

Austen Therapy: *Pride and Prejudice* and Popular Culture

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I WANT TO TAKE A CUE FROM RUDYARD KIPLING'S SHORT STORY "The Janeites" and focus on the representation of the Austen devotee in contemporary popular literature. In Kipling's story, the shared love of Jane Austen generates community among the officers at the front during World War I, and their discussions of Austen provide an oasis of sanity amidst the chaos of war. When Humberstall, a soldier, is inducted into the officers' Janeite society, he learns Austen's narratives (and renames the artillery for her characters); subsequently he experiences the benefits of being a Janeite on the battlefield, and as he tells his fellow veterans afterwards, "[T]here's no one to touch Jane when you're in a tight place."¹

Recent novels depict contemporary readers and viewers of Austen, who, like Kipling's British soldiers, turn to her for respite from their lives, as a kind of therapy. But the contemporary Janeites are refugees from a different war: the battle of the sexes. Their turn to Austen is not a statement about traditional British values, nationalism, or nostalgia, but rather a commentary about courtship in contemporary society, as characters express their frustrations with dating and relationships. Yet as Allegra in Karen Joy Fowler's *The Jane Austen Book Club* remarks, "[I]t's Austen writing the really dangerous books. . . . Books that people really do believe, even hundreds of years later. How virtue will be recognized and rewarded. How love will prevail. How life is a romance" (141). Recent novels by Alexandra Potter and Shannon Hale suggest that Allegra is right: the modern Janeite runs the risk of becoming "lost in Austen," to borrow the title of the recent ITV program, by reading Austen solely as romantic fantasy. For such readers, Austen therapy may cause the very problems that it is designed to solve.

□
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The initial wave of Austen-inspired works from the mid- and late 1990s was largely uncritical of Austen devotees (or more precisely, uncritical of their devotion to Austen and Austen culture). Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996) and *Bridget Jones and the Edge of Reason* (1999) document and celebrate Darcymania in the United Kingdom, much as Karen Joy Fowler's *The Jane Austen Book Club* (2004) captures and celebrates Austen community in the United States. For Bridget, watching Colin Firth as Darcy is escapist and therapeutic: the 1995 BBC TV series provides a fantasy that allows her to leave the chaos of her romantic life behind. Bridget's Austen fixation centers on lusting after Colin Firth, as she finds particular satisfaction in the film's now-famous pond scene, which does not occur in Austen's novel. Bridget is primarily enthralled with "Austen" rather than Austen. But Fielding is not; she creates a metafictional discourse in *Bridget Jones's Diary* by presenting Bridget's thoughts about Elizabeth and Darcy (and the actors Colin Firth and Jennifer Ehle), all the time winking at the reader, who realizes that Bridget is living Austen narrative—first *Pride and Prejudice*, then *Persuasion*—even if Bridget does not. Mired in dating theories and self-help books, Bridget is hapless but goodhearted, and her repeated viewings of the *Pride and Prejudice* video are presented sympathetically and approvingly in the novels.² Furthermore, watching *Pride and Prejudice* is a communal event in Fielding's novels: as Jude and Shazzer watch the video with Bridget and console themselves over their romantic trials, they articulate relationship theories and a shared code of values, and engage in a shared therapy. Bridget and her friends are not interested in enacting Austenian manners or courtship codes; rather, Austen creates a space that enables therapeutic discourse.

Similarly, the members of the Jane Austen Book Club find comfort in reading Austen, and like Fielding, Fowler develops a metafictional discourse as her characters discuss and invoke Austen's values. The origins of the book club are therapeutic, as Jocelyn establishes the club to help her friend Sylvia with the aftermath of her divorce. As they read and analyze Austen's novels, the members of the club work through their issues and relationships.³ Their Austen discussions are group therapy, and the members of the club recognize it as such, for they often appreciate the relevance of Austen in each other's lives even if they do not always see Austen narrative in their own.⁴ Although their readings of Austen's novels differ, Austen brings them together, and as the members of the club coalesce as a community, they support each other through a number of crises: not only Sylvia's post-divorce depression, but the death of Prudie's

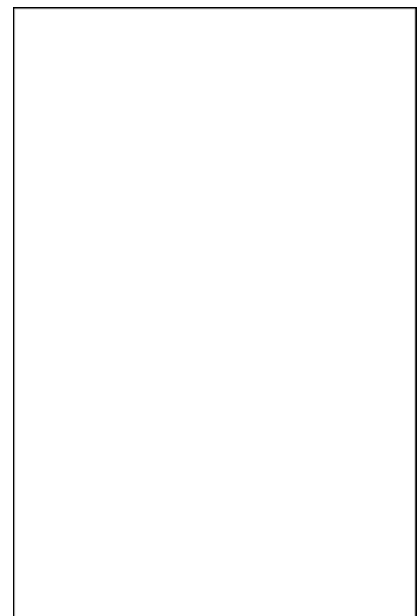
mother, the betrayal of Allegra by her lover, and so on. After discussing Austen's six completed novels, the members of the book club feel transformed: "We'd let Austen into our lives, and now we were all either married or dating. Could O'Brian have done this? How? When we needed to cook aboard ship, play a musical instrument, travel to Spain dressed like a bear, Patrick O'Brian would be our man. Till then, we'd just wait. In three or four years it would be time to read Austen again."⁵ In Fielding and Fowler's novels, reading Austen (or "Austen," by watching film versions of her novels) is not only an expression of taste and values, but also a psychologically satisfying, healthy, healing activity.



More recently, authors have depicted Austen's modern devotees in a less flattering light: as obsessive, escapist readers, for whom Austen becomes the source of their romantic problems. Emily Albright, a bookstore manager in Alexandra Potter's *Me and Mr. Darcy* (2007), and Jane Hayes, a graphic designer in Shannon Hale's *Austenland* (2007), have enjoyed *Pride and Prejudice* since adolescence. As Emily and Jane catalogue their disastrous dates and relationships, their dating narratives might be called *Desperately Seeking Darcy*. With high standards and expectations based on their readings of Austen, they do not succeed at romance—for no man can compete with their idea of Mr. Darcy.⁶ Interestingly enough, neither Emily nor Jane envisions herself as Elizabeth Bennet, although that is an implicit part of the fantasy: to be the desirable-but-unnoticed woman that a Darcy falls in love with against his will. These women are independent professionals, confident in their values and beliefs, if insecure about romance; unlike Bridget Jones, they do not feel that they need to change. Their quest to fulfill the *Pride and Prejudice* narrative centers on finding that elusive handsome, wealthy, noble, brooding man rather than acquiring Elizabeth's confidence, wit, and charm.⁷

Insofar as *Pride and Prejudice* provides Potter's Emily and Hale's Jane solace from their frustrations with contemporary courtship, Austen does have a therapeutic value in these novels. Like Bridget Jones, Jane watches the 1995 BBC *Pride and Prejudice* repeatedly—but she hides the DVD set when friends and relatives come to visit, ashamed of her excessive viewing. Emily reads Austen's novels constantly. Their ongoing, intense engagement with Austen suggests that they are managing and assuaging the trauma of their romantic failures in a manifestation of Freud's *fort/da* behavior—as Emily and Jane repeatedly engage with Austen's narrative, they acquire control: they are secure in the knowledge that the romance between Elizabeth and Darcy will succeed every time.⁸ Yet unlike Bridget and the members of the Jane Austen Book Club, Emily and Jane are largely isolated in (and by) their Darcy fixation. In Hale's *Austenland* Jane has only one confidante, as does Emily in Potter's *Me and Mr. Darcy*—and each of those confidantes lacks a Darcy fixation because her attention is elsewhere: Jane's best friend Molly is happily married with twins, while Emily's friend Stella is a young, partying fashionista. When Molly and Stella proffer their perspectives on Darcy, fiction, and reality, Jane and Emily dismiss their friends' remarks; even close friends cannot understand a fixation that they do not partake in as well. As a result, Emily and Jane lack community—much less an Austen community—to provide perspective before their Austen obsession takes hold.

Austen does not advocate uncritical, romantic reading—the narratives of Marianne Dashwood, Captain Benwick, and most famously, Catherine Morland, make evident the psychological costs of misreading.⁹ Elizabeth Bennet is a model reader—for reading is one source of enjoyment among many for her; as Darcy notes, it is extensive (*not* repetitive) reading that characterizes the accomplished woman, and improves the mind.¹⁰ Yet for Potter's Emily, and for Hale's Jane, Austen's fiction keeps getting in the way of real life (insofar as they, as fictional characters, have "real" lives), and they know that it is unhealthy to be attached to a fictional character. As Jane remarks, "That pesky movie version was the culprit. Sure, Jane had first read *Pride and Prejudice* when she was sixteen, read it a dozen times, since. . . . But it wasn't until the BBC put a face on the story that those gentlemen in tight breeches had stepped out of her reader's imagination and into her non-fiction hopes. Stripped of Austen's funny, insightful, biting narrator, the movie became a pure romance" (Hale 2). To rid themselves of their Darcy fixation, each travels to England—Emily on a tour of Austen sites, Jane to a Regency period enactment park—to have one final intense Austen experience before letting go of Darcy, Austen, and romance altogether. (Jane calls this "immersion therapy," but such experiences are just as likely to confirm Darcy fixation as remove it. Such are the premises of contemporary chick lit.) If Austen causes relationship problems as well as ameliorates them, then Austen withdrawal is also a form of Austen therapy.



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Since Hale and Potter's novels are Austen fictions, their protagonists inevitably reiterate Austen's narrative: both Jane and Emily enact romance with a modern version of Darcy that the reader recognizes long before they do. Yet for Hale and Potter, it is necessary to give up Austen's Darcy in order to find your own contemporary Darcy, which is easier said than done. In *Me and Mr. Darcy*, Emily meets Austen's Mr. Darcy at multiple sites on the Austen tour, and he arranges midnight trysts and picnics, and recites poetry to her; at *Austenland*'s Pembroke Park, Jane encounters Mr. Nobley, a Darcyesque Regency gentleman who first ignores and snubs her, then admires and romances her. Emily and Jane revel in their fantasies of a Regency-period Darcy, making it difficult to abandon them.

But the line between reality and fantasy is highly permeable; just as the Darcy fantasy has overtaken their real lives, reality starts seeping into their Darcy fantasy. When Emily and Jane encounter the material and social codes of Regency England, the codes that Austen's Darcy lives by and believes in, they balk.¹¹ A stay at Pembroke Park requires that Hale's Jane wear Empire-waist dresses, defer to those of higher rank, and spend days sewing, reading, and waiting—for a walk, for a ball, for it to stop raining. As "Miss Erstwhile," Jane is frequently bored and frustrated, and soon she yearns for her familiar material reality—for electronic devices, basketball games on television, jeans, and chocolate—and for a psychological reality to reveal the truth behind the Regency fantasy that is Pembroke Park. Jane soon realizes that she wants a "real" man—not one filled with repressed passion, bound by Regency social constraints and class codes, and not one who is acting a role to please her. Similarly, Emily is charmed by Darcy in Potter's *Me and Mr. Darcy*, but she has opinions that startle and alienate him, particularly regarding her career and his servants. Moreover, Emily is appalled that Darcy is sexist and classist, her twenty-first-century sensibility clashing with his nineteenth-century one. Soon Emily finds it annoying that Darcy arranges outings without asking her first, or inquiring about her preferences; what seemed attractive, romantic, and thoughtful begins to feel assertive, confining, and patronizing.

Neither Emily nor Jane is able to perform as a Regency woman, as an Elizabeth Bennet; as Henry, the actor who plays Mr. Nobley at Pembroke Park later tells Jane, she's a terrible actress. But it is not enough that Emily and Jane recognize that they cannot follow the social codes for Regency women depicted in *Pride and Prejudice*: they must realize that they do not want to, not even for Darcy. It is the latter realization that releases them from their Darcy fixation, for unlike Amanda Price in ITV's *Lost in Austen*, they know that they cannot find happiness (or even contentment) with Austen's Darcy, who cannot meet their needs and whose needs they can never fulfill.¹²

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By gesturing towards the socio-economic complexities of *Pride and Prejudice*—towards Austen's commentary on wealth, rank, class relations, and the social options for women—Alexandra Potter, like Shannon Hale, signals the limitations of reading the novel solely as a romance. Both Emily and Jane have perpetuated imbalanced readings of *Pride and Prejudice* by happily focusing on Darcy to the exclusion of the other aspects of the novel; when Emily and Jane confront the material and social manifestations of Austen's world, the limitations of their romantic readings become fully apparent. Not only have Emily and Jane failed to grapple with Austen's complex socio-economic critique of her society, but they have also undermined their ability to maintain their fantasy, since they cannot understand the society that defines and shapes Darcy. Or put differently: Emily and Jane are devoted, but not insightful, readers of Austen—and their intellectual myopia ultimately leads to the destruction of their Darcy fixation. In this sense, Emily and Jane echo Catherine Morland, the highly impressionable reader of Gothic novels in Austen's *Northanger Abbey*. Despite many signs that she is not living a Gothic narrative at Northanger Abbey, Catherine enjoys the frisson of Gothic horror and romance that she persistently (and falsely) attributes to the house and its inhabitants. When Henry Tilney recognizes Catherine's misappropriation of the Gothic, he exposes it, arguing that Gothic narrative is impossible in England—a cultured, civilized country where people are regulated by law, society, and surveillance, not by trauma and violence. As her logic, morals, and aesthetic sensibility are challenged, Catherine's folly is revealed, for her devotion to the Gothic novel has stymied her understanding of her society rather than enhanced it.



Austen criticizes immature, unwise readers, as well as readers who fail to maintain the boundaries between fiction and reality. But neither Potter nor Hale pursues their critique of readers who read Austen solely for romance. Instead of providing an alternative to the romantic reader's reading of *Pride and Prejudice*, Potter and Hale adapt Austen's romance narrative to modern circumstances in *Me and Mr. Darcy* and *Austenland*. Much like their protagonists, Potter and Hale acknowledge but largely avoid the possibilities of non-romantic readings of Austen, of the socio-economic discourse and critique of Austen's culture, and of the present. The pull of Austen's romance narrative is seemingly too strong. So while Potter and Hale allow their characters to entertain the possibility of relationships with real, flawed men—as Emily and Jane relinquish the Darcy fantasy, attempt to mature, and decide to confront romantic risk and disappointment—Potter and Hale cannot resist rewarding their protagonists with the full Austen romance. Accordingly, Potter and Hale position Emily and Jane to be modern Elizabeths: Emily and Jane are contemporary versions of the unsuspecting female who gets noticed by, and earns the love of, the desirable man. Jane and Emily's new resolve to accept something other than the Darcy ideal is never tested, for Potter and Hale reward their heroines with modern Darcys, who are noble, considerate, and moral.

For a reader familiar with *Pride and Prejudice*, Potter's *Me and Mr. Darcy* and Hale's *Austenland* are highly faithful to the trajectory of Austen's romance narrative. Potter and Hale's modern Darcys are attractive, but they initially display characteristics that alienate the modern Elizabeths. In *Me and Mr. Darcy* Emily is annoyed by journalist Spike Hargreaves's arrogance, self-assuredness, and his penchant for blonde Frenchwomen, while in *Austenland* Jane is frustrated by the aloofness and snobbery of Henry Jenkins, the actor playing Mr. Nobley at Pembroke Park. Emily does not recognize Spike's interest in her, nor

is Jane aware of Henry's quiet attention as anything more than his role as Mr. Nobley. As in *Pride and Prejudice*, both Spike and Henry declare themselves unexpectedly; Emily and Jane refuse, only to learn subsequently the value of their suitors. Both men reveal their true Darcyness slowly, belatedly: Potter's Spike takes care of Emily when she is ill, secretly helps a tour member locate the child she gave up for adoption years earlier, and prevents a con man from preying upon the women on the Austen tour. Hale's Jane discovers Henry's history of honorable behavior—and his unfailing nobility and kindness, despite the trauma of his former wife's adulterous, larcenous conduct, and the constant pressure from the predatory women visiting Pembroke Park. As Emily recognizes Spike's Darcyness (and Jane, Henry's), misunderstandings are clarified, and the couples are reconciled. Conveniently, Spike and Henry are of the same socio-economic, intellectual class as Emily and Jane, a strategy that eliminates the class and social critique of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*—and facilitates the romantic resolution, since there are no social obstacles to be overcome. And happily, there are no familial ones either.

By granting Emily and Jane the romantic ending, Potter and Hale fulfill the agenda of contemporary chick lit and pledge allegiance to *Pride and Prejudice* by adhering to its narrative paradigm. Potter and Hale are Austen fans too, after all—and as John Wiltshire suggests, recreating Austen is an expression of affection, play, and devotion. Such revisions and appropriations of Austen engage in a fantasy: they allow authors to be “Austen” as well as to interact with Austen, which is a therapeutic writerly fantasy as well. Like Helen Fielding and Karen Joy Fowler, Alexandra Potter and Shannon Hale not only demonstrate that Austen and her plots are applicable to modern society, but they argue that we live in Austen's world, whether we are aware of it or not. Austen is inescapable—so one must hope to be Elizabeth Bennet, and not Charlotte Lucas. But as Hale and Potter's novels attempt to perform a regulatory function—to demonstrate how *not* to read Austen, how *not* to respond to her works—they fail to do so. Potter and Hale perpetuate *Pride and Prejudice* as a pure romance narrative, and its therapeutic power is never truly questioned—because the courtship problems that devotion to Austen causes are solved in an Austenian fashion. Even if a reader learns to overcome an unhealthy obsession with Austen (and Darcy), the romantic dream still comes true in *Me and Mr. Darcy* and *Austenland*, a conclusion that justifies the obsession with Austen and the romance in *Pride and Prejudice*. Potter and Hale blur the distinction between fantasy and reality as their characters do, for they reinforce *Pride and Prejudice*'s power as a real, realizable narrative, rather than as a fictional one.

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As Deidre Lynch's collection *Janeites* (2000) makes evident, devotion to Austen has a long history. Austen's acolytes have often been characterized by their possessiveness of and allegiance to Austen (“our Jane”), and their sense of exclusivity as a community of select readers with expertise on Austen's life and works. And yet, before their inevitable happy endings, *Me and Mr. Darcy* and *Austenland* suggest that the experience of a contemporary Austen devotee has somehow gone awry. What turns the contemporary readers' response to Austen into an obsession? If Hale and Potter's protagonists are any indication, part of the answer lies in the isolation of the contemporary Janeite, who may lack the salutary communal experience of Austen depicted in the works of Kipling, Fielding, and Fowler. Even on their trips, Jane and Emily experience Austen alone: Emily does not discuss her encounters with Darcy with the tour members, and Jane does not bond with the other guests at Pembroke Park. The implication is that it is not healthy to read Austen alone, or to let others do so; instead, one should encourage an Austen reader to find a fellow Janeite, join a book club, or become a member of the Jane Austen Society of North America.

But Emily and Jane's obsession with Austen may ultimately be a function of frustrated desire: the modern woman's desire for romance, and the desire to consume Austen as a cultural product. In this regard, Potter's *Me and Mr. Darcy* and Hale's *Austenland* speak more to the psychology of women readers and the marketing of modern fandoms than about Austen or her works. Emily and Jane, like Potter and Hale, do not provide new insights into *Pride and Prejudice*; instead, they offer updates on the status of *Pride and Prejudice* and Austen's readers in contemporary culture. This is not to say that Potter and Hale (and their protagonists) do not venerate Jane Austen—they do. And these novels argue that if one must be obsessed about an author, Austen is the author to choose. But Potter and Hale's critique of the modern Janeite, incomplete as it is, implies that the modern reader's reverence of Austen is self-serving, if not selfish: Emily and Jane read and love Austen because she justifies their romantic ideology and provides narratives that fulfill their romantic desires. Just as Catherine Morland adored the thrill of the Gothic novel, so too Emily and Jane love the way Austen makes them feel; like Catherine, Emily and Jane yearn for an authentic realization of their literary experience—their desire to be an Austen character, and to function in a world created by Jane Austen.

But Austen will always be out of reach, fixed in Regency history; the modern reader is a spectator of, not a participant in, her novels. What *Me and Mr. Darcy* and *Austenland* demonstrate is that even if the modern reader could

enter Austen's world, the encounter with the Regency would be unsettling, if not alienating. So while Austen elicits veneration from her twenty-first-century readers, the latest generation of Janeites is inevitably frustrated in their desires to fulfill their Austen fantasies: Austen therapy has its limitations. Potter and Hale suggest that this frustration can be resolved by the creation of "Austen" texts: if modern Janeites cannot live in Regency England, they can import Austen's sensibility and ideas into the present, and modern ideas into the Regency. These "Austen" works—the films, novels, the tours, the cultural events inspired by Austen—are inevitably compensatory because they are not created by Jane Austen. (If the possibility of realizing a genuine Austen narrative or experience is asymptotic to zero—readers may get close but never completely succeed—then the "Austen" texts, which are of necessity one degree removed from Austen, are less likely to accomplish it.) Nevertheless, these "Austen" texts respond to the longing for an accessible, performable Austen, as they proffer permutations of Austen's narratives that the modern reader can engage with, and possibly achieve.

In essence, Potter's *Me and Mr. Darcy* and Hale's *Austenland* justify modern Austen culture (and their participation in it) as the logical response to the inability to enact an originary Austen experience. Their novels pay homage to Austen while acknowledging that they cannot be anything other than adaptations of an inaccessible original. The readers of *Me and Mr. Darcy* and *Austenland*, like Potter's Emily and Hale's Jane, are subject to the contemporary marketing of culture, which identifies consumer interest in order to develop and exploit markets—and leads to the establishment of places like Pembroke Park (which is not unlike Dickens World in the United Kingdom, or Colonial Williamsburg in the United States), to the development of Austen tours of England (which do exist), and crucially, to the production of mass-marketed videos and DVDs ("that pesky movie version") that can be played over and over again. The Austen industry satisfies the consumer's desire for more Austen by providing "Austen" products and experiences, and in so doing, services an Austen fandom by reaffirming Austen's genius and augmenting the cultural presence of "Austen."³

If Potter and Hale's representation of the modern Austen devotee is correct, then there should be no end in sight for contemporary re-imaginings of *Pride and Prejudice*. There will always be the desire for more "Austen," as readers, chronologically and culturally removed from Austen, will adapt and appropriate her life and works to their needs.¹⁴ The thriving "Austen" industry corroborates this reading of the cultural power of the modern Janeite: from the Bollywood *Bride and Prejudice* (2004), to Stephanie Barron's Jane Austen detective novels, to the romantic biopic *Becoming Jane* (2007), to the current spate of Austen-horror hybrids like *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2009), *Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters* (2009), and *Mr. Darcy, Vampyre* (2009), there is more varied "Austen" being produced to solace, engage, and entertain contemporary consumers. Like Kipling, Fielding, and Fowler, Potter and Hale affirm the therapeutic power of Austen—but they also indicate that Austen therapy is very much a work in progress.

NOTES

I would like to thank Dennis Allen for our ongoing discussions of Austen, fan behaviors, and fan cultures, and Laura Engel for the coffee and the encouragement.

1. Kipling 146. See Johnson's discussion of Kipling and Austen's therapeutic effect on veterans, 31-34.

2. Bridget describes watching *Pride and Prejudice*, and the national response to the series (Fielding *BJD* 215, cf. *BJD* 216-17). For her repeated viewings of the video, with and without friends, see Fielding *BJER* 35, 90-91, 124-5, 296. Fielding's metafictional play reaches its height when Bridget interviews Colin Firth, whom she repeatedly confuses with Mr. Darcy (*BJER* 136-143). For the intertextual play between Fielding's novels and Austen, see Salber.

3. Sylvia turns to Austen to address the problems of older women; Prudie tries to defuse the effects of student sexuality by reading Austen; and Daniel wants to join the book club, for *Persuasion* is about second chances (Fowler 46, 87, 239). Cf. Robin Swicord's comment about the film version of *The Jane Austen Book Club*: "I want Austen to be an antidote to our fractured, busy lives" (Fowler, "What Would" 171).

4. For instance, Prudie realizes the implications of her *Sense and Sensibility* comments for Sylvia (Fowler 47).

5. Fowler 249. The film version of *The Jane Austen Book Club* (2007) engages in this self-conscious referential play, as the traffic sign flashes at Prudie, "What would Jane do?" The film versions of *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001) and *Bridget Jones and the Edge of Reason* (2004) eliminate most of the references to Austen and Austen culture, primarily signaling Austen/"Austen" in the casting of Colin Firth as Mark Darcy and in Bridget's job at Pemberley Press.

6. Cf. Pattillo's Professor Emma Grant, whose adoration of Darcy and Knightley leads to a disastrous marital choice, which subsequently triggers a career crisis. Unlike Emily and Jane, Emma's devotion to Austen manifests itself as research rather than repetition, but she too tends to blame Austen for her troubles.

7. Emily and Jane (like Bridget Jones) objectify Darcy as they idolize him, but some Austen fictions rewrite *Pride and Prejudice* from Darcy's point of view to provide insight into his character; see Aidan, Grange, and Fasman.

8. In the fort/da game, a child repeatedly hides and finds an object to overcome anxiety and fear regarding maternal absence; see Freud 14-23.

9. Tellingly, these characters' courtships resolve with comparatively little romance: Henry proposes to Catherine in *Northanger Abbey* because he recognizes that she's in love with him; Marianne is encouraged to marry Colonel Brandon in *Sense and Sensibility* because he deserves his heart's desire; Benwick falls in love with the recuperating Louisa Musgrove in *Persuasion* for she provides an immediate sympathetic object for his affection.

10. Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 37, 39. I am grateful to Juliette Wells and Eric Lindstrom, who pointed out that Elizabeth reads alone at Netherfield (where she is interrupted and teased about reading) and when she receives her correspondence—especially Darcy's letter, which she cannot truly share. Yet Elizabeth's solitary reading is not psychologically debilitating because she engages in many other activities that provide perspective; Mary Bennet reads alone constantly, and not surprisingly, she is socially and intellectually awkward. For scenes of collective reading in Austen, and its effects, see Marianne's description of Edward as (unlike Willoughby) a less-than-ideal reader in *Sense and Sensibility*; Collins's attempt to read Fordyce's *Sermons* to the Bennets; Henry Crawford's reading of Shakespeare in *Mansfield Park*; and Elton reading while Emma draws in *Emma*, among others. For the conventions of domestic and collective reading in the period, see Michaelson.

11. Cf. the comments of Rigler's Courtney Stone, a Janeite transported to Regency England after a romantic trauma, on the material and social circumstances of the period (18-19, 24, 36, 50, 84-85, 91-92). Carroll argues that Austen time-travel narratives insist on the inexorable strangeness and the dirtiness of Austen's world.

12. In *Lost in Austen*, modern Janeite Amanda Price and Elizabeth Bennet switch places, and *Pride and Prejudice* changes considerably despite Amanda's efforts to ensure that the characters enact Austen's plot. When Darcy visits twenty-first-century London, he is horrified and awkward (unlike Elizabeth, who fits in admirably). In the end, Amanda chooses to remain in Austen's world, since there is no Darcy in her world and no possibility of Darcy adapting to the twenty-first century. See Laurie Kaplan's discussion of *Lost in Austen*, "[Lost in Austen and Generation-Y Janeites](#)," in this issue.

13. For a useful survey of Austen's cultural presence, see Auerbach (265-91). See Thompson on Austen products. Foster discusses the niche marketing of Austen biographies and novels; for the Austen tourist industry, see Crang. In Kiefer's recent survey of 4,501 Janeites, 47% had visited Austen sites in England. Kiefer's survey also documents the ongoing engagement with Austen: "About one-third of participants typically read one or two of the novels annually, and about the same number read three or more. Eleven percent read all six every year!"

14. Jenkins argues that technology enables "participatory culture" as modern fans create texts, experiences, and communities based on the cultural works they enjoy. The Internet is a primary site for participatory Austen culture; see Austen.com and FanFiction.Net, which host thousands of Austen-influenced stories (finished and unfinished, Regency and modern) written by fans of Austen.

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Jane Austen, in *Pride and Prejudice*, portrayed several things through her chosen title. First, Mr. Darcy exhibits pride when he first arrives at Netherfield because he looks down on country. What is the main theme in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*? As the title suggests, the main themes in *Pride and Prejudice* really are pride and prejudice. Elizabeth is shown to be guilty of prejudicially judging Darcy to be prideful. In addition, it turns out how does Jane Austen use wit and irony in *Pride and Prejudice*? A great deal of Austen's wit is actually seen through the use of irony. In *Pride and Prejudice* is a romantic novel of manners written by Jane Austen in 1813. The novel follows the character development of Elizabeth Bennet, the dynamic protagonist of the book who learns about the repercussions of hasty judgments and comes to appreciate the difference between superficial goodness and actual goodness. Its humour lies in its honest depiction of manners, education, marriage, and money during the Regency era in Great Britain. Jane Austen's *Pride & Prejudice* is set in 18th century England. A foolish mother, a patient father, and a mixture of five lively, intelligent, silly and good natured girls make up the family around which the story revolves. Brief Chapter Summaries and Links to Text and Commentary. Detailed Chapter Summaries and Links to Text and Commentary. Each line in the delightful novel can be studied to reveal great insights and truths. Let's take for example the description of Darcy's admiration for Elizabeth