, *A Quiet Passion* (2016). Much of the film is taken up with the deaths of Dickinson's parents and her own, ultimately fatal, struggle with what was diagnosed as Bright's disease.
[8] Chapter 48 of *Mansfield Park* begins: "Let other pens dwell on guilt and misery. I quit such odious subjects as soon as I can, impatient to restore every body, not greatly in fault themselves, to tolerable comfort, and to have done with all the rest". Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*, ed. Kathryn Sutherland (1814; London: Penguin, 1996) 428.
[9] Toby R. Benis, "The Austen Effect: Remaking Romantic History as a Novel of Manners," Wordsworth Circle, 42:3 (2011): 183-6 (183).
[10] Karen Gevirtz, "Tidying as We Go: Constructing the Eighteenth Century through Adaptation in *Becoming Jane*, *Gulliver's Travels*, and *Crusoe*," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 43 (2014): 219-37.
[11] The film's title refers to Jon Spence's biography, *Becoming Jane Austen*, published in 2003.
[12] *Pride and Prejudice*, dir. by Simon Langton, screenplay by Andrew Davies (BBC, 1995).
[13] John Wiltshire, *Recreating Jane Austen* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), 17; Haiduc, p. 58.
[14] Polaschek, p. 3.
[15] This episode in *Persuasion* is considered in greater detail, as is Austen's literary relationship with Byron, in chapters 1 and 2 of Sarah Wootton, *Byronic Heroes in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing and Screen Adaptation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2016).
[16] Letter dated 3 Nov. 1813, in *Jane Austen's Letters*, ed. Deidre le Faye, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011) 260.
[17] According to Marina Cano López and Rosa María García-Periago, "*Becoming Jane* shows solidarity between the two women", in "Becoming Shakespeare and Jane Austen in Love: An Intertextual Dialogue Between Two Biopics," *Persuasions On-Line*, 29.1 (2008), 16 Aug. 2016 <http://jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol29no1/cano-garcia.html>. As the title of the article suggests, López and García-Periago consider John Madden's *Shakespeare in Love* (1998) to be 'one of the cultural codes contained in the film [*Becoming Jane*]'.
[18] Anne Elliot fixes the camera, and thereby the viewer's gaze, in the 2007 adaptation of *Persuasion*. These private moments of self-assurance, as she writes in her journal, contrast sharply with the heroine's pained social insecurities and the harried interiority that is captured through the use of breathing camera techniques.
[19] Marilyn Butler, "The Woman at the Window: Ann Radcliffe in the Novels of Mary Wollstonecraft and Jane Austen," *Women and Literature*, 1 (1980): 128-48 (140). The phrase 'oppressive, coercive environment', quoted later in the paragraph, is taken from p. 134.
[20] Elisabeth Lenckos explores the legacy of Radcliffe on Austen in "From Sublime Abbey to Picturesque Parsonage: The Aesthetics of *Northanger Abbey* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho*," *Persuasions*, 32 (2010): 105-14.
[21] *Sense and Sensibility*, dir. by John Alexander, screenplay by Andrew Davies (BBC, 2008). Deborah Cartmell reminds us that the framing of the heroine/ author through windows has a long heritage in Austen adaptation, which can be traced back to Robert Z. Leonard's 1940 film of *Pride and Prejudice*. See Cartmell, "Becoming Jane in Screen Adaptations of Austen's Fiction," in *Writer on Film*, ed. Buchanan, 151-63.
[22] John Keats, "Ode to Psyche", ll. 58, 59, 60, *The Complete Poems*, ed. John Barnard, 3rd ed. (London: Penguin, 1988).
[23] Percy Bysshe Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry", *The Major Works*, ed. Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003), 696-7. Hereafter "DP".

[24] A sense of reflected subjectivities constructed through mirrors, windows, and doorways is similarly present in Jane Campion's *Bright Star* (2009). The literary biopics of Jane Austen and John Keats released between 2007 and 2009 focus on reading interiorities through interior spaces; all three films share an emphasis on female creativity.
[25] Gillian Dow and Clare Hanson, "Introduction," *Uses of Austen: Jane's Afterlives* (New York: Palgrave, 2012) 1-18 (13).
[26] Cartmell, p. 157.