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# MEET JANE AUSTEN: THE AUTHOR AS CHARACTER IN CONTEMPORARY DERIVATIVE WORKS

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# MEET JANE AUSTEN: THE AUTHOR AS CHARACTER IN CONTEMPORARY DERIVATIVE WORKS

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# RESUMO

A escritora inglesa Jane Austen possui, além do status de autora canônica, um apelo popular não apenas em função de sua qualidade como escritora, mas também pela força imagética de suas obras quando adaptadas para o cinema. Em *Amor e Inocência* (2007), o diretor Julian Jarrold apresenta um episódio ocorrido na vida da autora, com base em fatos extraídos da biografia *Becoming Jane Austen*, escrita em 2003 por Jon Spence. O filme explora um possível envolvimento entre a jovem Jane e o estudante irlandês Tom Lefroy. Essa produção, enquanto apresenta o início da carreira da escritora, sugere que o trauma da relação mal sucedida com Lefroy possa ter sido a fonte temática que inspirou sua obra ficcional posterior. Esta dissertação verifica de que forma o filme articula as questões históricas sobre a vida de Austen com as situações ficcionais apresentadas em seus romances para chegar a um produto final tão coeso e verossímil, embora ficcional. Especial atenção é dada ao estudo da construção da personagem protagonista, que resulta da combinação entre o conteúdo imagético das obras de Austen e os elementos biográficos pesquisados por Spence. Além dessas fusões, há ainda que ser considerado o ícone Jane Austen, que habita o imaginário dos ingleses e dos leitores pelo mundo afora. Na evolução das adaptações fílmicas das obras de Austen testemunhamos a fusão entre as personagens e a própria autora, especialmente no caso de Elizabeth Bennet, em *Orgulho e Preconceito* (1813). Para realizar esta análise, lanço mão dos conceitos de adaptação e apropriação propostos por Linda Hutcheon, e do conceito de metaficção historiográfica estabelecido pela mesma autora em *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (1988). Ao término do trabalho, espero que esta discussão investigativa e argumentativa seja útil em três aspectos: contribuindo para o debate sobre autores usados como personagens na ficção derivativa contemporânea; identificando certas necessidades culturais que subjazem ao culto do ícone Jane Austen, conhecido como Austenmania; e verificando até que ponto o conceito de metaficção historiográfica dá conta de propostas narrativas em que a personagem histórica retratada é também uma escritora.

Palavras chaves: Literatura Inglesa. Jane Austen. Autor como Personagem. Adaptação. Metaficcção Historiográfica.

# ABSTRACT

Jane Austen enjoys more than the status of canonical author: she is also popular not only because of her achievements as a writer but also for the cinematic appeal of her novels. In *Becoming Jane* (2007), director Julian Jarrold presents the story of Jane Austen from an episode occurred early in the author's life. Based on facts extracted from Jon Spence's biography *Becoming Jane Austen* (2003), the film explores a supposed relationship between young Jane and an Irish Law student, Tom Lefroy. In *Becoming Jane* we witness the beginning of Austen's writing career, and the film speculates that the trauma of a failed relationship with Lefroy was the inspiration for Austen's mature novels. This work verifies the ways in which the film articulates the historical aspects of Jane Austen's life with fictional events as presented in her novels to reach a cohesive and credible – although fictional – result. Special attention is paid to the process of constructing a fictional Jane as main character, combining the images contained in her novels with the biographical elements presented by Spence; it is also considered in this analysis the evolving nature of Jane Austen as an icon that inhabits not only the English imaginary but also that of readers all over the world. In the evolution of Austen filmic adaptations, we witness a fusion between her characters and the author herself, especially Elizabeth Bennet from *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), which adds to the intertextual layers of any film analysis. To deal with the questions of film adaptations, I refer to the concepts of adaptation and appropriation as posed by theoretician Linda Hutcheon. For the specific analysis of the phenomenon of author as character, I turn again to Linda Hutcheon and the concept of historiographic metafiction presented in *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (1988). I hope, by the end of this thesis, that this investigative and argumentative analysis is helpful in three instances: contributing to the discussion of the use of authors as characters in contemporary fiction, be it filmic or literary; identifying the cultural needs of readers and critics that perpetuate the cult of Jane Austen, known as Austenmania; and verifying to what extent historiographic metafiction alone is enough to deal with narratives in which the historical character portrayed is also a writer.



Keywords: English Literature. Jane Austen. Author As Character. Adaptation. Historiographic Metafiction.

*The person, be it gentleman or lady, who has not pleasure in a good novel, must be intolerably stupid. (…)*

*Yes, novels; — for I will not adopt that ungenerous and impolitic custom so common with novel writers, of degrading by their contemptuous censure the very performances, to the number of which they are themselves adding — joining with their greatest enemies in bestowing the harshest epithets on such works, and scarcely ever permitting them to be read by their own heroine, who, if she accidentally take up a novel, is sure to turn over its insipid pages with disgust. Alas! if the heroine of one novel be not patronized by the heroine of another, from whom can she expect protection and regard? I cannot approve of it. Let us leave it to the Reviewers to abuse such effusions of fancy at their leisure, and over every new novel to talk in threadbare strains of the trash with which the press now groans. Let us not desert one another; we are an injured body. Although our productions have afforded more extensive and unaffected pleasure than those of any other literary corporation in the world, no species of composition has been so much decried.*

*(Jane Austen,* ***Northanger Abbey****)*

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# INTRODUCTION

*'I am afraid', replied Elinor, 'that the pleasantness of an employment does not always evince its propriety'.*

Jane Austen, ***Sense and Sensibility***

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a work about Jane Austen *must* start with these seven words, and I refuse to do it differently. There comes a time when one realizes that talking about Jane Austen is like threading in over charted territory – being well aware of the paths that have been taken before, and unsure if there still is any land to be discovered and conquered. In any such adventures, the search is part of the fun; and by paying attention to the maps of Austenland, we may discover that its borders are ever expanding – *that* is the direction one should go. I have been an avid consumer of all things Austen for the better part of the last two decades. Still, all the novels I have read, film adaptations I have seen, articles I have studied and books I have purchased could not have prepared me for the decision to approach Austen not as an admirer, but as a scholar. The stronger the bond, the more difficult it is to create a healthy distance from the object of research, which can lead to many surprising side effects, that range from re-reading *Pride and Prejudice* two times a year to not being able to even look at it for a while.

Most of the paths in Austenland are named after each of Austen's six major novels, but there are other smaller, but nonetheless important, roads to follow. It would be easy to wander around some many interesting avenues, especially when the popularity of Jane Austen, with the general public and scholars alike, seems live and well and ever so increasing. In this thesis, I choose to concentrate on one of such smaller roads. This means that I will not plunge deeply into the analysis of any of Austen's six classical novels. What I will do is to examine the process through which the person/author turned into the icon, an entity standing on its own in the popular imaginary; and how this icon was appropriated by readers, who turned it

into characters in the derivative fiction they created. Thus, the central aim of my research is to investigate the appropriation of Jane Austen's historical person into character(s) in derivative works of fiction. To do so, it is necessary to accompany and understand the evolution of Jane Austen's image in the last 150 years, through the phenomenon that ended up being known as Austenmania, when the release of four major adaptations of Austen novels, in 1995, catapulted the sales of her work and the consumption of novels and films alike. I mean to cover these events in a deeper research, but time and format constraints forbid me to do so now. I will, however, lean on the work of talented critics who have tackled those issues, especially Claudia L. Johnson, Juliette Wells, Deirdre Lynch, and Claire Harman. Their research is fundamental for the overview of the events that will be presented here.

The phenomenon of Austenmania was not restricted to films: it also brought to light a tradition of derivative fiction based on Austen's work that increased with the spotlight provided by the sudden global explosion of the English writer. Allied with the spread of commercial domestic internet access, this Austen-fuelled literary industry aligned itself with the *fan culture*, and fan culture's most visible product, the *fan fiction*. The market of Austen-related novels – sequels, prequels, completions, variations, modernizations – lends itself to a study of the changing readership of Austen, and of new modes of fan engagement, as mapped out by Henry Jenkins in *Textual Poachers* (1992). There is an overwhelming number of works with these characteristics – a number which grows every day –, but the focus here will lie on works in which Jane Austen is presented as a character. The more restricted the number of titles, the more we narrow the scope of the research to focus only on works that feature Jane Austen as a character, the more complex the issue becomes. Do we know who the real Jane Austen was? Is it relevant to know the facts about her life to be able to write fiction about her? Through what specific succession of events is it that the person became the icon, and the icon multiplied into new characters? In order to handle the questions above, let us briefly observe some moments in the sequence of events that helped create the "personality" that is commonly ascribed to the icon created.

Jane Austen, the person, was the daughter of a country parson, the second-to-last in a family with eight children with enough connections to be well regarded by neighbors, but not enough to be seen as more than genteel. It has been a long way from those original circumstances, to the icon that we have nowadays, whose image is able to sell not only her books, but that of several other authors that are inspired by Austen, and appropriate her work, as well as all sort

of merchandise imaginable. It seems as if this fusion of reality and imagination has both haunted and embraced her from the start. The first full-length biography, *A Memoir of Jane Austen*, was published in 1869 by Jane Austen's nephew James Edward Austen-Leigh. It was meant to finally introduce the author to the public: following the restraints imposed by her time, Austen's novels had so far been published under the signature "By a Lady". The posthumous edition of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, published just a few months after her death in 1817, was the first to bear its author's name. The rigidity of the society of which Austen-Leigh was part demanded that the good name of the Austen family be not harmed by the impropriety of harboring a female writer, in a time when the pursuit of any kind of profession by a genteel woman was frowned upon. Her name was known, but her circumstances were not, and the selective nature of the events chosen to be disclosed by her family might have not offended Victorian sensibilities, but it also gave margin to ample speculation on those parts of Jane Austen's story for which there are no corroborative documentation. Part of the reason for this was the choice made by Austen-Leigh and his collaborators – his sisters Anna and Caroline – to conceal episodes of their aunt's life which could be considered improper, and to censor and adapt the correspondence to which they had access. Their representation of Jane Austen is a continuation of the biographical notice of the author in the posthumous edition of her two last novels, which said of Austen: "A life of usefulness, literature, and religion, was not by any means a life of event" (AUSTEN-LEIGH, 2002, p.137). This designation was composed by her favorite brother, and early literary agent, Henry. In the end, Austen-Leigh's memories do not tell us who Jane Austen was, but rather who her family *would like people to believe* she had been: "the inspired amateur, the homely spinster who put down her knitting-needles to take up her pen" (SOUTHAM, 1979, p.28) – a position which is contradicted by the publishing, through another relative, of previously unknown letters, in 1884: Lord Braborne, son of Jane Austen's favorite niece, Fanny Knight, came, upon his mother's death, in possession of over 80 letters left to her by Cassandra Austen. These letters cover a period of Jane Austen's life in which she constantly dealt with publishers, negotiating the release of her novels. This contradicts Austen-Leigh's assertion that Dear Aunt Jane wrote neither for fortune nor for fame. Thus, from the authority of such claims in a family-sanctioned biography, the myth surrounding Jane Austen, the gentlewoman who writes, was created. Despite the effort of several accomplished biographers to dispel some early misconceptions about the author's life, the case with Jane Austen is one of those instances where the boundaries between history and fiction become blurry, as there are no diaries, and only a few letters allow us to glimpse what she might have been like. As such, all

portraits of Jane Austen are, in a way, fictional, as they had to rely on speculation to fill in the gaps about the author's life.

For the reasons stated above, I chose, as my corpus of application, the 2007 film *Becoming Jane,* written by Sarah Williams and Kevin Hood, and directed by Julian Jarrold. The film embodies most of, if not all, the issues that I would like to discuss: firstly, because it is a work of fiction and not a documentary, the character Jane, presented in *Becoming Jane* is neither the daughter of Reverend George Austen, nor the author of *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), but a construct designed through several different readings of possible Jane Austens: the person, the author, the characters in her fiction, and the icon. The second reason why I chose this film is the fact that it offers a unique opportunity to examine the process of appropriation of a historical character into a fictional one. On that blurred zone, the author of the film *Becoming Jane* – thus I call the team that includes its director, screenwriters, producer, etc. – is no longer bound by the rules of commonplace "truth", as it has never been stated that the film aims to *accurately* portray who Jane Austen, the person, once was. Another relevant contributor in the film is Jon Spence, an acknowledged Austen scholar who wrote, in 2003, the biography *Becoming Jane Austen*. When he wrote this book, Spence "filled in the blanks" as a biographer does, in search of solid elements that might retrieve part of what was missing in the life of the living person. The same Jon Spence was later invited to work as historical consultant to the film *Becoming Jane*, but this time he was committed to a different kind of truth, to fictional truth.

These are the reasons why I believe this film serves as a worthy corpus of investigation, which I mean to approach in the light of two discussions proposed by theoretician Linda Hutcheon: historiographic metafiction and intertextuality between history and fiction. To Hutcheon, "Postmodern intertextuality is a formal manifestation of both a desire to close the gap between the past and present of the reader and a desire to rewrite the past in a new context" (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 118). One way of rewriting the historical past in a new fictional context is precisely historiographic metafiction. While in historical fiction real life characters and events are used as a way to legitimize the narrative, the author of historiographic metafiction appropriates these elements and assimilates them into the story, but with no commitment to truth, or historical accuracy. In fact the author may choose to sever any or all bonds with historiography, questioning the boundaries between fact and

fiction, while the resulting text urges the reader to question the notion of truth that arises when talking about History.

This thesis is structured in three chapters: Chapter 1 is about the transitions from person to author, from author to icon, from icon to character. The biographical information conveyed serves the purpose of trailing the process of erasure of the person and shaping of the myth. Chapter 2 explores the derivative production and the role it plays in the present state of the author's critical fortune. The discussion about Austen fans and Austen readers is meant as on the great differences in the role of the writer, of the fan and or the reader in the centuries that separate our current reading/critical practices from those of Jane Austen's time. The final chapter comments on the choices made in the film, and examines the strategies and techniques put to use in the transit between the realms of history and fiction. Special attention is paid to the touching zones between the film, the biography of Jane Austen and the film adaptation *Pride & Prejudice* (2005), directed by Joe Wright.

In the 200 years that separate us from Jane Austen's time much has changed in the process of writing a novel, in the process of criticizing a novel, and in the ways of *reading* a novel. Austen herself offered a great contribution to this developing genre, adding in psychological depth, complexity in narration and acute analysis of the social practices. As this new kind of novel reached a deeper emotional level of response, readers responded in a more emotional way. Caught between the neoclassical and the romantic moods, Austen's texts affect the readers in a way that the late 18$^{th}$/early 19$^{th}$ Century critics were not prepared to deal with. What happened to Austen was something similar to what happened to Byron: the more their work was bought, read, and loved, the less the first critics were able to deal with the phenomenon. That is probably why Brian Southam remarks that "the birth and growth of Jane Austen's critical reputation was a dull and long-drawn-out affair" (SOUTHAM, 1979, p.1). On the other hand, the adoration of her name started with the publication of Austen-Leigh's *Memoir.* As time went by, it reached a level of personal identification, to the point that, as Claire Harman posits, "Austen is the only writer who is instantly recognizable by her first name" (HARMAN, 2010, p. xx). In his essay "*Emma* and the legend of Jane Austen", Lionel Trilling investigates this unusual relationship between reader and author that, to him also, seems to only happen in the case of Jane Austen: "admirers call her Miss Austen; others, impudently, call her simply Jane. Either appellation suggests an unusual, *and questionable*, relation with the writer, a relation that does not so much consort with the established literary

practices we expect" (TRILLING, 1970, p. 148, italics mine). The fact that Trilling considers the intensity of this emotional traffic on the part of the reader "questionable" partly illustrates what Southam calls the difficulties in the course of Austen's critical fortune. The way Austen readers respond to her novels caused her to reach this uncommon status of being simultaneously an academic favorite and a best-seller author, which is an unusual relationship. The course development of Austen academic criticism, and the factions it created, is another fascinating possibility of research – which, unfortunately, will only come tangentially in this thesis. Instead, I will think of them as one among the different categories of Austen's readers, a category that brings together academics, dilettantes, and fans – all of which have been called, in one point or another, by the name of *Janeites*.

This term was coined by the late-Victorian writer and literary critic George Saintsbury to refer to those who, like him, saw the interest in Jane Austen as a sign of good taste. The traumatic changes imposed by industrialization and accelerated progress may explain why, to their imagination, the glamor of Regency style, and the safety of the old times represented by the memory of rural England was what made Austen's fictional world so fascinating. The fact that the enthusiasm of Janeites is not necessarily related to *literary* questions annoys Trilling:

> If Jane Austen is carried outside the proper confines of literature, if she has been loved in a fashion that some temperaments must find objectionable and that a strict criticism must call illicit, the reason is perhaps to be found not only in the human weakness of her admirers, in their impulse to self-flattery, or in whatever other fault produces their deplorable tone. (Trilling, 1970, p. 150)

Trilling would most likely be shocked, had he lived to see how "outside the proper confines of literature" today's Austen's readers can be, and how outside literature they can reach, especially because these early Janeites idolized the image created by James Edward Austen-Leigh of the Dear Aunt Jane, and viewed Austen's work as a sign of good taste – an elite view of an author whose work had such popular appeal. Nowadays the term has almost gained the opposite meaning: to be a Janeite today means a new way of readership, that range from fan culture to fan fiction, and allowing derivative works written by fans. Today's Janeites may also consume Austen through more than the novels: one no longer comes into Austen's work completely blind. Many people who read her novels for the first time have already been in contact with them in one form or the other: through film adaptations – that can range from transpositions to loosely-based – or one of several varieties of derivative novels. These new

readers no longer stop at reading the novel or watching the film: they also buy the DVDs, the games based on them (be it the book or the film), and all kinds of products that carry the brand Jane Austen. Those who love Jane Austen so illicitly are, according to Claudia Johnson, "by definition a set of readers who cannot get enough of Jane Austen" (JOHNSON, 2008, p. 16): they demand of her novels more than the established number of pages can provide.

This is another mark of a true Janeite: they cannot accept the fact that Jane Austen only left six complete novels. The rest of her production – the *Juvenilia*, the early novels, the unfinished pieces, the short fiction, letters, poems, histories, prayers – offers them no solace to the fact that, in contrast with Dickens, or Hardy, she left us so little. Her reader would like to have some more of Austen, so one has to find different avenues. One way of doing that is to write more about the characters in her novels, or reimagine them in different settings, time and places – even different genders. As such, the reader becomes also a creator, although not the original creator of the universe in which they play with. As they see the potential of continuing the stories they are so familiar with, these readers become part of what Henry Jenkins calls participatory culture, a term which contrasts with established ideas that media consumption is done through passive reception of authorized readings, and where content producers and content consumers can be one and the same: if one wants more of something, one creates more of something. In the end, Trilling himself answers the question of why readers want more Austen: "Perhaps the reason is also to be found in the work itself, in some unusual promise that it seems to make, in some hope that it holds out" (TRILLING, 1970, p. 150). And contrary to Trilling's worries, the very fact that this thesis is being written is proof that today's criticism and academic thought is open to the examination of such derivative production, accepting them as a valid expression of readership and participation. If they are to be eventually marked as literarily worthy or not is a different question. There, each author and each work is as much at their own risk as any who enters the field. My point here consists solely in acknowledging the existence of this subculture within the culture of Austen. Additionally, we cannot forget the fact that Austen herself practiced her craft by engaging in similar behavior: as an avid reader of the popular gothic and sentimental novels from the late 18$^{th}$ Century, she would employ the established formulas of the genre in the stories she wrote, but would add her own twist to things, to the point where her style, while emulating that existing, successful one, would improve on it. The best example, of course, is *Northanger*

*Abbey* (1818), which at the same pays homage to and mocks the Gothic conventions of the time.

One recent and successful example of Austen derivative novels is Karen Joy Fowler's *The Jane Austen Book Club* (2004), the story of a group of friends who form a book club, and in each month a different Austen work is read and discussed. As they do so, we perceive a parallel between the events in the novels and the difficulties each person is going through in their own lives. Here, Austen's novels have a therapeutic function, helping these people sort through their personal issues. Like in Austen's fiction, there is also a witty comment about the difficulties in adapting to one's social context, this time California in times of late Capitalism. To the members of the book club – who no doubt would admit they are Janeites – Austen is more than an author: she is a close friend, an advisor, and her novels are as much a moral compass as they are fiction. The novel begins with a bold declaration: "Each of us has a private Austen" (FOWLER, 2004, p.1), that plays with the notion of the reader's expectation, but also implies that each of the club's members (as well as any reader of Austen) appropriates Austen into their own agenda. Brandy Foster considers this statement "loaded with the implication not only that Austen is changed according to individuals' perceptions of her but that she is simultaneously *Jane Austen* and a multiplicity of *Jane Austens*" (FOSTER, 2000, electronic information). Appropriating Austen's historical person to a work of fiction is not that different. The character "Jane Austen" is but one of several Jane Austens generated by readers' perceptions, which can change depending on their knowledge of historical facts and the several different narratives of her life. While her novels have found an extensive afterlife in films and novels, games, internet series and other merchandise, the story of the person Jane Austen kept confined to biographies that are informed by family-created myths and academic sanctioned readings, despite the lack of documentation on long periods of Austen's life and the gaps that it promotes. The popular appropriation of her life that chooses to fill those gaps with her own fiction can be viewed either solely as entertainment, or also as an alternative form of speculation on the content of those blackened out events and/or their subsequent suppression from family records. In the end, this thesis is nothing more than the search for my own private Austen, an attempt to understand the appeal this author has held on me for almost 20 years now, and how to reconcile those very different purposes to which she has been appropriated.

As to the more technical information: this thesis is written in the combination of MLA and ABNT technical styles currently used in my graduate program and authorized by CAPES.[1] Also, direct citations of Austen's novels will always refer to the Norton Critical Editions and the titles will be presented in abbreviated form: *Sense and Sensibility* ("*SS*"), *Pride and Prejudice* ("*PP*"), *Mansfield Park* ("*MP*"), *Emma* ("*E*"), *Persuasion* ("*P*"), *Northanger Abbey* ("*NA*"). For the *Juvenilia* and other writings, the reference is the *Minor Works* ("*MW*") edited by Robert Chapman. The letters are taken from Deirdre Le Faye's 1995 edition and will be referred to by their number, year of writing, and the page on the reference. These works are all listed at the end of the thesis. To avoid any confusion as to *which* Jane Austen I am referring to (there are many), I mean to treat the author as "Austen", the historical character and the icon as "Jane Austen" and the fictional character as "Jane".

Hopefully the result will be more of scholar research and less of a fan's fantasy, but as Austen herself said in a letter to the Prince Regent's librarian, James Stanier Clarke, "I must keep to my own style & go on in my own Way; And though I may never succeed again in that, I am convinced that I should totally fail in any other" (Letter 138D, 1816, p. 312).

[1] The governmental organ that legislates on this subject in Brazil.

# 1 MEETING JANE AUSTEN

> *'There is a stubbornness about me that never can bear to be frightened at the will of others. My courage always rises with every attempt to intimidate me'.*
>
> Jane Austen, ***Pride and Prejudice***

Henry Austen may have claimed that his sister's life was not one of event, and surely there are periods of her life still surrounded in mystery. As described in early biographies, Jane Austen's life almost reads as a text composed based on her "Plan of a Novel": "Scene to be in the Country, Heroine the Daughter of a Clergyman, one who after having lived much in the World had retired from it and settled in a Curacy, with a very small fortune of his own" (AUSTEN, 1954, p.428). Yet, some facts are indisputable: that Jane Austen was born on December 16th, 1775 at Steventon parsonage in Hampshire, where the rector, Reverend George Austen and his wife had been living for seven years, and that she died in Winchester, on July 17th 1817, in the arms of her sister and best friend, Cassandra.

Written in 1816, the "Plan of a Novel" explores the most common formulas and clichés of popular fiction – a genre which Austen read extensively, and subscribed to – and the unwelcome suggestions made by James Stanier Clarke, the Prince Regent's librarian. Jane Austen corresponded with Clarke between 1815 and 1816, as well as with renowned publisher John Murray. The texts are preserved in part of the 160 surviving letters written by Austen, and show that the author was familiarized with the intricacies of the publishing industry, as well as very conscientious of her intentions in publishing her novels, which she refers to as her "own darling child[s]" (Letter 79, 1813, p. 201).

As stated in the Introduction, this chapter casts an overview of Jane Austen's life, focusing on the pertinent events that contribute to the formation of the icon and that, eventually opened the possibility of using the author as character in further derivative texts. Special emphasis is given to the presence of Tom Lefroy, an acquaintance to the Austen family, because of the fictionalized use made of his image in the movie *Becoming Jane.* The selection of facts here presented aim at informing about three issues: the development of Austen as an author, and the role she played in the establishment of the novel as a respected genre; her family's attempt to emphasize Austen's domestic life, relegating her writing to a minor role in her biography; and the ways in which the critical fortune of the last 150 years is somehow informed by the myths perpetuated by her family. The evolution of Austen criticism as a discipline, throughout the 20th Century, also illustrates the ways in which her work has been constantly appropriated by different reading audiences, both popular and academic, and how the polarizing views that exist within those audiences also affect the iconic image we have of Jane Austen.

## 1.1 LIFE

Jane Austen was the seventh of a total of eight children, and only the second daughter to the Reverend and Mrs. Austen. They were not rich, but from both sides of the family tree, their connections rendered them part of the gentility. Besides Steventon, Rev. Austen had another parsonage, Deane, which he rented. Mrs. Austen had received a small inheritance after the death of her mother. Their income was supplemented by their taking in pupils, who were taught by the reverend and taken care of by Mrs. Austen. Unlike the characters created by their youngest daughter some 20 years later, the Austens did not have to worry about inheritance or entails: they had six sons, four of which lived with them.

The eldest son, James, followed in his father's footsteps and went to Oxford, with the intention of being ordained and becoming a parson as well. The second son, George, left the family at an early age: he "suffered from fits and was not developing normally" (SPENCE,

2007, p. 20). As was common practice at that period, this child with disabilities was delivered to the care of a surrogate family in the village close to their home, where he was taken care of, with money provided by the Austens. They were familiar with this kind of situation since Mrs. Austen's brother had a similar condition – George was probably put in the care of the same family who looked after his uncle. His existence is erased in James Edward Austen-Leigh's *Memoir* (SUTHERLAND, 2002, p. xxxiii), but he gains a prominent role in *Becoming Jane*.

The third son, Edward, was adopted by rich family relatives who, being childless, saw in the young Austen a step son. He maintained a tight relationship to his family at Steventon. Francis and Charles, the two youngest boys, made their careers in the Navy. Although all Austen siblings were close, Jane Austen's life mostly revolved around Henry, who was four years her senior, and Cassandra, with whom she had a two-year difference. Henry was the charming and adventurous brother who became Austen's literary agent, negotiating and interceding in her name with London publishers and printers. Eliza, the exotic cousin who had been born in India and was married to a French Count, escaped the social turmoil in France and spent much time at Steventon, starting in 1783. She was lively, witty and a flirt, and from her first moment with the Austens she began long, dramatic, courtship with Henry, ten years her junior.

Cassandra, the only other girl in the Austen household, was Jane's best friend. They were constant companions, and faithful correspondents when apart. Throughout her life, it was in Cassandra that Jane confided, and in her judgment she trusted. Their nephew, James Edward Austen-Leigh remarked, in the biography he published in 1869, on this sisterly affection: "Perhaps it began on Jane's side with the feeling of deference natural to a loving child towards a kind elder sister. Something of this feeling always remained; and even in the maturity of her powers, and in the enjoyment of increasing success, she would still speak of Cassandra as of one wiser and better than herself" (AUSTEN-LEIGH, 2002, p. 18). Cassandra is, perhaps, the reason why we know so little about Jane Austen: as executor of her sister's estate, she censored and destroyed most of the letters they exchanged, probably because they contained remarks the family would resent, or secrets Cassandra feared Jane would not want disclosed. All the hard evidence from Jane Austen's life comes from the less than 200 letters

that survived, along with those recollections made by family members such as Henry Austen, James Edward Austen-Leigh, Caroline Austen, Anna Lefroy, and Lady Fanny Knatchbull.

The education of a genteel girl in the 18th Century consisted of learning to read and write, and was complemented with the learning of music, drawing, painting and sewing. At the very best, they learned a foreign language. In the Austen household all children, including the girls, had the liberty of frequenting their father's library, which had "rows and rows of books; one of his bookcases covered sixty-four square feet of wall, and he was always collecting more, not just the classics but new ones, from which he read aloud" (Idem, 1997, p. 30). To complement his income, the Reverend took in pupils, and for a time the parsonage was effectively turned into a school. All their children became part of this environment, including Cassandra and Jane. Claire Tomalin, in her biography of Jane Austen, notes that "[T]he number of pupils was small enough for the Austens to run the school as a large family rather than as an institution. When the boys were not at their lessons, they were much like extra elder brothers to the girls" (TOMALIN, 1997, p.26). The overwhelming company of boys also guaranteed that Cassandra and Jane were not much confined to the house: they were allowed to play outside, take long walks, and explore the surrounding areas with the boys.

The Austens, however, made three attempts at giving their daughters a more well-rounded education. In 1783 Cassandra and Jane were sent to school, which almost caused their death, as an outbreak of putrid fever in Southampton made the two sisters sick. Mrs. Crawley, their tutor, did not notify the family, but Jane Cooper, Cassandra and Jane's cousin who was also being tutored, was able to notify the family in time. As her mother and Mrs. Austen ran to aid their children, the girls were able to recuperate, but Mrs. Cooper caught the fever and died (SPENCE, 2007, p.28-30). Jane and Cassandra would be sent again to school two other times, the last one to the Abbey School in Reading, where they spent a year and a half, but by 1786 the girls returned home for good.

Settling back at Steventon, Jane was again exposed to a mostly male environment. According to Tomalin, "Jane Austen was a tough and unsentimental child, drawn to rude, anarchic imaginings and black jokes." It was also at this time that she discovered that her observations

could be turned into fiction: to explain how, in *Northanger Abbey*, the main character Catherine Morland lacks the propensity to become a heroine, the narrator describes her as being "fond of all boys' plays, and preferring cricket not merely to dolls, but to the more heroic enjoyments of infancy, nursing a dormouse, feeding a canary-bird, or watering a rose-bush" (*NA*, p. 5). Later, Catherine abandons even those boys' games and switches her interest to books. The Austens had always been fond of books, and this domestic incentive was essential to Austen's formation as a writer.

By 1793 there were no boys left at Steventon. The school had closed. James was ordained and lived close by, at Deane parsonage, with his wife Anne Matthew and their daughter Anna. Edward was also married and lived at the Knight's estate. Charles and Frank were in the Navy, working at their careers. Henry had finished his studies in Oxford and was now part of the militia. In 1795 he tried – unsuccessfully – to convince cousin Eliza, now a widow, to marry him. During this period, Austen saw her writing "graduate from the mostly parodic character of her *Juvenilia*" into fiction (GREY, 2001, p. 407) by working on "Lady Susan". Cassandra had been engaged since 1792 to the Reverend Thomas Fowle, a former pupil of their father. For Jane's sake, the Rev. and Mrs. Austen arranged for the girls to go to balls and be seen by eligible young men in visits further away from Steventon:

> This was the country; the Austen daughters had been joining in country dances at home from their earliest years, and knew all the neighbors' sons and daughters (…) they were all made up of the same familiar steps, jumping, setting, forming a ring, linking hands and arms, moving up and down the sets, clapping, bowing and curtsying; variations on themes everyone knew as well as they knew how to run up and down their own stairs in the dark. (Tomalin, 1997, p. 103)

In the meantime, the two Austen girls would help their mother out with domestic chores and visit friends and family: the Lloyd sisters, Mary and Martha; and the three Bigg sisters at Manydown Park, Alethea, Catherine and Elizabeth. After the failed experience of going to school at Mrs. Crawley's in 1783, Jane made a new friend closer to home: her name was Anne Lefroy, and she was the wife of the rector at Ashe parsonage. Ashe was a calm haven compared to the agitation at Steventon, and the young Jane relished the moments spent there

with her friend, with whom she shared a love of poetry. It was this friendship that allowed Jane Austen and Tom Lefroy to meet.

Tom Lefroy is mentioned in the first two of Jane Austen's 160 surviving letters, the same letters Cassandra so carefully chose to select on her quest to preserve her sister's secrets. Written on the span of two days 9th and 10th of January 1796, they are addressed to her sister who was, at the time, visiting her fiancé's family. Tom Fowle had decided to accept a position as chaplain on a voyage to the West Indies, in the expectation of receiving a better curacy upon his return, which would allow him to finally marry Cassandra. Other than indirect references in two other letters, years later, these are all the documented factual references that Austen makes of Tom Lefroy. Thomas Langlois Lefroy was "the eldest son of George Lefroy's brother Anthony, who had had a career in the army in Ireland (…) and had settled there with his large family. Tom was handsome and clever – everything but rich" (SPENCE, 2007, p. 95). George Lefroy was the husband of Jane Austen's neighbor and friend, Anne Lefroy. As the eldest boy in a family with ten children – five daughters and five sons, in that order – it was deposited in Tom the expectation of making a good career to help with his family's less fortunate situation. Lefroy's studies were sponsored by his uncle, Benjamin Langlois. He was called to the Bar in Dublin in 1797 and became Lord Chief Justice of Ireland in 1852. In 1799 Tom Lefroy married the sister of a school friend (SPENCE, 2007, 109-113). In 1796, however, he was still only a Law student who went to Hampshire to visit relatives on Christmas. To recount the events of his acquaintance with Jane Austen, I turn to her own words, in the letters addressed to Cassandra in January 1796, and to Spence's reading of those events, as it is this reading that principally informs the appropriation of facts that we have in *Becoming Jane*.

The first letter, started on January 9th, congratulates Cassandra on her birthday and immediately makes reference to Lefroy: "In the first place I hope you will live twenty-three years longer. Mr. Tom Lefroy's birthday was yesterday, so that you are very near of an age. After this necessary preamble I shall proceed to inform you that we had an exceeding good ball last night" (Letter 1, 1796, p. 1). The ball had been held at Manydown and Jane Austen lists all the guests who attended it, before she starts commenting on the events: "Mr. H[eathcote] began with Elizabeth, and afterwards danced with her again; but *they* do not

know how *to be particular*. I flatter myself, however, that they will profit by the three successive lessons which I have given them" (Idem, p. 1). Elizabeth Bigg would marry Mr. Heathcote, but here the young couple was still only flirting; by dancing together twice they were exposing their mutual interest. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Bennet is believed to be singled out by Mr. Bingley as a favorite because he "had danced with her twice, and she had been distinguished by his sisters" at the Meryton Ball (*PP*, p. 9). Austen implies that her demonstrations of being particular are even more obvious, as she danced with the same partner for three dances in a row, the "three successive lessons which I have given them". Her partner was Tom Lefroy.

The ball at Manydown was the third ball at which Jane Austen and Tom Lefroy socialized. They had probably met at the Assembly Ball in Basingstoke on December 28th 1795 (LE FAYE, 2006, p. 180), meeting there again on January 6th. She indicates to Cassandra that, while brief, their acquaintance has become subject of speculation among family and friends, so much that: "he is so excessively laughed at about me at Ashe, that he is ashamed of coming to Steventon" (Letter 1, 1796, p. 1). Cassandra must have remarked on this behavior in a previous letter, because Austen says: "You scold me so much in the nice long letter which I have this moment received from you, that I am almost afraid to tell you how my Irish friend and I behaved. Imagine to yourself everything most profligate and shocking in the way of dancing and sitting down together." (Idem). She tries to placate her sister by assuring that "He is a very gentlemanlike, good-looking, pleasant young man, I assure you." (Ibidem)

The writing of the letter is interrupted by a social call, as Austen records that "we received a visit from Mr. Tom Lefroy and his cousin George", marking the first time they met outside a ballroom. This more intimate visit could lead to a better assessment of his behavior, not colored by the less restrictive environment of a ball which forgives light indiscretions. Her verdict is that "he has but one fault, which time will, I trust, entirely remove—it is that his morning coat is a great deal too light". It also implies that Jane Austen and Tom Lefroy had the opportunity to discuss literature, for she continues: "He is a very great admirer of Tom Jones, and therefore wears the same coloured clothes, I imagine, which *he* did when he was wounded" (Letter 1, p. 2). Spence speculates that the account has a playful tone because "at this time Cassandra needed to receive entertaining and diverting letters" (SPENCE, 2007, p.

97) to take her mind from her fiancé's imminent departure for the West Indies, but at the same time, he identifies in some of Austen's remarks the anxiety in hearing her sister's opinion on her Irish friend; she laments Charles' [Fowle, Tom Fowle's brother] absence at the Manydown ball as "he would have given you some description of my friend, and I think you must be impatient to hear something about him." (Letter 1, 1796, p. 2). Biographers who do not see the flirtation between Austen and Lefroy as serious dismiss the contents of these letters as proof that she was not in love, but Spence believes that "in spite of all the lightness and levity of what she had written to Cassandra, her sister understood this was just the way Jane had chosen to express being in love" (SPENCE, 2007, p. 97). As letters were expected to be read aloud for family members, there were no viable ways of registering more intimate thoughts and feelings; the sisters would choose to do so when they met in person. The fact that Cassandra preserved this, and the following, letters may indicate that she believed no harm could be done by what her sister had decided to put into words that could be publicly (within the family) be divulged. While Jane Austen acknowledges her shocking behavior, she reminds Cassandra that it will be short lived: "I can expose myself, however, only once more, because he leaves the country soon after next Friday, on which day we are to have a dance at Ashe after all" (Idem, p. 1).

The second letter would be written right before and immediately after the Ashe Ball. The tone is even more playful; she writes at length about everyday occurrences and updates on family and friends. It is almost at the end of the first part of the letter, written on January 14$^{th}$, that she mentions Lefroy again, when she jokes about abandoning "all my other admirers (…) even the kiss which C. Powlett wanted to give me" as she means to "confine myself in future to Mr. Tom Lefroy, for whom I donot [sic] care sixpence" (Letter 2, 1796, p.4). There was speculation that John Warren, a former pupil of Reverend Austen and long life friend of the Austens, might have shown interest in Jane, but she shoots down the possibility saying that "a last and indubitable proof of Warren's indifference to me" was the fact that, after the Manydown ball – where she danced with Warren in addition to the three consecutive lessons in being particular with Lefroy – , Warren drew Lefroy's picture and presented it to Jane as a gift "without a sigh" (Idem, p. 4). It is known, as Austen herself had intimated in the letters, that after the ball, Tom Lefroy left Ashe for London. The second letter ends with her saying to Cassandra: "At length the Day is come on which I am to flirt my last with Tom Lefroy, & when you receive this it will be over – My tears flow as I write, at the melancholy idea"

(Idem, p. 40). By most accounts, the Ashe Ball was indeed the last time Jane Austen and Tom Lefroy met.

His departure may or not have been precipitated by the speculation on the status of his relationship with Reverend Austen's daughter. Neither had money, and even with Lefroy's intention of becoming a barrister, it was expected, within his family, that he should marry advantageously so as to be able to support them back in Ireland. Although well connected, the Austens did not have the money to allow Jane to marry whoever she wished. Austen's next surviving letter is from eight months later, in August, written from London, where she and her brothers Edward and Frank stopped on their way to Kent. The address given is Cork Street – the same street where Lefroy lived with his uncle Benjamin Langlois. Spence argues that Langlois "was the only rate-payer in Cork Street that the Austens have a known connection with" (SPENCE, 2007, p. 98) and speculates that it might have been there that Jane Austen and her brothers broke their journey, a planned visit so as to show that "Jane's personal qualities, would make uncle Benjamin overlook the fact that she had no money of her own" (Idem, p. 100). However, there is no evidence of this being true and even less that she might have seen Tom Lefroy during this brief visit. Her mood, however, is completely opposite from what it was in January 1796. While there, she writes to Cassandra in a tone that is much more somber: "Here I am once more in this scene of dissipation and vice, and I begin already to find my morals corrupted. We reached Staines yesterday, I do not (know) when, without suffering so much from the heat as I had hoped to do" (Letter 3, 1796, p. 5). As none of her letters from earlier that year have survived, one can only conjecture at the intentions and consequences of this brief visit.

Around October 1796, Austen began the manuscript for *First Impressions*. Throughout the year, several events profoundly affected the Austen family: in April came the knowledge that Cassandra's fiancé, Tom Fowle, had died of fever in San Domingo in February, leaving her with a little inheritance from his early investments, and in a mourning that would last for all her life. James Austen got re-married, to the Austens' good friend Mary Lloyd. His daughter Anna – who had been living with her grandparents and aunts at Steventon since 1793, when her mother died – is sent back to her father's house. The period she spent at Steventon will be relevant when, over 70 years later, she helps her half-brother James Edward in his quest to

write their aunt's *Memoir*. The year ended rather cheerfully when Henry Austen – unbeknownst to his own family – finally married, after a courtship of more than ten years, the widowed Eliza de Feuillide (SUTHERLAND, 2002, lix:105:246). *First Impressions* was finished around August 1797 and became an enormous success within the family and friends who had ample access to it; so much so that by November that same year Reverend Austen wrote to a publisher, Thomas Cadell, offering an unnamed manuscript. The offer was rejected; there can be no way to know for sure which manuscript Rev. Austen offered, it may have been *First Impressions*, which seemed to be, at the time, a finished product rather than a work in progress. Reverend Austen's letter to Cadell survived among the publisher's belongings and, in 1840, after Cadell's death, was put to auction. The letter reappears by the time James Edward Austen-Leigh was writing the *Memoir*, thanks to relatives connected to the Lefroy family, who owned the letter. It had been bought back in 1840 by a "Tom Lefroy".

Lefroy returned to Hampshire for a visit in October 1798, but he had no contact with Jane Austen. In a letter to Cassandra, in November 1798, Jane Austen describes the visit in these terms:

> Mrs. Lefroy did come last Wednesday, and the Harwood came likewise, but very considerately paid their visit before Mrs. Lefroy's arrival, with whom, in spite of interruptions both from my father and from James, I was enough alone to hear all that was interesting, which you will easily credit when I tell you that of her nephew she said nothing at all, and of her friend very little. She did not once mention the name of the former to *me*, and I was too proud to make any enquiries; but on my father's afterwards asking where he was, I learnt that he was gone back to London in his way to Ireland, where he is called to the Bar and means to practise [sic]. (Letter 11, 1798, p. 19).

He might have already been engaged, and we do not know if Mrs. Lefroy knew about, or informed Jane Austen of it. When Tom Lefroy first left Hampshire two and a half years earlier, he may have left Jane Austen broken-hearted, but she was still 20 years old, and friends and family thought she would not only recover, but find a more suitable prospect soon. It is believed that Mrs. Lefroy felt guilty about the unresolved affair between her nephew and her neighbor, and tried to promote the acquaintance between Jane Austen and Reverend Samuel Blackall – he is the friend of Mrs. Lefroy to whom Jane refers, and later on in the letter, after she says "There seems no likelihood of his coming into Hampshire this

Christmas, and it is therefore most probable that our indifference will soon be mutual" (Letter 11, 1798, p. 19). This is the last letter to reference in a direct way the relationship – or lack thereof – between Jane Austen and Tom Lefroy.

In 1801, Reverend George Austen decides to retire and takes his wife and daughters to Bath. It is believed that Jane Austen disliked the city and thought it too crowded for her country tastes; it is certain that she complained of the move in the letters written between the date which the decision had been taken and their effective departure for their new home. Today, Bath is closely associated with Jane Austen, not only because of her period of residence there, but because of the two novels set in that town: *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*. The Austens would stay in Bath for four years. During this period, few letters have survived – none from May 1801 to September 1804; none that can shed light on the event occurred in 1802, during a visit to Manydown, home of the Biggs. Jane Austen and her sister were invited for a long stay with their friends Alethea, Catherine and Elizabeth, when something unexpected happened: Jane received a marriage proposal from their younger brother, Harris Bigg-Whiter: "On the evening of 2 December, Harris asked Jane to become his wife. It seems likely his sisters conspired with Cassandra for the couple to be left alone, in the library, perhaps, or one of the small drawing rooms" (TOMALIN, 1997, p. 181). Described as an awkward-looking young man, Bigg-Whiter was five years Austen's junior and heir to his father's estate. The union would be desirable because Bigg-Whiter was socially awkward, "Because of his stammer he had been privately educated at home until he went to Oxford, and the stammer still remained, which meant that social life could be something of an ordeal" (Idem, p. 181). Jane Austen was someone known to him, a friend to his sisters, someone he was used to and found approachable. For Austen, the prospect of lightening the burden of her parents, with two unmarried daughters of almost 30 years of age, was tempting. She accepted his proposal, which caused great joy to all. The morning after, however, she withdrew her acceptance:

> She thought and thought; and in the morning she packed her bag, dressed herself grimly, and sought someone – Alethea perhaps – who would find Harris. Again they were closeted alone in the library, or the small drawing room, and this time Jane explained, with all delicacy in her power, that she had made a mistake and could not after all marry him. She esteemed him, she was honoured by his proposal, but on thinking it over she realized that esteem and respect were not

> enough, and that she would not be behaving fairly or rightly towards him if she accepted the offer of his hand. (Tomalin, 1997, p. 181)

The two sisters left Manydown immediately after that, and returned to Bath. This episode was the last romantic entangle in Austen's life. After that, her focus went into writing, publishing and taking care of her family. In 1803 she finally was able to sell, through her father, the rights of one of her manuscripts, *Susan*. The publisher, however, delayed the publishing of the novel for so long, that it would take Austen almost 15 years to reclaim the rights to the story. Nevertheless, it served as an incentive for her to continue her work, in the prospect of another future sale.

The year of 1805 was marked by the death of Reverend George Austen. Mrs. Austen and her two daughters continued living in Bath, where they were then joined by Martha and Mary Lloyd, two friends of the family whose mother died at the same period. Mary would eventually become James Austen's second wife. As to Martha, she remained with the Austens in Bath, and later in Southampton, where they lived for a few years, before Edward Austen, the rich brother, came to their rescue. In 1809 they moved to Chawton Cottage, part of one of Edward's properties in Hampshire. It was there that most of Austen's writings were finished. The stability of having a roof with almost no risk to it gave her the peace and the harmony to focus on writing, editing, revising, and publishing her six novels. She lived in Chawton for the rest of her life, excepted for the final period of her illness, in which she had to be taken to Winchester, where she died on July 18$^{th}$ 1817. Tom Lefroy outlived Jane Austen fifty-two years. As there were several connections between the families, he must have been made aware of the event. His nephew, T.E.P. Lefroy, was married to Jemima, eldest daughter of Anna Lefroy, James Austen's daughter. T.E.P Lefroy passed along to Austen-Leigh, after the publication of the *Memoir*, the story of how, when asked about his acquaintance with Jane Austen, his uncle made a "late admission 'that he was in love with her' but that 'it was a boyish love'." (SUTHERLAND, 2002, p. 221). This does not amount to a confession, but it is close enough to spark the creativity of today's readers who indulge in appropriations of Austen's life and work. The relative shortness of her life, and its abrupt end while she was in the middle of a creative wave, also contribute to the reader's desire for more of Austen, as a means of mourning the loss of the novels she could have written.

## 1.2 LABOR

As epigraphs to this thesis, I have chosen two passages from *Northanger Abbey*. The first, "The person, be it gentleman or lady, who has not pleasure in a good novel, must be intolerably stupid" is Henry Tilney's response to Catherine Morland's presupposition that he does not enjoy novels, as "gentlemen read better books." (*NA*, p. 72) It comes as a contrast to Catherine's previous conversation with her other suitor, Mr. Thorpe, who says "I never read novels; I have something else to do." (*NA*, p. 31) Dialogues such as these are recurrent in *Northanger Abbey*, a novel in which Austen parodies and, at the same time, defends the novel as a genre. Even as she assigns those remarks to her characters, it is *Northanger Abbey*'s narrator who makes the most passionate arguments, berating fellow novelists for "joining with their greatest enemies in bestowing the harshest epithets on such works, and scarcely ever permitting them to be read by their own heroine" – that is, portraying in their own novels the distaste for novels that contemporary literary critics had. The narrator goes on, urging those novelists to let reviewers come up with criticism, and unite in the name of their genre: "Let us not desert one another; we are an injured body." (*NA*, p. 22)

Why would Austen, today regarded as one of the greatest novelists of all times, need to defend so fiercely the literary genre to which she applied? The answer lies in the genesis of the English tradition of the novel and the reading public to which it was directed. In *The Rise of the Novel*, Ian Watt traces this genesis to the early 18$^{th}$ Century, and attributes it to the changes in the reading public, the publishing market, and the economic affluence of the middle class. A major obstacle to the increase in number of readers was the high incidence of illiteracy in England. In the case of major urban populations, those who were semi-literate had not the means to read, as books were very expensive items. The production of books was aimed at private collectors, who had both the means to buy and the ability to read them. For the general reading public, cheaper versions of texts, known as pamphlets, were printed, sold, or distributed; these pamphlets were ideological texts, usually on themes of politics, morality, and religion. A fundamental distinction needs to be made to better understand the context in

which the novel appeared: fiction and literature, contrary to what we know today, were distinct from each other. Literature encompassed the classic genres – poetry, epic, tragedy. Earlier forms of prose such as romance have, like the classic genres, a very rigid structure in both form and content. The goal of early novelists was to reject these forms: "the novel arose in the modern period, a period whose general intellectual orientation was most decisively separated from its classical and mediaeval heritage by its rejection – or at least its attempted rejection – of universals" (WATT, 2001, p. 12). The works of authors such as Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, and Henry Fielding aimed to go beyond "plots of classical and renaissance epic (…) based on past history or fable" (Idem, p. 13). The evolution of the English novel in the 18th Century dealt with a dualistic view of life that had to be reconciled with in order to represent all aspects of reality, that is, as Watt puts it, "the problematic nature of the relation between the individual and his environment" (Ibidem, p. 295). The innovations to the approach to fiction, in both content and form, were brought and perfected by these authors and others who followed, and where in full effect by the end of the century when Jane Austen, the avid reader, tried her hand at writing.

At that point, novels had become widely read throughout England. The popularization of prose fiction was possible because publishers decided to invest by printing novels in installments – in which two or three volumes would form a complete novel. Higher incidence of literacy and the multiplication of circulating libraries also contributed to this. Circulating libraries were institutions which permitted the public, regardless of social sphere, to borrow books through affordable monthly fees, taking from the reader the burden of buying such an expensive item. According to Barbara Benedict, "these contexts worked to shape fiction and to outline the way to read it. The Regency library was a transitional arena permitting a rich interchange between rival literary ideals." (BENEDICT, 2001, p. 65) Circulating libraries would offer everything, from essays, technical texts, and collections of poetry to contemporary, popular novels. The inventory would be informed by the owner's own tastes, its acquisitions from private collections, and the interest of the readers who subscribed to it. This structure would help disseminate the reading of fiction by blurring the boundaries between what was regarded as "high" and "low" literature, and between "selective and general membership." (Idem, p. 65) The dissemination of circulating libraries and the increase in numbers of readers of popular fiction in early 19th Century also serves as a starting point to the discussion of reading practices, especially those that involve popular fiction. "Novels

trained readers in reading novels, through their intertextuality or their repetitions of tropes that with increasing efficiency induced desired sentimental responses." (Ibidem, p. 81) In the 18th and19th Century, reading could be a solitary and a collective activity, as families would gather around to read aloud interesting parts of favorite books (something particularly common in the Austen household); but with the circulating library, this experience extrapolated the confines of domestic intimacy: readers would interact with others through comments written on the margins of the books, showing that "They [novels] had an active life in readers' minds" (Ibid, p. 79). To feed the readers' minds, more and more titles where published each year and its popularity caused a reaction in the form of reviewers who criticized the genre, its authors and readers (MANDAL, 2007, p. 13). It was against this kind of criticism, and of fellow authors public rejection of the genre which made them famous that Austen's defense of the novel was written.

The novel evolved as a genre in both senses – of format and content. Anthony Mandal identifies, throughout the 18th Century, the prominence of sentimental fiction, "initially following the model of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740), and *Clarissa* (1747–9)" (Idem, p. 7). The level of interest of the reading public, along with critical recognition, would eventually elevate some authors from their popular status to that of grand author – such was the case with Richardson and Fielding, for example (BENEDICT, 2001, p. 64) – while new, popular authors would try and repeat the success of their predecessors. To that extent, the format and content of new publications would try to emulate that of popular reading choices: the reproduction of themes and overall plots – the formulaic nature of popular novels – was a safe way to guarantee a reading public. Along the century, however, changes in taste for both author and readers, promoted alterations to the sentimental novel, and "[F]rom the 1790s onwards, however, Richardsonian variants declined in popularity, to the point that they [were] perceived as outmoded and clumsy, being replaced by newer formulations of sensibility." (MANDAL, 2007, p. 7) The success of sentimental fiction gave rise to the number of titles each year, but also accounted for the surge in women readers and writers in the last two and a half decades of the 1700s. The style of the British female writers "is far more direct and may or may not be epistolary," unlike the epistolary style adopted by Richardson. In these domestic-sentimental novels, "the plot itself is exciting, adventurous, gregarious (in contrast to the isolation of the antecedent types), and typically features an orphaned heroine who must discover her usually aristocratic origins" (Idem, p. 8), but like its predecessor, the subgenre of

the sentimental novel would eventually decline and be replaced by a new genre, which would adopt "many of the tropes of sensibility – notably the orphaned heroine" but would exaggerate the circumstances so that she "must face a world even more hostile that that portrayed in sentimental fiction": Gothic romance, and its main representative was Ann Radcliffe, author of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (Idem, p. 8).

All these changes would take place in the last decade of the 18th Century, and would have been witnessed by an adolescent Jane Austen, who was a dedicated reader of the genre, but not without its criticism, which she wrote in the form of parody: "In these pieces, Austen manages to collapse the rambling sentimental narratives into short, clipped sentences—to the extent that her own tales of sensibility, as full of variety and incident as their circulating-library progenitors, are rarely longer than a dozen or so pages" (MANDAL, p. 8). She was doing privately what would amount to a new subgenre in the following decade, when even the Gothic began to slip in public preference. Austen's parodist treatment of contemporary novels was the basis of her training as a writer, but she was not content in only imitating the style of others. She knew that, to be able to publish her writings, she would have to leave a mark of her own.

The popularity of Austen-Leigh's biography in 1870 cemented in the public's imagination the idea, first presented by Henry Austen's *Biographical Notice*, of Austen as an amateur writer. In his words: "We did not think of her as being clever, still less as being famous; but we valued her as one always kind, sympathising, and amusing" (AUSTEN-LEIGH, 2002, p. 10). While his generation of the family may have thought so, the previous ones were not so unsuspecting: Jane was, by no means, the only Austen to exhibit literary inclinations and talent. Mrs. Austen composed verses; her eldest brother James was a poet and the main instigator of theatrical adventures at Steventon. Along with Henry, the two Oxford-educated brothers had for a year and a half published a periodical called *The Loiterer*, which featured essays and stories penned by the both of them, their cousin Edward Cooper and other school friends. Austen's pursuit of writing was never criticized within the family; in fact, as Claire Harman affirms, "Unlike many women writers of her generation – or stories about them – she had no struggle for permission to write, no lack of access to books, paper and ink; no frowning paterfamilias to face down or from whom to conceal her scribbling." (HARMAN,

2010, p. 2) Her stories were passed along to relatives and friends as a form of entertainment, read aloud in family gatherings and considered good enough to inspire some in the next generation, like James Edward himself, to attempt writing fiction.

Jane Austen started writing around the age of 11 or 12, stories which were written and read to the family for their own entertainment. Some of the short-stories and plays were preserved because Austen would copy them and Reverend Austen would bind them in volumes made to resemble a published book. In one of them, he wrote the inscription: "Effusions of Fancy By a very Young Lady Consisting of Tales In a Style entirely new" – signaling that her talent was appreciated in the family, that they considered it good enough to be published, and that they recognized that her style brought something new to the tradition of the novel. The collection of these early writings, which includes "Love and Freindship"[sic], "A History of England" and "Lesley Castle" is known as the *Juvenilia*, and are believed to have been written between 1787 and 1793. Other finished and unfinished manuscripts of around that time and later, such as the novella "Lady Susan" and the fragments "Sandition" and "The Watsons" are referred to as *Minor Works*. This initial phase of Austen's career, as previously stated, is marked by her use of parody as a writing exercise. In an essay on the influence of Samuel Richardson's fiction on Jane Austen's work, critic Kenneth Moler exemplifies this point by remarking on the similarities between Austen's character Charles Adams, from "Jack and Alice", a story from the *Juvenilia*, and Samuel Richardson's Sir Charles Grandison, character in a novel by the same name. In it, Charles Adams is described in language similar to Richardson's: he is "incredibly beautiful and accomplished" (MOLER, 1972, p. 174); Charles' attention is disputed by two poor young girls, Lucy and Alice, but the social differences between him and Alice are so exaggerated, and Alice's vices are so many that she cannot be compared to the naïve, impressionable young ladies that fawn over Richardson's characters. Moler identifies in Richardson's work the portrait of a popular type of character in 18$^{th}$-Century literature, which he calls the patrician hero. This character is an echo of the former image of a medieval landlord, an authority figure whose relationship with his dependents "act[s] as a metaphor for the relationship between the social order and the individual, 'natural' man" (Idem, p. 492). As a reader, Austen would be familiar enough with that to satirize the situation in her stories and improve upon them, and the image of the patrician hero returns in her later works.

Of the six finished novels that compose Austen's main body of work, only *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1815) and *Persuasion* (1818) were written directly for publication. *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) is the final version of an earlier epistolary novel called *Elinor and Marianne*, possibly from 1795. *First Impressions*, written between 1797 and 1798, was the first version of *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). Neither manuscript had a surviving copy, which would have been useful for an analysis of the development of Austen's working method, which included several revisions to finished and unfinished manuscripts, as well as constant rewriting. She comments about these editions in letters to Cassandra and others, more proof that she viewed writing with seriousness and professionalism. *Susan* – the first manuscript Austen sold – was written around 1799. Although elements of pastiche are present, the story had enough alterations, as Austen revised it around 1802 for fear that her references had become obsolete, to not be considered part of the *Juvenilia*. The manuscript was sold in 1803 for mere £ 10. Despite advertisement in the press, the publisher never put it to print. Comparatively, Frances Burney, Austen's favorite author, sold the rights to the sentimental novel *Camilla* for £1,000 (MANDAL, 2007, p. 16). *Susan* was finally printed, alongside *Persuasion,* in 1818, after her death. But by then its title had changed to *Northanger Abbey*.

The probable origin of *Pride and Prejudice* was the manuscript *First Impressions*, written between 1796 and 1797, on the reels of Jane Austen's failed relationship with Tom Lefroy. The final version probably presents less criticism and pastiche of the styles to which her predecessors, such as Richardson and Burney, subscribed. Kenneth Moler, whose analysis of "Jack and Alice" points to similarities between Austen's character Charles Adams and Samuel Richardson's Sir Charles Grandison, says that "although she retained an element of ironic imitation, Jane Austen refined her characters, transforming them from mere vehicles for satire into human beings interesting in their own right"( MOLER, 1967, p. 504). He argues that, in Austen, but especially in *Pride and Prejudice*, we see an unusual treatment of the patrician hero, which Moler identifies as "a character-type best known as represented in the novels of Richardson and Fanny Burney" (Idem, p. 492), a male figure that signals the resurgence of classic values such as virility and roughness, combined with the more recently acquired genteel civility of the upper classes. Richardson's novels would always involve "relationships between men of rank and fortune and young women who are, in varying degrees, their social inferiors" (Ibidem, p. 172); those men could be either "prosperous", like in *The History of Sir Charles Grandison*; or "destructive", like Lovelace in *Clarissa* – the

nature of the hero would determine if the story was a celebration of the status quo or a warning against the dissipation of moral values.

Austen's preference is clearly for the prosperous patrician hero. In Mr. Darcy's first appearance in *Pride and Prejudice*, "his fine, tall person, handsome features, noble mien; and the report which was in general circulation within five minutes after his entrance, of his having ten thousand a year" (*PP*. p. 8-9) shares traits with Richardson's Sir Charles Grandison. Darcy's status, wealth, and appearance however do not render him the protagonist of Austen's story, in a shift from the structure usually followed by Richardson and Burney. Instead, Austen proposes a female protagonist that is neither an orphaned heroine who must search for her aristocratic roots, like in sentimental and Gothic novels, nor a naïve and secluded beauty who worships the hero in Richardson's and Burney's works. The only trait Elizabeth Bennet shares with those characters is the fact that her situation is indeed inferior to Darcy's, but he is shown as being less perfect than his fellow patrician heroes, especially when his personality is contrasted with his friend Bingley's: "He was at the same time haughty, reserved, and fastidious, and his manners, though well bred, were not inviting. In that respect his friend had greatly the advantage. Bingley was sure of being liked wherever he appeared, Darcy was continually giving offence." (*PP*, p. 12). On the other hand, Elizabeth's "lively, playful disposition, which delighted in any thing ridiculous" (*PP*. p. 9), is contrasted with Miss Bingley's studied speeches and actions, her attempts at calling Darcy's attention for she is "all too obviously willing to play the role of the patrician hero's female adorer in order to become the mistress of Pemberley." (MOLER, 1967, p. 503), without realizing that it is precisely Elizabeth's individualism that intrigues Darcy:

> Elizabeth was far from suspecting that she was herself becoming an object of some interest in the eyes of his friend. Mr. Darcy had at first scarcely allowed her to be pretty; he had looked at her without admiration at the ball; and when they next met, he had looked at her only to criticise. But no sooner had he made it clear to himself and his friends that she had hardly a good feature in her face, than he began to find it was rendered uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression of her dark eyes. To this discovery succeeded some others equally mortifying. Though he had detected with a critical eye more than one failure of perfect symmetry in her form, he was forced to acknowledge her figure to be light and pleasing; and in spite of his asserting that her manners were not those of the fashionable world, he was caught by their easy playfulness. (*PP*, p. 16)

Watt asserts that "the novel's realism does not reside in the kind of life it presents, but in the way it presents it" (WATT, 2001, p. 11), and in *Pride and Prejudice* this becomes even more clear with Elizabeth's realization that Darcy "was exactly the man, who, in disposition and talents, would most suit her. His understanding and temper, though unlike her own, would have answered all her wishes" (*PP*, p. 202) because their union is the reconciliation of art versus nature, that is, of divergent approaches to realism within the tradition of the novel, because "by her ease and liveliness, his mind might have been softened, his manners improved, and from his judgment, information, and knowledge of the world, she must have received benefit of greater importance" (Idem). By subverting the characterization of the patrician hero as seen in Richardson, Austen combines the preservation of classic values and the civilized behavior of the prosperous hero represented by Sir Charles Grandison, but also displays the virility and sensuality of Lovelace, the tragic protagonist of *Clarissa.* This becomes clearer in visual adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice*, such as the ones which will be discussed in Chapter 2. Austen achieves, in her novels, a representation of men that "is informed by shifts in public constructions of masculinity throughout the Romantic period and by the literary masculinities of her predecessors and contemporaries" (AILWOOD, 2008, p. 9). By adding to it her own perception, she was able to give life to "a male character who in the twenty-first century has become iconic with a particular model of desirable masculinity" (Idem, p. 10). In her novels, but especially in *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen succeeds in reconciling different representations of masculinity that were in vogue in the Romantic period. In her portrayal of men, she addresses different models of desirable and undesirable masculinities set within the context that she knows best, which is domesticity.

Austen reads with the same degree of interest and attention the works of Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding and domestic-sentimental novels penned by women; she follows both Richardson and Fielding's tradition of presenting the occurences of daily life from a distant, comic point of view, but "Rather than proceed through negations, she inaugurates her career by asserting solidarity with a distinctively feminine tradition of novelists that developed in the late eighteenth century, a tradition in which Burney and Radcliffe ranked very high" (JOHNSON, 1995, p. 191). By dispensing the participant narrator, Austen gains more freedom to comment on all characters from the point of view of the protagonist. As this focalization is tinted with the character's own thoughts and judgements, the reader also gains a glimpse into their internal struggles, and their progression from self-acknowledgement to

realization. Not only self-reflecting, Austen's characters also reflect the social changes that took place in the early 19th Century England, not through grand descriptions and epic developments like those in Sir Walter Scott's historical novels, but through the internalization of these changes into the lives of her characters, and its consequences in the domestic sphere. In *Aspects of the Novel*, author E.M. Forster states that "She is a miniaturist, but never two-dimensional" (FORSTER, 1927, p. 74). Janet Todd argues that this "ability to create the illusion of psychologically believable and self-reflecting characters" (TODD, 2006, p. ix) is what contributes most to Austen's popularity among all types of readers. Her novels do not encompass the whole social and political scenes of the time; they prefer to focus on that microcosm that is the English country domesticity. There is nothing lacking in them.

Along with the contributions to the novel as a genre, in both capacities of reader and writer, Austen also is innovative in her approach to publishing, which shows both an acute knowledge of the business and a desire to be able to control the fate of her novels. In the early 19th Century, publishing was never a guaranteed endeavor: publishers could buy the rights to a novel and it would never see the light of day; or more frequently, people would relinquish the rights to the novel in exchange for a cut in sales. That sort of gamble could lead the author to debt, but it also could lead to a better profit. Austen was aware of these intricacies because of her elder brothers' adventures in writing with *The Loiterer*. Austen had access to this publication when younger. Henry – who had more experience than her on the subject – acted as her representative with the London publishers. As attuned as she was to the publishing market, she may have felt that a male emissary could have more luck in negotiations than a single woman could – as famous authors such as Frances Burney and Ann Radcliffe did, who were married and had their husbands' reputations as shields against public disapproval. In Anthony Mandal's overview of the literary marketplace in the late 1700s and early 1800s, he says that "it becomes evident that the mid-1790s were specifically conducive to female authorship (…) By the later 1790s, however, female authorship was in decline" (MANDAL, 2007, p. 14). He conjectures that this scenario might explain Cadell's rejection of the manuscript offered by Reverend Austen: while Austen was first drafting her manuscripts the market was still welcoming to women authors, but when she was finally able to sell *Susan* in 1803, the publisher might have shelved it for fear that it would not sell.

While she wrote throughout her life, it was only when she and her family finally settled at Chawton, in 1809, that she actively sought publication. By the following year, *Elinor and Marianne* had been completely rewritten, from its epistolary format to the text that is known today as *Sense and Sensibility*. Through Henry, Austen reached to Thomas Egerton, who had been the publisher of *The Loiterer* (HARMAN, 2009, p. 36). The decision to publish on commission – in which she would be liable to all losses – was risky, but successful: "By July 1813 the first edition of around 750 copies (cheaply produced for the circulating library trade at a price of 15 shilling a set) had sold out, earning Austen a profit of £ 140" (Idem, p. 39). When the time came to publish *Pride and Prejudice*, Henry was unable to assist, as his wife Eliza was ill. Austen herself took over the negotiations, but while it would be best for her to follow the successful model of the first time, she preferred to sell the copyright of *PP* to Egerton for £ 110, less than what she hoped for, but which was money she could count on. Even after Henry was able to assist her again, Austen kept a close eye on the negotiations, and would always try to obtain the best deal possible so that her costs would not be exorbitant, and the monetary return, acceptable. By being a present force behind negotiations, she was able to push for the release of the novels when printers were late, as well as obtain, in the end, enough money to not only cover the publishing costs of future novels, but also obtain some profit for herself.

In "The Professional Woman Writer", Jan Fergus offers the details of these effective deals between Austen and her publishers, and even challenges the family portrait of Austen as someone who treated writing as a hobby: "That myth, and others like it, have prevented subsequent readers from understanding that, for Austen, being a professional writer was, apart from her family, more important to her than anything else in her life" (FERGUS, 2007, p. 13). The seriousness with which Austen viewed her craft, and her professionalism in her dealings with publishers, contrasts with latter accounts by her family – especially by her brother Henry and nephew James Edward Austen-Leigh – of a private, amateurish writer who shied away from fame, hence the anonymity of her publications. James Edward Austen-Leigh's biography "evokes a comfortable, approachable figure who put down her needlework to pick up her pen—who wrote in the odd moments snatched from the daily round, who scribbled to please herself and entertain the family, who sat quietly in a corner, silently observing the world go by" (SOUTHAM, 1987, p. 3). Barbara Benedict conjectures that

> By her thematic and generic formulas, her style, and her method of publishing outside the contemporary critical coterie, Austen contradicted the Romantic claim that fine writing required extraordinary experience, extraordinary character, and a revolutionary ideology. (Benedict, 2000, p. 64)

To the Victorian sensibilities of the generation that contributed to the *Memoir*, it was best to present the image of someone who wrote only for personal amusement.

As above mentioned, Austen's body of work closes with *Northanger Abbey*, the revision of *Susan*, the first manuscript she had sold almost 15 years previously. Interestingly, her last work to be published was the reshaping of her first work submitted to an editor. *Northanger Abbey* would only be published, though, in 1818, after her death. It is there that we meet her appeal to fellow novelists to "leave it to the Reviewers to abuse such effusions of fancy at their leisure" because she knew that although novels had "afforded more extensive and unaffected pleasure than those of any other literary corporation in the world, no species of composition has been so much decried" (*NA*, p. 22). As we will see, almost two centuries after her death, her legacy is questioned precisely because the reviewers and orthodox Janeites tend to forget Austen's early alliance with popular fiction.

## 1.3 LEGACY

Over the last two centuries, the mark left by Austen in Literary history has been seen, felt and discussed in innumerous fashions, and through the efforts of so many scholars have been able to access a most comprehensive bibliography on the author. Other than try to summarize the extensive Austen scholarship available, I will concentrate on two aspects of her legacy: the process of iconization of Jane Austen through early biographies and portraits, and the emergence of the Janeites and the notions of authorized and unauthorized readings of Austen's work. With this, I expect to be able to link the tradition of Austen criticism with her

insertion into a fan culture that tends to be overlooked by more traditional approaches to Literature.

The attachment between Jane Austen and her sister Cassandra is an undeniable fact, documented in all biographical accounts and in the letters. How can only 160 letters have survived if it is known that the sisters, who found themselves several times separated due to obligations to one or another brother, were prolific correspondents? Cassandra was beside Jane Austen until her last moment, literally: on that day in July 1817, Jane Austen died in her sister's arms, and the grief expressed by Cassandra, in a letter to their niece Fanny Knight, is heartfelt:

> I have lost a treasure, such a Sister, such a friend as never can have been surpassed, – She was the sun of my life, the gilder of every pleasure, the soother of every sorrow, I had not a thought concealed from her, & it is as if I had lost a part of myself. I love her only too well, not better than she deserved, but I am conscious that my affection for her made me sometimes unjust to & negligent of others… (Letters, CEA/1, 1817, p. 344)

As much as we feel Cassandra's need to shield her sister's intimacy, perhaps anticipating the curiosity that would follow the disclosure of the identity of the author of works such as *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*, we also wonder about the reasons why she did it. Although concealed, Austen's identity was fully known among family and friends, and to outsiders it became a sort of open secret, as Henry Austen would disclose it to his friends in London, who ran in literary circles. Also, her correspondence with editors and publishers and with the Prince Regent's librarian shows that as much as she hid it, she would not deny her authorship if directly asked about it. She was not ashamed of being a writer; she merely sought to preserve her privacy – but to what extent? Enough for Cassandra to dispose of most documents which could give us an insight into her sister's mode of thinking? Austen left no diary, no register log of her work routine and of her manuscript revisions. The timeline of their writing is given by the information presented in the letters, and in Cassandra's recollections, which she eventually put to paper. The mystery surrounding Austen's life is not only because of the long periods of her life from which no correspondence survives; it is also from the absence of any documentation of her creative process. As executor of her sister's

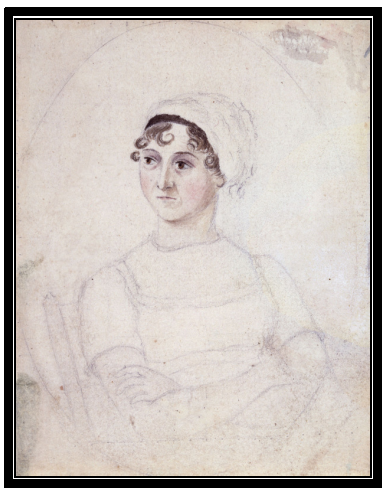
estate, Cassandra Austen took possession of all the manuscripts that had not been sold, and those that were unfinished. She also became the custodian of her sister's earnings from the publication of her four novels. Just after Austen's death, Cassandra and Henry would sell and see published the last two revised manuscripts, *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey*. But in the end, it was through "the preservation (and destruction) and subsequent distribution among brothers, nieces, and nephews of the letters, manuscripts, and memories she inherited" that Cassandra would end up controlling the way her sister would be portrayed by future generations, as she "decisively shaped, through stewardship of the archive, through its calculated division, and through conversation, what was available (and to whom) in the next generation" (SUTHERLAND, 2005, p. 78). Cassandra's influence upon what remained and what was erased in the letters and fictional legacy of her sister can be faced in two opposite ways. On the one hand, if we think in terms of genetic criticism, we mourn the loss of invaluable material and information. On the other hand, without her interference so much would be now open and traceable, that much of the mystery that feeds her fans' imagination would be lost, the mystery out of which Jane Austen the icon emerges, with all the derivative production it has provoked.

The evolution of Jane Austen's image in the last 200 years is a direct result of these choices made by Cassandra Austen after July 1817. Aside from Henry Austen's "Biographical Notice" of 1818, and its subsequent revision in 1833, all biographies written about Jane Austen are informed by the surviving letters and the recollections of family members from the following generation, nephews and nieces who were too young to have spent much time with their Aunt Jane, or who knew of her only from their parents' stories. More importantly, when the task of writing the biography was undertaken, the principal researchers were James Austen's children Anna Lefroy and her half-siblings, Caroline Austen and James Edward Austen-Leigh who, as much as they had spent time with her, had only part of the puzzle in their hands, thanks to Cassandra. In their attempt at presenting Austen's life to an audience who knew too little about her, they ended up discovering what too little all of them knew about Aunt Jane.

It is somewhat disconcerting, then, to see how much of today's image of Austen is informed by myths perpetrated from this family re-imagination of Austen. As a consequence,

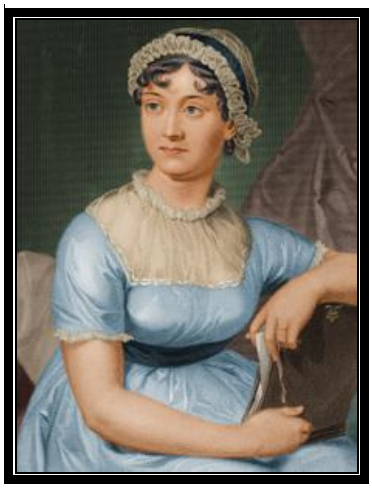
contemporary fictional portrayals of Jane Austen are accused of historical inaccuracy. According to Emily Auerbach, Henry Austen's biographical notice painted an image of Jane Austen as a "modest, delicate, saintly woman unconcerned with her artistic reputation" (AUERBACH, 2004, p.6); Henry revised this brief biography in 1833, for a complete edition of Austen's novels that would be printed by Richard Bentley, and Austen-Leigh's biography – also done as a companion to Bentley's re-edition of the novels, this time in 1870, not only piled on that, but cemented the image of the author as Dear Aunt Jane in a rather literal way (LE FAYE, 2005, p. 52).

The distortion in the image we have of Jane Austen is not only metaphorical. Even when we consider material representations, as portraits, we meet with complications. Out of the few authenticated images of Jane Austen, two are contemporary to her, both painted by Cassandra Austen. Only one of these authenticated images – in exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery, in London – shows Jane Austen's face. It is an incomplete watercolor painted by Cassandra around 1810, which shows her sister seated, looking to her right side, arms crossed and a closed expression on her face – not exactly the image of a lovely, jovial aunt (Image 1). Later, the nieces would claim that the sketch was nothing like the real subject, and thus a more truthful image was required. But the living relatives who had known Jane Austen were in no condition to give testimony, as was the case of Lady Knatchbull – formerly known as Fanny Knight –, whose memory was beginning to fail. So, in order to illustrate the *Memoir*, Austen-Leigh commissioned a revised version of Cassandra's portrait, which softens Austen's expression and is more in tune with the image presented in the text (Image 2)



Img. 1 Jane's portrait painted by Cassandra Austen circa 1810.

Img. 2 Altered version presented in the *Memoir* in 1870.



Img. 3 This is the more colorful (and altered) version of Image 2.

Image 2 conveys the idea of Dear Aunt Jane much better, “a homely spinster, an amateur, who avoided literary society, whose writing was squeezed in between the household chores and the task of looking after an invalid mother” (SOUTHAM, 1987, p. 3). The biography consists of a recollection of stories gathered by the descendants of James Austen, only some of whom had met their aunt Jane, and the few letters and manuscripts that had been left to them. At the time of publishing, they were unaware that Lady Knatchbull had been in possession of over half of the surviving letters, as well as other manuscripts. Those would only come to light after her death, when her son, Lord Brabourne, published them. The recollections by Austen-Leigh and his sisters were also mostly stories passed down to them by older family members, especially Mary Lloyd Austen and Cassandra. How much of it is true is hard to know, as their subject was dead and they may have tried to shield her from family gossip, or make the stories more interesting, or even try to adapt to this new image of the smiling adorable lady the commissioned portrait now displayed. Some of the events described in the letters were confirmed by them, though, but did not make the final text of the *Memoir* probably because they were filtered through Victorian sensibilities, and the author and his assistants feared offending their aunt’s memory or tarnishing the family name. The *Memoir* was, then, an attempt to present Austen to an audience that knew *of* her, but knew nothing *about* her, and succeeded in creating an image that is still accepted today. The Austens, from several different branches of the family, would dominate the market for Jane Austen biographies until 1938, when Elizabeth Jenkyns wrote *Jane Austen*. Besides the previous biographies, Jenkyns had at her disposal *The Complete Works of Jane Austen*, edited by professor Robert William (R.W.) Chapman. Chapman collected all the novels, minor works, letters, and manuscripts available at the time, an indication that Austen was no longer merely an author ardently admired, but that she had become the subject of academic interest.

As much as the lack of documented evidence of Jane Austen’s life is baffling, it is the absence of a concrete, ultimate visual representation of the author that disconcerts even more academics and fans alike, so much that other portraits have been brought forward and contemplated as possible “lost pictures” of the author. Both Cassandra’s watercolor and

Austen-Leigh's updated illustration – along with an even more softened version of the latter (Image 3) – have been the only sanctioned images of Austen so far. In his 1884 edition of the letters, Lord Braborne uses as illustration an image of a possibly adolescent Jane Austen, in a white dress, holding an umbrella; this is known as the Rice portrait, after the family who owned it. Other portraits, drawings, and sketches of Austen's likeness can be found at The Jane Austen Centre in Bath, or presented to other institutions which count Austen's manuscripts in their archives, such as the Morgan Library, in New York, though most of them are imaginative portraits, painted on commission[2]. More recently, a painting bought in a London auction by her husband has sent Dr. Paula Byrne in a quest to authenticate the picture. The uniqueness of this portrait comes from the fact that it shows a woman sitting by a window, holding a pen – the author in her element. An inscription in the back identifies the subject as Jane Austin [sic] 1775-1817. Byrne's research was documented by BBC in a television documentary called *Jane Austen: The Unseen Portrait* in 2011, in which a panel of Austen scholars give the verdict of authenticity based on the evidence provided to them by Dr. Byrne: they are Kathryn Sutherland, the Oxford professor who currently oversees the digitalization of Austen's manuscripts; Professor Claudia L. Johnson from Princeton University and Deirdre Le Faye, widely regarded among Austen scholars as the eminent authority on Austen family records, editor of the latest edition of the letters. Their verdict was inconclusive. Sutherland and Johnson believe it can be real, but it needs more evidence. The discussion on the veracity of the portrait also leads to the acknowledgement that, as Juliette Wells argues, "Visual and verbal portrayals of Austen today participate in, and contribute to, a long tradition of reinventing her image and propagating wishful myths about her" (WELLS, 2011, p. 142). So, it is not only Austen's novels that are being adapted: she too, or at least her face, is subject to adaptation.

Author of an extensive research that catalogues Austen's critical fortune, Brian Southam demonstrated that, by the time James Edward Austen-Leigh published *A Memoir of Jane Austen*, in 1870, "As far as criticism and the public at large were concerned, Jane Austen was a minor writer of a past age" (SOUTHAM, 1987, p. 1). Austen had received attention from contemporary reviewers, chiefly among them Sir Walter Scott, who praised her for her portrayals of ordinary life. Scott wrote an unsigned review of *Emma* in 1816, on commission

[2] Margareth Kirkham makes a more compelling analysis in "Portraits," published in Janet Todd's *Jane Austen in Context*.

from John Murray, who had published Austen's latest novel. Scott praises Austen's novels as "far superior" than "the ephemeral productions which supply the regular demand of watering-places and circulating libraries" (SCOTT, 1979, p. 64) and he emphasizes the quality of her depictions of everyday life, contrasted with what he perceives as a lack of plot:

> The narrative of all her novels is composed of such common occurrences as may have fallen under the observation of most folks; and her dramatis personæ conduct themselves upon the motives and principles which the readers may recognize as ruling their own and that of most of their acquaintances. The kind of moral, also, which these novels inculcate, applies equally to the paths of common life, as will best appear from a short notice of the author's former works, with a more full abstract of that which we at present have under consideration. (Scott, 1979, p. 68)

Southam notes that Scott's opinion "became the kernel of Jane Austen criticism, the statutory quotation. No article or essay could proceed far without it" (SOUTHAM, 1987, p. 6).

When we consider the interesting course of Austen's critical fortune, its beginning can be said to rely on three basis: Sir Walter Scott's authoritative view, the fact that the following generation of readers belonged to the Victorian Era, and the effects of the publication of the *Memoir*. In the decades that followed Jane Austen's death there was an increased interest in her novels, mostly from critics seeking to reevaluate them rather than from the general reading public. About 50 years after Scott, critical views were practically the same, and the assessments to the image of the author were associated with the image conjured by her family in 1870: Austen was associated with ideas such as "provincial", "charming", "sweet-natured", "loving" and "moral".

To the Victorians, strongly committed with the idea of progress and industrialization, the emphasis lay on the domesticity of the agreeable portrayal of family life and on the ratification of moral standards. It is only as the 20$^{th}$ century opens, through Edwardian eyes, that the social plea contained in Austen's fiction will be recognized and voiced. Later on, when literary theory starts to be considered as a science to be approached with a certain method, the Structural school will highlight the importance of Austen to the novel as a genre. With her, characters gained in psychological depth, the narrative scheme became more complex and the narrator less reliable, which caused the readers to become more active,

constantly reevaluating the facts given to them in previous sections of the narrative. Austen seems to have more things in common with the Modern and Post-modern readers than with the Victorian or Neoclassical ones. And now, in postmodern times, with the new modes of reading and writing, Austen has grown even more popular with readers and in stature with critics. As to the latter, Deirdre Lynch implies that literary criticism is still in need of some time to adapt to derivative production. In strong terms, she refers to "the anxiety provoked when the mass production of the tokens of elite culture threatens to undo their elite cachet." (LYNCH, 2000, p. 11).

The fact is, Austen's critical fortune has been through alternate moments when her novels were considered either too simple in theme and restricted in scope; or too subtle and sophisticated to be recognized by the general reading public. Would they "be capable of responding to the 'fineness' and 'delicacy' of her work?" (SOUTHAM, 1987, p. 14-15). At the same time, there is the propagated idea of Austen as undemanding reading, soothing and inspirational; the moral and aesthetic pleasure of reading her novels is presented as an antidote to the popular fiction that dominated the market, namely, the morbid realism of detective and crime Victorian fiction. According to Barbara Benedict, "her intertextuality suggests that she conceived of her novels in the context of current fiction, as part of popular literature, and designed her novels to reach the audiences who were reading contemporary novels" (BENEDICT, 2000, p. 64). Still, when Victorian critics tried to "rescue" Austen from uninformed readers, they did so by ignoring the fact that, while not a popular author, Austen was a self-acknowledged author of popular fiction.

In 1894, in the introduction to a new edition of *Pride and Prejudice*, critic George Saintsbury would coin the term that would be used in the future to refer to the enthusiastic, emotional way in which a great number of readers react to Austen: Janeites[3]. Before the *Memoir*, Austen had been examined by reviewers in different lights, but after Scott's opinion was pronounced, and accepted with reverence by Victorian critics, and after the word "Janeite" got its way, there was a period of critical silence about her work, reflecting the perception that there is little else to say about her novels; Austen's novels were deemed an example of

[3] Originally spelled by Saintsbury as "Janites", but currently used in the form adopted by Rudyard Kipling in the short story "The Janeites" (1926).

elegant writing and safe readings. For one faction of the readers, the appreciation of Jane Austen went beyond her literary merits and became a sort of cult of personality., they were part of the literary elite that believed in the need for "universal principles of taste if there are not to be disruptions in sensation and communication that would lead to social chaos" (COTTOM, 1985, p. 1-2). For the Janeites – who boast among them other authors like Rudyard Kipling and E.M. Forster – to admire Austen's work was the ultimate test in good taste.

The idea of "illicit love" for Jane Austen that was criticized by Lionel Trilling in 1957, mentioned in the introduction, has its origins with these Janeites and the intense partisanship that their appropriation of Austen promoted. An unidentified reviewer remarked in 1889 that "Those who do appreciate her novels will think no praise too high for them, while those who do not, will marvel at the infatuation of her admirers; for no one ever cares moderately for Jane Austen's works" (MALDEN, 1987, p. 189). At the same time, a systematic academic analysis of Literature was being developed. This would result in the inclusion of Literature as a subject to be studied in universities; Austen's work was included in those initial curricula. The academic approach requires a distancing from their subject of research; consequently, the Janeites' enthusiasm tends to be disregarded in academic criticism. In the last decades of the 20$^{th}$ Century, when the Eurocentric patterns of ethics and aesthetics were reevaluated, a number of issues concerning quality in art were raised. In Austenland, this triggered a long battle between sanctioned and un-sanctioned readings and adaptations of Austen. The term Janeite became, then, synonymous with amateurish, uninformed, uncultivated readers, the epithet used "whenever [the purists] need to designate the Other Reader (…) to personify and distance themselves from particular ways of reading" (LYNCH, 2000, p. 12). Today's Janeites share with their predecessors the emotional attachment to the constructed image of the author, a closeness and intimacy that is reserved to a friend or family member, but they differ in that their response does not claim to be moral or aesthetically superior to others: "Jane Austen fosters in her readers, as most other literary giants do not, the devotion and fantasies of personal access that are the hallmarks of the fan" (LYNCH, 2005, p.111). What these readers derive from Austen's works – be it the novels or their adaptations – is a kind of pleasure that is at least as emotional as aesthetic, an enriching experience. Their readings may be informed either/both by the appreciation of critical material written on the subject, or/and by the return offered by derivative material. Such responses range from public declarations of

appreciation on social media to appropriation of the novels and biographies in derivative works to the consumption of every kind of product available that is connected, somehow, to Jane Austen. The difference between popular and academic views on Austen's work is nothing more than the position of different types of readers who have different claims of authority over the author's work. Lynch's opinion seems to favor the line of pleasure over the line of duty, when she divides the factions "between readers for whom Jane Austen represents domestic privacy, leisure and sometimes shopping and professional scholars/teachers/readers for whom Jane Austen represents career and a connection to the public sphere" (Idem, p. 113). This marks a great change, if we consider the time when Victorian critics feared that the general public would be unable to identify Austen's merits. According to Benedict, today

> This pigeonholing of Austen as an author of high literature remains in effect. Yet, Austen wrote love stories at a time when novels that portrayed female emotion and the struggle of independent heroines against social convention were the popular rage. Moreover, the Romantic ideal of authorship as a sign of laudable originality was, in fact, only newly emerging, and doing so among a literary elite to which Austen did not belong. (…) How did these original readers encounter Austen's work – as 'literature' or as 'fiction'? Since her novels plumb a popular tradition of love fiction, why did critics categorize her work as highbrow? (Benedict, 2000, p. 63)

This contrast between literature and fiction happens because, as mentioned before, at the early stages in the development of the novel, this genre was regarded more as entertainment than as art. In this sense, Austen's critical fortune reminds us of Shakespeare's: Austen wrote novels, Shakespeare wrote popular theater; they were first taken as entertainment and then two centuries after their death, experienced a considered heightening in their status within the literary canon. Lynch acknowledges the similarities between the two authors, both in terms of contribution to literature and as cultural icons, but in the case of Shakespeare she says "we are hard pressed to find signs of an audience believing that their beloved but imperilled author requires protecting from a cult" (LYNCH, 2005, p.111) while Austen commands an internal division within the trenches of her army: a portion of the Janeites seem to fear that Austen might lose her canonical status due to her popularity, whereas, for another portion, "The powerful identifications that Jane Austen compels produce playful attempts to participate in her world, as well as to merge that world with one's own" (Idem, p. 118). The term Janeite, which was once attributed to the critics who tried to "blind" Austen from the public, is now

used to describe those readers – consumers of popular fiction who appropriate Austen outside those limited parameters once used by the critics.

In Chapter 2, the discussion turns from this internal dispute to focus solely on the derivative readings of Austen, and on how she fits, despite her canonical status, as a leading popular icon within fan communities and culture, as well as on the appropriations made by these fans that are shared, published, and consumed within those communities.

Most textual production follows closely either Austen's style or its derivations, especially in subgenres such as romance and chick-lit[4]. The focus on a more superficial level of Austen's novels, especially that of the marriage plot, characteristic of the domestic and sentimental fiction of the 18th Century, lends itself as a basis to most of these derivative novels, but this is not a recent development. Donald Grey remarks that early readers of Austen "received her fictions as well-composed fantasies (Elizabeth Bennet as Cinderella) that satisfy because they let us forget, or magically resolve, the troubles that ordinarily attend such events as falling in love" (GREY, 2001 p. vii). The fairy tale aspect of Austen's novels has been investigated by academic scholarship, but it manifests differently in popular readings: less allegorical and more structural, the template for a kind of fiction that elicits an emotional response from the reader. For Deirdre Lynch, "there are more productive things to do with this record than to adjudicate between faithful and unfaithful readings", especially when it demands that interpretative authority is given to one side of the dispute, and ignoring "the divergent uses to which such alternative Austens have been put in the literary system and the culture at large" (LYNCH, 2000, p. 5). Academic interest in fan responses to Austen may help understand her everlasting appeal without jeopardizing her canonical status. As Lynch observes, much of the focus of cultural studies in readers' responses to Austen is modeled after a similar trend in Shakespeare studies, where the Bard is investigated for his "multiple functions as folk hero, English export industry, cult object and tutelary deity" (Idem). Cultural manifestations of Shakespeare fans are not seen as a threat to his stand as a literary favorite:

[4] The term was coined in the 1990s in the British press to describe a trend in romance novels written by women, usually targeting a female readership that portrayed the lives of urban, single women who deal with hardships in their careers and in their quest for love.

> Shakespeare fans, we should note, can act like fans, parade through Stratford-upon-Avon every April 23rd sporting sprigs of rosemary, and not put at risk the plays' claims to be taken seriously. No one, it seems, feels compelled to take this cult audience to task for their excesses and their failure to blush over them. (Lynch, 2000, p. 10)

Like Shakespeare's, Jane Austen's life is surrounded in mystery thanks to absent documentation, a restricted and censored correspondence, and the conflicting family accounts that inform the early biographies. This limited range of sources means that there is little to no new evidence to be found. What usually differentiates each biography is the reading done by its author of the existing documents, and how they may explain the circumstances that allowed Austen to write and to publish, and from where she drew her stories and characters. Biographers also had to fight the established myths about Jane Austen, which present her as dull and dutiful, a pious doting Aunt whose literary genius came only by accident, and who sought neither fame nor fortune with her talents. Jane Austen's biography has gaps that need to be filled in somehow. For Aleid Fokkema, "Fiction in biography, though desired, is at best an indulgence, at worst mere aberration" (FOKKEMA, 1999, p. 42), but in some cases, fiction is all that is left. At first her works were considered in the light of this image created by the Austen family, but the evolution of literary criticism, and especially of Austen-focused literary criticism, was responsible for changes in the pre-conceived ideas of Austen that persisted throughout the 20th Century. At the same time, academics have tried to rescue Austen from popular appropriations of her life and works, as if her status as a canonical writer could be challenged or withdrawn because of her popular appeal.

The search for answers to the mystery surrounding Jane Austen's life eventually looks for clues in her novels, and the speculation that this exercise allows is reflected in the growing numbers of derivative works based on her life. Deirdre Lynch comments that "For readers in our post-Freudian century especially, the distance that Austen put between herself and marriage represents a topic of ongoing, almost obsessive fascination" (LYNCH, 2000, p. 9). Because of the documented failed relationships in her life, fictional appropriations of her story try to fit Jane Austen in the mold of one of her protagonists. It is as if readers try to go against documented history by giving Austen the "happy ending" she never had by blending her with her own characters. Juliette Wells discusses the image of Jane Austen, not from the portraits,

but from the descriptions and commentaries provided by family members, such as Henry and Caroline Austen, who described the author in terms as generic as the ones she uses for her characters, and contradictory in their attempt to be faithful to the memory of Jane Austen and the image the family would like to portray:

> As to my Aunt's personal appearance, hers was the first face that I can remember thinking pretty, not that I *used* that word to myself, but I know I looked at her with admiration — Her face was rather *round* than long — she had a *bright*, but not a *pink* colour — a clear brown complexion and very good hazle [sic] eyes — She was not, I beleive [sic], an absolute beauty, but before she left Steventon she was established as a very pretty girl, in the opinion of most of her neighbours (Austen-Leigh, 2002, p. 169)

Wells believes that this image of Jane Austen gives the "impression of a healthy, graceful woman who, while attractive, would not have been singled out for her beauty, as are the heroines she created" (WELLS, 2011, p. 143), but I would disagree on the count that almost all of Austen's main characters are described as not being singled out for their beauty: Catherine Morland is described as having "a thin awkward figure, a sallow skin without color, dark lank hair and strong feature" (*NA*, p. 5); Anne Elliot, the oldest Austen female protagonist at 27, "had been a very pretty girl, but her bloom had vanished early; and as even in its height, her father had found little to admire in her" (*P*, p.5). Even Elizabeth Bennet is described by Darcy as being "tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt *me*" (PP, p. 9), agreeing with Bingley that Jane Bennet is more handsome than her sisters. It may be precisely because Darcy later changes his mind about Elizabeth's appeal, thanks to "the very great pleasure which a pair of fine eyes in the face of a pretty woman can bestow" (*PP*, p. 19) that Jane Austen is mostly associated, from all her characters, with Elizabeth, as readers tend to imagine her with the same sense of wit and liveliness as her character. The struggle between authoritative academic readings and popular recreations is a constant in the history of the Austen critical fortune when, according to Lynch, "a customary method of establishing one's credentials as a reader of Austen has been to regret that others simply will insist on liking her in inappropriate ways" (LYNCH, 2000, p. 7). The impropriety of contemporary popular manifestations of Austen fans follows the same pattern as the fan culture at large, and are ignored or depreciated for stepping out of the authoritative readings of Austen. In "The Divine Miss Jane", Claudia L. Johnson asks how modern-day Janeites, along with other "fans, and mass culture media enthusiasts of today, marginalized by dominant cultural institution (…)

constitute a reading community whose practices violate a range of protocols later instituted by professional academics when novel studies emerged (JOHNSON, 1996, p. 151). In Chapter 2 the discussion will be focused on derivative works based on Austen's novels and life – mainly the films, and also on the ideas of Henry Jenkyns about fans and fan culture, and how their main cultural product, fan fiction, relates to Austen studies and the main objectives of this thesis.

# 2 SEEING JANE AUSTEN

*Nobody minds having what is too good for them.*

Jane Austen, ***Mansfield Park***

This chapter will explore the genesis of Jane Austen's popularity in the 1990s, as well as the consequences and ramifications of this phenomenon, and how it relates to the criticism of Austen's work. Film adaptations may be the most visible product of Austenmania because they target all audiences, not only those familiar with Austen and her work, so their analysis will comprise the bulk of this chapter. With variant degrees of success, nonetheless their popularity sparked a renewed interest in Austen's work that has yet to slow down. As more and more adaptations started being produced in subsequent years, we have reached a point where there has been at least one Austen-based film a year, ever since. The history of Austen-related adaptations lends itself to illustrate several concepts within Adaptation Studies, such as the definition of what a classical adaptation is, and the taxonomy of different types of adaptation. Theoretician Julie Sanders proposes that an adaptation "signals a relationship with an informed source text or original", while an appropriation "frequently affects a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domains" (SANDERS, 2006, p. 26). Such new cultural products, based on or appropriated from known source texts, serve as examples in the discussion of the borderline issues raised by the meeting of canonical source and mass market medium.

In that sense, what Henry Jenkins calls participatory culture "contrasts with older notions of passive media spectatorship" (JENKYNS, 2008, p. 3) and its reach is expanded globally

thanks to the internet, allowing different fans from different parts of the world to come together and share their experiences in reading and consuming cultural products. The position adopted by Henry Jenkins illustrates the fact that contemporary criticism, in order to deal with phenomena such as derivative literature, needs to loosen up their pre-determined parameters respecting what is or what is not to be considered art, lest they fall into the trap of disregarding these popular manifestations as illicit readings, as if only authoritative views could possibly bring up new insight into the work of an author. Thus they would incur in the error of dismissing valid considerations and drawing a line between acceptable and unacceptable readings of literature. Fan culture, in the sense proposed by Jenkyns, "muddies those boundaries, treating popular texts as if they merited the same degree of attention and appreciation as canonical texts" (Idem, 1992, p. 17). In the case of Austen, the challenge to these orthodox academic notions of authority is even greater since she is both a canonical *and* a popular author.

For critic Deirdre Lynch, "acknowledging that the cultural Jane Austen has been a crossover phenomenon and acknowledging that Austenmania straddles the divides between high and low culture (…) can be humbling experiences" (LYNCH, 2000, pp. 5-6). These new readings are informed by the novels, but also by the filmic adaptations, and also academic criticism. Beyond the cinematic continuation of Austen's works, Austemania also accelerated the market for Austen-based fiction and other types of derivative products. In many instances of fan culture, the discussion of these literary derivatives produced by fans, commonly known as fan fiction, raised questions of copyright infringement and literary value of such texts. Again, in the case of Jane Austen, to the discussion is added the fact that Austen's work has been in public domain for a long time, so derivative fiction based on her novels or her life are lifted from their status of fan fiction to that of published work. Furthermore, their target audience is the same that consumes other types of popular fiction along with Austen's novels, so that their attachment is much more to emotional responses to readings than academic ones. In this sense, the literary value of these texts, if based on academic standards, is irrelevant. Acknowledging both from the writers of these novels and their readers (and the fact that sometimes they are both) can be of interest if one aims to understand the enduring popularity of and response to Jane Austen.

## 2.1 FILMS

In 1995, four different productions, each based on a different Austen novel, were released. They were: Amy Heckerling's *Clueless* (based on *Emma*), the BBC's television film *Persuasion* and mini-series of *Pride and Prejudice* and Ang Lee's *Sense and Sensibility*. What could seem like an orchestrated effort was, in fact, a serendipitous event, as these four projects had been in development for years and would end up premiering within ten months of each other between 1995 and 1996[5]. Lead chiefly by the success of BBC's six-episode series, these adaptions quickly became best-selling products:

> There followed a period of what was variously called 'Austenmania', 'Austenfever', 'Austenitis' and, perhaps the most frequently used description of all, 'Darcymania'. The viewing figures for this adaptation (…) were the highest that there has ever been for a classic serial (…) When the video priced at just under £20 was released in advance of the final episode, it sold 12,000 copies in just two days and 50,000 within the week. (…) Nearly 100,000 copies of the video had been sold by the end of October and the BBC had to abandon other projects in order to reissue it in time for the Christmas market (Sales, 1996, p. 228)

This abundance comes in direct contrast to the first decades of the film industry, when many Shakespeare plays and several 19th Century novels from authors such as Charles Dickens, Charlotte Brontë and Lewis Carroll, were turned into films. But there was no Austen. In fact, it would take almost 50 years for Hollywood to introduce Miss Austen to the big screen. What is known today as a classical film narrative, the "linear narrative with a cause-and-effect logic driven by the agency of one or two main characters" (CORRIGAN, 2007, p. 34), is nothing more than the appropriation of the rules of oral and written storytelling. Once the novelty of recording live events for posterior viewing wore off, filmmakers explored the possibility of expanding these events in sequential form, following narrative patterns; soon, the realism of

[5] The première dates and mode of release (theatrical or television) in the United States and the United Kindgom vary. Technically, the earliest release is the BBC's *Persuasion*, which was exhibited in April 1995, but was posteriorly released in the theaters in the USA in September 1995. The only non-British production was Heckerling's *Clueless*, which premiered in the United States in July 1995 and in the UK in October 1995. All dates listed here are as listed in the IMDB (www.imdb.com)

Victorian fiction was adopted (and adapted) by filmmakers (MCFARLANE, 2007, p. 23). With time, and with the help of other literary tools, such as serialized installments, producers tried and established a faithful audience within their public: with ongoing plots and recurring characters, these serializations were the genesis of film genres such as the western, screwball comedies and musicals – films that follow a pre-established formula, recognized and enjoyed by the audience.

For the early movie enthusiast, going to the theater meant simply watching a good story, something that would entertain. Cinema was at first seen as a lesser art form, therefore inferior to literature. Arguably this issue was raised because of the nature of cinema in its beginning: a primarily popular, mass form of entertainment, an alternative to a poor, illiterate public that had no access to other forms of art and, because of that, was unable to form judgment. Adaptations, accordingly, suffer from the same prejudice: they are seen as replication of the original, with no artistic intervention or alteration by the film producers. According to Gerald Mast, films would only be recognized by those who judged them inferior "by the conversion of the movies to the values of the educated and the affluent" (MAST, 1982, p. 280) – the ones who could afford to read the book, see the film and write about it. These values include the required respect for the original text and the obligation to being faithful to it, which will often restrict its form:

> Although the filming of a literary work has been called "adaptation" by some and "translation" by others, both terms imply (indeed demand) a respect for the original text as the fixed foot of a compass around which the film version must revolve. (…) the burden for artists becomes the wholeness and integrity of their artistic interpretations, not their loyalty to the original. (Mast, 1982, p. 280)

Because of its nature, film must rely on visual and sound interpretations of the words in the novel in order to convey their meanings, subtexts and subtleties, resulting in a more physical, pleasurable, stimulating and intense experience. However, the restrictions of the medium sometimes require that the adapter makes some changes to the source material in order to achieve a pleasantly cinematic result.

The notion of fidelity started being applied to adaptations when the number and importance of those films demanded a more in depth academic look. In the absence of other tools of analysis, the same principles of intersemiotic translation were applied. As such, it became expected that every adaptation or appropriation of a literary work to be turned into a film would always be "in the secondary, belated position, and the discussion will therefore always be, to a certain extent, about difference, lack, or loss" (SANDERS, 2006, p. 12), or, put it more simply, "the book is always better than the film". The assertion that film adaptations will always be inferior because they will never be able to faithfully recreate the novel into the screen is not only unfair, but it also ignores the complexities and differences of each medium. Linda Hutcheon says that, when talking about adaptations, "to be second is not to be secondary or inferior; likewise, to be first is not to be originary or authoritative" (HUTCHEON, 2006, p. xiii). Interestingly, the argument of the inferiority of the adaptation is only applied to *some* works of fiction that are adapted into films; as Timothy Corrigan points, "Arguments about how faithful movies are to books or to what extent one medium can be translated into another can differ significantly, for instance, if the source is considered classical literature or popular literature." (CORRIGAN, 2007, p. 31). No one bothers with questions of fidelity in the adaptation of a lesser known novel.

In the evolution of Adaptation Studies, not only were they dismembered from Translation Studies, but the notion of fidelity was, over and over, questioned and in its place was introduced the idea of intertextuality applied to adaptations. The intertextual approach to adaptations displaces the adapted text as the only point of origin of the adaptation: it becomes one of many sources from which the new work draws, but it also considers all the cultural baggage brought by the reader/spectator. Brian McFarlane argues that "[T]he way we respond to any film will be in part the result of those other texts and influences we inescapably bring to bear on our viewing" (MCFARLANE, 2007, p. 26), so adaptations should be viewed without the burden of constant comparison to its original source, simply because it is impossible to do so. The collaborative nature of film production may also contribute to the plural readings that form one single work of adaptation or, as McFarlane asks, "how is any film version, drawing on the contributions of numerous collaborators, ever going to produce the same responses except by the merest chance?" (Idem, p. 15) Linda Hutcheon says that

adaptations are palimpsests, below the surface are innumerous layers that can represent the spectator's or the adapter's previous readings; in fact adaptations would be something of an "ongoing dialogue with the past (…) more than one text is experienced – and knowingly so" (HUTCHEON, 2006, p. 116). The recognition of those previous texts may happen or not because it depends on each person's previous knowledge. To that Hutcheon says that "some call elitist, some call enriching" (Idem, p. 117), a callback to the idea that only the academically trained reader will be able to properly read a text. Even if the regular reader/spectator does not recognize some or any of the previous texts, their overall experience may be positive if the post-text can stand on its own as an aesthetic object.

Looking at the overwhelming number of adaptations based on, or related to, Austen's work that we have today, it is difficult to believe that for a long time no film based on her novels was produced. In my opinion, it was Austen's mastery of words that prevented her novels from being adapted; for Deborah Cartmell, "stripped of their words, the novels would appear quite absurd (…), nothing much happens in Austen's stories, the pleasure being in the choice of words and in the verbal subtleties" (CARTMELL, 2010, p. 4). Before the advent of sound in films, there was no right way to take Austen to Hollywood, while the works of other 19th-Century authors were being constantly adapted: between 1910 and 1943, at least fourteen versions of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* had been produced.

The 1940 MGM production of *Pride and Prejudice* was directed by Robert Z. Leonard, with Greer Garson as Elizabeth Bennett and Laurence Olivier as Mr. Darcy. The screenplay, written by Jane Murfin and Aldous Huxley, was based not on the novel, but on a 1936 stage adaptation by Helen Jerome which, according to Andrew Wright "had respectable runs in both New York and London, in 1935 and 1936 respectively." (WRIGHT, 1975, p. 430). In attendance to one of the New York performances was comedian Harpo Marx, who used his Hollywood connections to try and convince Irving Thalberg, high executive at Metro Goldwyn-Meyer to invest in a script that could become a vehicle for Thalberg's wife, actress Norma Shearer; in January of 1936 the studio bought the rights to the play for $50,000 (TURAN, 1989, p. 140). Why buy the rights to the theatrical version of a novel that was long in the public domain? Thalberg reasoned that the publicity generated both by the play and by the sale would help sell this rather obscure property to the American movie-going public

(Idem, 1989, p. 140). After some delays in the production, caused mainly by Thalberg's death in 1939, the film began its production in early 1940, less than six months after the beginning of World War II. This added a more serious layer to the first adaptation of one of Austen's novels, as she was again seen as an anesthetic to the horrors of war: as the public, frightened with the proximity of war, searches for entertainment, the idea of an idyllic England from the past is used as deflection from the worries of everyday life. It also had the added bonus of promoting the solidarity of the American people to the English who were under attack – although the film would only reach the parts of Europe involved in the war only after 1945.

As a consequence of this need for escapist entertainment, the emphasized elements of the novel were those of the romantic relationship between Elizabeth and Darcy: "With its warring lovers, witty dialogue, class differences, opportunity for elaborate costumes, and comic minor characters, the novel lends itself to the broadly comic treatment of screwball comedies" (PARRILL, 2002, p. 49). A commercial success in the 1930s, screwball comedies were fast paced, relationship-centered films, commonly with adversarial characters that duel through dialogue and, by the end of the story, realize they love each other; and Jane Murfin, the screenwriter hired by the studio, specialized in this kind of story. The delay in production also meant that *Pride and Prejudice* was released after *Gone With the Wind*, another literary adaptation. Vivien Leigh, the star of the latter, was Laurence Olivier's first choice for Elizabeth Bennet, but the studio executives believed that "putting Olivier and Leigh in the same movie was chancy commercially because it risked a moral backlash if their affair became public" (Idem, 1989, p. 142). Laurence Olivier's status as leading man was unquestionable, after his success in the previous year as Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*. By casting Greer Garson – Olivier's former pupil – in the role opposite him, his star quality would not be obfuscated. The influence of *Gone With the Wind*'s commercial success is most visible in the alterations made in the costumes presented in *Pride and Prejudice*: the more subdued fashion of early 19$^{th}$ Century Empire style was replaced by late 19$^{th}$ Century American fashion – like in *Gone With the Wind* –, the antebellum style characteristic of the South of the United States. As Elizabeth, British actress Greer Garson tries to follow the mannerisms of the 1930s modern woman whose opinions, given freely, are more rude than endearing, but Deborah Cartmell comments that she "comes across as irritatingly culpable for her unbecoming idleness and studied coquettish behavior" (CARTMELL, 2010, p. 78). It is only fair to remark that the anachronistic changes made by the studio were standard form in

Hollywood at the time. Adaptations had not yet achieved the status of a separate discipline and, therefore, questions of fidelity – to the source material, to the historical context – are only ever posed in retrospective.

Sue Parrill argues that "Darcy's role is so underwritten in the 1940 production that Laurence Olivier has little to do, except react to Elizabeth's insults and register disdain for her family's low behavior." (PARRILL, 2002, p. 51). Darcy's slight of Elizabeth in the Meryton Assembly ball is changed to illustrate the greater social gap that exists between them: he says he is in "no humor [...] to give consequence to the middle classes at play". When they meet again at Rosings, the film distances itself from the novel by applying to the conventions of the genre: Darcy is shaken to see Elizabeth; she acts flirtingly as he addresses her; they stare longingly into each other's eyes until Lady Catherine calls Darcy's attention. Later, and off scene, Elizabeth learns from Colonel Fitzwilliam of Darcy's interference in Bingley's courtship of Jane. Unaware of that, Darcy goes for a private interview with Elizabeth intending to propose to her. As he relates his feelings and objections to Elizabeth, Olivier's Darcy seems resigned rather than nervous; he takes a didactic – and sometimes condescending – approach to listing her family's faults. This could be the director's choice, but Olivier's approach to this scene is reminiscent of what Kenneth Moler denominates the patrician heroes of 18th Century novels, especially those by Samuel Richardson, one of Jane Austen's favorite authors**.** As seen in Chapter 1, patrician heroes are

> authority figures of a sort: they tend to take on symbolic values as representatives of the social and economic establishment in which they are prominent; and their heroines, in combating them, contemplating them, or cherishing them present the individual's responses to the virtues and failings of the heroes' class and the order which sustains it. (Moler, 1972, p. 172)

Darcy does, however, pace around the room, a filmic signalization of internal emotional struggle. However, when he professes his love for her, she is surprised. Darcy's reaction is similar to Mr. Collins', in the novel, mistaking astonishment, and silence for a positive response: he kneels before her, kisses her hand twice, and says "Yes, my darling, I'm asking you to marry me" – something the Darcy in the novel would never do or say. Elizabeth breaks

with the tradition described by Moler by not only not cherishing his declaration, but by aggressively and rather disproportionately contesting it. Perhaps in order to balance this behavior there is no visit to Pemberley, which suggests an attempt to downplay Elizabeth's materialism, so that she is seen as marrying only for love, and not for money and security (CARTMELL, 2010, p. 80), and that Lady Catherine is shown as being supportive of their match – her dialogue with Elizabeth is a "test" to prove that she is worthy of Darcy. This is contradicted, however, by the fact that she was shown gossiping with Jane and her mother on how much the newly-arrived Darcy and Bingley are worth in the very first scene of the film. By constraining itself within the screwball comedy genre, the MGM production forces the roles of Darcy and Elizabeth to downplay the more complex relationship they maintain in the novel and allows a reading of the characters that has more to do with Austen's parodies from works like *Northanger Abbey* than the more sophisticated approach she took in her later novels.

The gap between cinematic Austen adaptations is impressive: It would take another 55 years for another film adaptation to be made, even more for conventional adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* – 65 years. In the meantime, *PP* and the other Austen novels found a nice little home in television and, while there, also helped shape a genre that is associated with adaptations of 19th Century and early 20th Century novels: heritage or prestige productions. According to Timothy Corrigan, classic literary adaptations and prestige films "offer psychologically and socially complex stories whose canonical status could protect them from too close scrutiny by the censors" (CORRIGAN, 2007, p. 36), a very welcome feature in post-WWII entertainment production because they could readily be approved by the committees that overviewed cinematic production and any perceived subversive messages could be blamed on the original (and dead) author. Jane Austen's novels are primary heritage production targets because of this perceived harmless superficial layer – it is only a love story. As defined by Eckart Voigts-Virchow, "Heritage is a very restrictive notion of cultural memory; it is diachronic, the preservation of a desirable past" (VOIGTS-VIRCHOW, 2007, p. 124) and, as it happened in the period of the two World Wars, Austen's stories can provide the sense of order that has been lost. Such localized notions, closely related to the broken spirit of the post-war Europeans, is overwhelming in Austen's novels and, as Jeanette Wells remarks that "For those [popular, foreigner audiences] who do not encounter Austen in school, the impression of her as an English writer is reinforced by screen versions of her

novels that saturate the viewer in English accents, period costumes, landscapes, architecture, décor, and manners." (WELLS, 2011, p. 5). These elements, so characteristic of heritage films, could alienate those foreign audiences if it were not for Austen's care in focusing her stories on a smaller, domestic sphere in which the issues raised by social interaction have more universal appeal than the drawing rooms in which those conversations are set.

Although their presence in the cinema is recognizable, it was in television that heritage productions found a more welcoming environment, mainly in public funded channels that have a more education-oriented programming. The comparison between television and cinematographic adaptations end up reflecting some of the more general concerns of Adaptation Studies, with television adaptations reflecting "television's tendency towards conservative, staid, and unimaginative programming in contrast with cinema's more vibrant, eclectic, and innovative offerings", according to Sarah CARDWELL (2007, p. 182), that is: to some, television's aim at fidelity to the source text renders it inferior to cinematic adaptations. On the other hand, it is precisely the faithful nature of television adaptation that makes it a better vehicle for such endeavors: "television's serial form, for example, is often better suited to adapting expansive classic novels than is cinema." (Idem, p. 182).

One of the world's earliest and more developed public channels is the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), whose name became closely associated with heritage productions and television adaptations of classic novels. Linda Troost attributes their success to the fact that BBC adaptations "found the right balance between heritage values and entertainment needs" (TROOST, 2007, p. 83), even if entertainment is not the public channel's main focus. As with their cinematic counterparts, television adaptations have been evolving in the last 20 years thanks to increasingly accessible technology that allows producers to deliver a final product with similar quality to cinema's within budget constraints. Technology also contributes to the funding of these channels, as the market for home videos – through VHS, DVD and now Blu-Ray – provides continuous income and ample advertisement. In contrast, early television broadcasts were

> almost entirely studio based, and the cameras were cumbersome, heavy, and difficult to move. This meant that changes of perspective and pace had to be created through vision mixing (cutting from one camera to another, in a three or four camera set-up), rather than through moving the cameras themselves, as in film. Moreover, the ability to record the material was not developed until 1947

> (and very few of those recordings were kept, until the mid 1950s)" (Cardwell, 2007, p. 185)

This lateness in developing means of recording broadcasted material is responsible for a gap in Austen adaptation studies. Contrary to what happened in the cinema, there have been seven adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* for television. The first predates even the 1940 MGM film: the BBC presented a live performance of *Pride and Prejudice* in 1938. In the following 40 years, the novel would be adapted six more times for television: in 1949, 1952, 1958, 1967, 1980 – of the early adaptations, that is the only one available in DVD today – and the Andrew Davies' version starring Colin Firth and Jennifer Ehle in 1995.

I have to agree with Cardwell when she says that we can no longer view television adaptations "as dull, formulaic products (…) rather than being regarded as potentially good, 'serious' drama" (CARDWELL, 2007, p. 182). Released in 2010, ITV's *Downton Abbey* is a fictional series, set in Edwardian England that follows the daily lives of those who inhabit the manor house whose name the title borrows. Creator Julian Fellowes focuses on all inhabitants of the house, both upstairs and downstairs – referring to the places to which the family and the servants occupied, respectively. While the story is solely the creation of Fellowes – not an adaptation in the general sense – the series reflects those values traditionally associated with heritage productions such as attention to costume and furniture details to not render any anachronistic moments, the use of a property[6] listed in the National Trust, the organ that aims to preserve and promote England's national heritage. ITV, which is not publicly funded – it was created in 1955 precisely to give a commercial competitor to the BBC –has achieved similar status in excellence of production of television films and shows. In 2007 a series of three television films based on Austen's novels was produced, focusing on the less adapted titles: *Mansfield Park*, *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey* (only the second adaptation of it, the first being a 1986 BBC mini-series) and, in 2008 the series *Lost In Austen*, which will be discussed later on. Cardwell points that "one can observe creative influences amongst and between filmmakers and television makers, especially once television technology had advanced beyond studio-based techniques" (CARDWELL, 2007, p. 182-183), and this mutual influence proves an essential part of the evolution of adaptations. As we will see below, classifying different types of adaptation is a difficult task, especially in view of the continuous

[6] Highclere Castle, the property where the series is filmed, has an interesting and unusual story, being the property of the Earl of Carnarvon. The 5th Earl of Carnarvon is known for his patronage of Howard Carter's excavations in the Valley of the Kings in Egypt, which lead to the findings of Tutankhamun's tomb in 1922.

intertextual dialogues they establish with each other, in addition to with the novel they are based on.

Although outdated, the taxonomy presented by George Wagner in 1975 is still helpful for a primary assessment of different types of adaptation and it is still used by several scholars, as will become clear in the following paragraphs. Wagner's proposed classification takes in consideration the degree of fidelity to the source-text and although it does not completely disregard possible intertextual relations, the variation in the degree of proximity to the original text is what determines its category. Depending on the choices made by directors, producers and screenplay writers, it "may seek to 'preserve' the novel, or it may aim to impose a particular interpretation on its hypotext or it may seek to translate it entirely, creating a new text which may aim to confront or indeed rival the 'original'" (CARTMELL, 2010, p.22). Wagner's classification proposes three categories: transposition, commentary, and analogy. I will try to illustrate this classification with examples from all the cinematic (and one television) adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* posterior to the 1940 MGM production.

The first category proposed by Wagner is *transposition*, also called classic adaptation which, like the television adaptations described earlier, tries to remain faithful to the source text, allowing only the alterations necessary to fit the story in the constraints of the new medium – mainly, duration:

> The term classic indicates the nature of the source in the canon of English literature as defined in the twentieth century and alerts us to the fact that these are adaptations that are generally strongly linked to a previous source not only by title but also by drawing on the author's name, the use of the original illustrations, and often by an image of the book or pages from it appearing on the opening sequence. (Geraghty, 2007, p. 15)

The major challenge of cinematic transpositions is in the necessity of remaining faithful to the text without the more generous format of serialized television adaptation. Events are condensed, scenes are referred to obliquely and the dialogue has to be clipped to fit in the

allotted time. Talking about his experience in adapting *PP* for MGM, Aldous Huxley said "One tries to do one's best for Jane Austen, but actually the very fact of transforming the book into a picture must necessarily alter its whole quality in a profound way" (TURAN, 1989, p. 141). Joe Wright's *Pride & Prejudice* (2005), which will be analyzed in more depth in Chapter 3, was criticized exactly because, being a transposition, it departed frequently from the novel for visual purposes: "the film clearly tries to distinguish itself from the popular 1995 adaptation by setting the story in the late 18th rather than the early 19th Century, when the novel was first drafted" (CARTMELL, 2010, p. 11), but the comparison is never made with the 1940 MGM film (which is the only other cinematic transposition of *PP*), but with the 1995 BBC mini-series, which not only had the advantages of the medium, as discussed previously, but would also become the production of *Pride and Prejudice* to which all others, regardless of the media, would be compared.

Premiering in September 1995, BBC's *Pride and Prejudice*, written by Andrew Davies, directed by Simon Langton and produced by Sue Birtwistle, was a weekly mini-series in six episodes, "a version made for a contemporary audience; it promises changes and transformations not only of the original source but also of the screen adaptations that have preceded it" (GERAGHTY, 2007, p. 15). More than technological advancements made upon its predecessor, the 1980 BBC mini-series, what screenwriter Andrew Davies promoted was a shift of the perspective from which the story is shown, by dividing the narrative between Elizabeth (Jennifer Ehle) and Darcy (Colin Firth) equally. Even so, it is Darcy who becomes the main focus of Davies' version. In the novel, Darcy is presented to the reader mostly through Elizabeth's eyes, and the reader's opinion of him is informed by Elizabeth's knowledge and feelings. In the series, Darcy's emotions are expressed not in words, but through physical activities that help convey the turmoil of emotions he feels, even though they are only implied in the novel. Darcy's activities go beyond the usual horse-riding and walking: he is also shown bathing, dipping in a pond, and fencing.

In the scene where Darcy first proposes marriage to Elizabeth, he paces around the room and keeps silent for a long time. The result is that, as he starts addressing Elizabeth, he is almost out of breath – physical reactions are used to convey emotions that otherwise would not be displayed. While he professes his love for her and concerns over her family, his face is calm

and has no exaggerated expressions, unlike Olivier's acting choices in the MGM production. Elizabeth listens to the proposal while seated; Darcy is standing – signaling his position above hers. She refuses him without resorting to blunt accusations and attacks as Garson's Elizabeth does. However different this scene is from the 1940 version, it also differs from the scene as presented in the novel:

> Is Darcy's proposal too expressive, as the novel might have it, or not expressive enough, as the film has it? The answer is both; he exists as both in two different *Pride and Prejudice* texts. Masculine emotional display has been envisioned differently by each; it provides a telling example of how Austen's 'balance' has been reformulated and paradoxically maintained by today's audience, an audience that expects masculinity to evidence balance through emotional display. (Nixon, 2001, p. 391)

The balance is achieved through Darcy's struggles with his feelings towards his place in society and his desire for Elizabeth, and also in her understanding of his motivations and, especially, his transformation into the type of desirable male that would please Elizabeth: she becomes the one to teach him a lesson. At first Darcy has difficulty in expressing emotions, because he is still repressing his "natural" side, but at the same time, the pursuit only of sexual desire has tragic consequences, so his transformation throughout the novel has to do not only with his attempt of freeing himself from the social constraints that his position requires, but also with reconciling that to the attraction he feels for Elizabeth. By reaching a balance, he becomes worthy of Elizabeth who, having freed herself from her prejudices, is in equal footing to Darcy, and they become compatible in mind and body.

As the majority of the series' audience was female, the camera's erotic focus shifts from Elizabeth to Darcy. As such, both she and the audience into are turned into *voyeurs* and it is Darcy who becomes the object of gazing, from both Elizabeth and the audience:

> The opening shot with Bingley and Darcy galloping in the direction of Netherfield, watched by Elizabeth, sets the tone for the entire production with the men very much the objects of the female gaze. The series is punctuated with Darcy gazing at Elizabeth while at the same time he himself is a subject of the viewer's gaze, culminating in the famous scene in the lake (Cartmell, 2010, p. 68-69)

In the scene, Elizabeth is visiting Pemberley with the Gardiners. Unaware of this, Darcy is getting back from a trip unannounced and decides to swim in the lake near the house. In that moment, Darcy is free of demands of social convention and obligation and can strip down his inhibitions and defenses. While getting back home in his wet clothes, he is surprised by meeting Elizabeth, who momentarily separated from the Gardiners, is admiring the gardens at Pemberley. Perhaps more representative of Elizabeth's change of opinion about Darcy is not when she sees his portrait in the gallery, but when she sees Darcy in his wet clothes, having just exited the lake, and in that moment he becomes "the living embodiment of the perfect picture Elizabeth has been looking at in Pemberley" (CARTMELL, 2010, p. 68-69). Sarah Ailwood states that "(…) Austen's constructions of desirable masculinity (…) are always based, first and foremost, on the needs and desires of women." (AILWOOD, 2008, p. 11). Andrew Davies' understood the needs and desires of women in the 1990s and presented a reading of Darcy that combines Austen's "representation of man that is worthy of the heroines in her novels" (Idem, 2008, p. 11) with 21st Century audiences desire for ideal, perfect man. At the very last scene, as they celebrate their wedding, Elizabeth and Darcy kiss. Ellen Belton believes the kiss "confirms the primacy of the romantic relationship over other claims and valorizes the drive toward self-fulfillment and gratification" (BELTON, 2003, p. 186) but it is, perhaps, a break with the convention of faithful television adaptations in order to incorporate filmic signalizations of a happy ending that are recognizable by general audiences.

In addition to groundbreaking challenges to views of masculinity and innovations in the production of television adaptations, the 1995 *Pride and Prejudice* is also partly responsible for the popularization of Austen's work outside English speaking countries from 1995 onwards: in addition to its domestic commercial success, the production reached a much wider public than expected. This success was in part because technology allowed the popularization of domestic videos and DVDs and also because the internet became available outside academic confinements: the speed with which the information about the series was disseminated online guaranteed that even audiences which had no direct means of watching the series were able to do so even if through illegal channels, such as video downloads. At the

same time, these practices were an incentive to the legal distribution of such cultural products – in Brazil, this version of *Pride and Prejudice* had only been broadcast by a cable network, with very irregular intervals in exhibition (contrasting with the constant repetition of more popular films and series). While film adaptations have been released here in time with their international release, British television adaptations were only made available in the last three years in Brazil.

Wagner's second category is commentary. Similar to the transposition, as it aims to be faithful to most of the text, this category is illustrative of the impact academic criticism exerts in filmic adaptations. Alterations are made to the source text as to mirror the director/producer reading of the original text. Highlighting or erasing specific aspects, introducing new characters, in an attempt to comment or critique the original novel or aspects of it, the commentary is a revisionist reading of heritage productions (VOIGTS-VIRCHOW, 2007, p. 129). Two adaptations of *PP* fall into that category and both are modernizations of the story that have its action relocated from England to another country. The first one, called *Pride and Prejudice: A Latter Days Comedy* (dir. Andrew Black), was released in 2003. It situates the plot of Austen's novel in the campus of a university in Utah, in the United States, where Elizabeth (Kam Heskin) is an undergraduate student who plans to be a writer and has delayed any interest in a romantic relationship until she achieves her professional goals. Her roommates work as a stand in for the other Bennet sisters, and there is some attempt at multicultural references by making Jane (Lucila Solá) an Argentinian exchange student and Darcy (Orlando Seale), fittingly, a British publisher who rejects Elizabeth's manuscript, thus eliciting her anger. According to Deborah Cartmell, it "has just enough church references to place the film in the Mormon movie genre, but it's one of the worst examples of a surprisingly rich and frequently successful group of pictures" (CARTMELL, 2010, p. 10).

Cartmell continues by suggesting that a better attempt at appropriating Austen to a different cultural context is *Bride & Prejudice* (2004), where director and producer Gurinder Chadha takes advantage of Austen's plot to promote a discussion of national identities. Indian productions based on European Literature classics are a common occurrence, as pointed out by Christine Geraghty, with particular preference for "classic 18th- and 19th-century

European novels that provide plots centering on romance, inheritance and feminine frustration" (GERAGHTY, 2006, p. 163), still relevant issues in today's India. The multicultural aspect is exacerbated by adopting a visual style that is common in Bollywood, India's film industry, and locations in India and Goa, as well as London and Los Angeles, which gives the film an exotic flavor that substitutes nostalgic recollections of the English countryside in straightforward classic adaptations. *Bride & Prejudice* was made for international audiences, "a hybrid which seeks to adapt Bollywood for western tastes" (Idem, p. 164). The film is spoken entirely in English, although there are some typical expressions and songs in Hindi and Punjabi and a cast that features both Eastern and Western actors. While generally subscribing to the genre of romantic comedy that most adaptations of Austen novels – especially the modernizations – adopt, *Bride and Prejudice* differentiates itself by being also a musical, reinforcing its intertextual nature and expanding the scope of source texts from which it feeds.

Parallel with Austen's original plot, the Bashki are a typical, not very affluent Indian family with four daughters - Mary and Kitty are condensed into one character, Maya. Mrs. Bashki's quest to seek suitable husbands for all the girls is a commentary on India's conservative society that still requires that young women not only should marry, but have to find an advantageous match. The notion of the marriage market of Austen's time resonates in today's India in the sense that women are expected to guarantee economic security by marrying, even though they have gained, through the advancements of social rights in the past decades, the freedom to study and work; but the still more sinister need for personal security through marriage – because of India's lenience with perpetrators of crimes against women – is also hinted at in the subplot involving Jaya (Lydia) attempted elopement with Johnny (Wickham) and in the decision to follow the strict rules of Indian cinema regarding intimate contact in a production clearly aimed at an international audience.

During a wedding party – a substitute for the Assembly ball – Lalita (Aishwarya Rai) and her sister Jaya (Namrata Shirodkar) meet Balraj (Naveen Andrews), his sister Kiran (Indira Varma), and their friend, Will Darcy (Martin Henderson). Darcy, the owner of a hotel chain, is there to scout new locations for his enterprises. When he complains out loud of the poor

conditions of the hotel he is staying in, he offends Lalita's pride as she assumes that Darcy, being a foreigner, is ignorant of the economic and social conditions in India; their antagonism is established and, as Christine Geraghty notes "[T]he barrier between the couple is not so much class as national identity." (GERAGHTY, 2006, p. 163). Lalita's involvement with Johnny Wickham (Daniel Gillies) may indicate that she has no problem with foreigners but Darcy, but they are nonetheless attracted to each other. Geraghty feels that Henderson's Darcy looks "wooden and stiff, his face lacking expression", and not so much proud as afraid of the changes that such a relationship would impose on him and the cultural barriers between Lalita and him and that his "uneasy, unemphatic gestures when the couple come together (…) indicate that this is a clash of cultures which romance has difficulty in reconciling" (Idem, 2006, p. 166). In a depart from the plot of *PP*, Lalita and Darcy are shown in the beginning stages of a relationship, and although the film is modernized – thus allowing more intimate contact between characters – their contact is limited to embracing or, at most, kissing on the face. While contemporary audiences expect the "kiss at the end", an emblematic feature of cinematic love stories, India's censorship demands a "No Kissing" rule in Bollywood. Because they are subjected to a board that rates the films before they are released, several productions forego the kiss altogether as a way of guaranteeing that their film can be show to a non-age restricted general public. Also, because of the aforementioned issues of women's rights, several actresses have in their contracts a "no kissing" clause so that they do not risk offending more conservative fans and avoiding tabloid speculation of on-set romances and scandals.

Casting choices become an important marketing strategy in post-1995 adaptations, as each new production is, undoubtedly, compared to those that preceded it. Acclaimed actors are cast in roles of authority, as if to ascribe legitimacy to the film, while younger actors give a fresh and sometimes more sexually charged take on the characters. Popular actors from different media, especially television, can also help attract more public (and publicity), as they bring with them the audience and aura of their more famous works. In *Bride and Prejudice*, that was the case of Alexis Bledel, who plays Georgie Darcy, known for her work on the TV series *Gilmore Girls* (2000), and Naveen Andrews (Balraj), who was part of the ensemble cast of the series *Lost* (2004). Aishwarya Rai, who plays Lalita, was Miss World in 1994 and, by that point, Bollywood most popular actress. Martin Henderson, who must have thought very difficult to fill in the shoes of Colin Firth's iconic performance in 1995, is known for films

such as *The Ring* (2002) and the music video for *Toxic* (2004), performed by Britney Spears. Casting choices also account for intertextual dialogues between different productions, such as in Joe Wright's *Pride & Prejudice* and *Atonement* (2007), and *Becoming Jane*, which will be discussed in Chapter 3.

As we reach the last category, it is important to the first two – transposition and commentary – are characterized by their attempt of fidelity to the primarily indicated source text, such as the novel being adapted. The idea of *analogy*, however, is similar to the intertextual approach to adaptation: a "fairly considerable departure for the sake of making *another* work of art" (WAGNER, 1975, p. 227). These more loose adaptations are not bound to the source text; they can, in fact, "take but the merest hints from their sources" (Idem, 1975, p. 230), promote temporal and geographical dislocations, making masked references to a known original source, or "overt (unsubtle) thematic intersections between the movie and source novel to make the film manifestly intelligible as an adaptation" (MOODY, 2009, electronic information). Of all the categories, the analogy may be the most difficult to exemplify precisely because of its infidelity: the film may allude to a novel as its origin, but the overall plot and themes do not resonated with those of the implied source. Or, contrarily, references may be so implicit as to escape the notice of a less attentive viewer. In the case of *Pride and Prejudice*, do we consider an analogy any film which portrays the relationship between two people who dislike each other at first sight and eventually fall in love? How can we differentiate it from, say, an analogy of William Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*? Without a direct reference, any story about two sparring lovers may be seen as being derived from one or another, and the popularity of such plot, to the point of becoming representative of a popular genre such as romance, in both literature and cinema, is a complicating factor in any analysis.

Examples of this are *You've Got Mail* (1997) and *Bridget Jones' Diary* (2001). In the former, the source reference is as much Austen's novel as is the 1940 film *The Shop Around the Corner*, by Ernst Lubitsch, in which two employees hate each other, but unbeknownst to them, are pen pals who end up falling in love.[7]. The plot focuses on competitors Kathleen

[7] At the same time, *The Shop Around the Corner* is the adaptation of a play by Hungarian dramatist Miklós László called "Parfumarie". The play was the base for three other films produced between 1948 and 1978.

Kelly (Meg Ryan) and Joe Fox (Tom Hanks), she is the owner of the Shop Around the Corner, a children's bookstore, while he is the heir to Fox Books, a big corporation that plans on installing a megastore close to Kelly's business. The film updates Lubitsch's story, in that the correspondence between Kelly and Fox is through e-mails. The connection to Austen comes from Kelly declaring *Pride and Prejudice* as her favorite book, and mentions of it in many other scenes. *Bridget Jones' Diary* is a study in Austen intertextuality: it is a film based on a novel based on a newspaper column based on *Pride and Prejudice*, but also on the BBC mini-series of 1995. Journalist Helen Fielding started *Bridget Jones' Diary* as a newspaper column in 1995, as the chronicles of a modern thirty-something woman who is in search of a job which can fulfill her, and a boyfriend. Her attentions are divided between work colleague Daniel Cleaver and the son of her parents' friends, rich attorney Mark Darcy. Through misunderstandings, Bridget and Darcy's relationship is shown to parallel Elizabeth and Darcy's in *PP*. The success of the story can also be attributed to Fielding's incorporation, on the newspaper column, of Bridget's obsession with the BBC mini-series. The resulting story, which was released as a novel in 1997, is as much a parody of *PP* as it is homage to Colin Firth's interpretation of Mr. Darcy. The film version of *Bridget Jones' Diary* gained another layer of intertextuality when Colin Firth was cast as Mark Darcy.

Adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* that can be categorized as analogies are also connected to the ideas of postmodern art and again reinsert into Austen the discussion of the boundaries between fact and fiction, and of high and low culture. In Linda Hutcheon's definition "the postmodern is not ahistorical or dehistoricized, though it does question our (perhaps unacknowledged) assumptions about what constitutes historical knowledge" (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. xii), which certainly applies to the question of historical truth in any analysis of Jane Austen's biography that does not take the *Memoir* and other family recollections as gospel. In postmodernism's reclaim of the past, "Its aesthetic forms and its social formations are problematized by critical reflection. (…) it is always a critical reworking, never a nostalgic 'return'" (Idem, p. 4), much like adaptations of Austen's novels, as inserted in the genre of heritage films, can be more than just an attempt at reproducing the past. Hutcheon goes further by saying that, in postmodern fiction, in the same way that the boundaries between History and fiction are being challenged, so are textual genres, and in this fluidity several limits are blurred, such as that of authorized and unauthorized readings, the increasingly participative role of the reader in any consideration of a text and the limitation of media in

storytelling. In all this, Hutcheon suggests, "[A] further modern paradox that this particular kind of fiction enacts is to be found in its bridging of the gap between élite and popular art, a gap which mass culture had no doubt broadened" (Ibidem, p. 20). The last two adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* to be discussed here are representative of this postmodern spirit embedded in readings of the novel, but also of the fan culture which consumes and produces everything Austen-related. Therefore, these productions will become part of the discussion in section 2.2, about fan culture and its ramifications.

The emphasis here has been so far on adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice*, but the impulse given by Austenmania also benefited all Austen novels, some of which had been rarely adapted. Although every work had been turned into television mini-series before 1995, the number of productions after that year, and the diversity in their approach, also invites curiosity. As previously stated, the BBC version of *Pride and Prejudice* shared the year with a television film of *Persuasion*, an American actualization of *Emma* (*Clueless*) and Ang Lee's *Sense and Sensibility*, which was nominated for seven Academy Awards and won for Best Adapted Screenplay, written by Emma Thompson. The 1990s also saw two different productions of *Emma*, both in the category of transposition: one produced for the big screen, starring Gwyneth Paltrow and the other, for television, with Kate Beckinsale; the aforementioned *You've Got Mail* in 1997; and Patricia Rozema's *Mansfield Park* in 1999. In 2007, ITV celebrated Austen by commissioning three television films based on the least adapted novels: *Mansfield Park*, *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey*. It was just the second adaptation of *NA*. *Sense and Sensibility* became a mini-series for the BBC in 2008, a romantic comedy set in Los Angeles' Mexican community, called *From Prada to Nada*, and another Mormon adaptation, although with less religious allusions, *Scents and Sensibility*, both in 2011. Other films that reference Austen are the two biographical pictures, *Becoming Jane* (2007) and *Miss Austen Regrets* (2008), which will be discussed in Chapter 3.

## 2.2 FANS

As seen in Chapter 1, the name of Jane Austen has been associated with a very engaged readership, which responded to her novels in different levels, from aesthetic appreciation to personal devotion. To understand how she elicits such extremist reactions from readers, one has to keep in mind that the image of Jane Austen, created by the biographical accounts of family members by the end of the 19th Century, are still the main sources of information on her life. Even with the added documentation provided by the surviving letters, the question of who Jane Austen was continues to haunt academics and fans. For the past two centuries, the tension between different factions of Austen's admirers has made true the words written by Lionel Trilling: "It is possible to say of Jane Austen, as perhaps we can say of no other writer, that the opinions which are held of her work are almost as interesting, and almost as important to think about, as the work itself" (TRILLING, 1970, p. 148). As much as academic criticism has expanded the points of view from which Austen's work can be regarded, initial reactions from contemporary readers and reviewers – that Austen draws from real life, that she depicts the common occurrences on the life of a social sphere with such accuracy that their characters are almost like real people – still prevails. While Austen has been accused of not paying attention to the larger picture, to the economic and social developments that shook England in the turn of the 18th to the 19th Century, her novels are undoubtedly about England at that period. More than absolving her from this perceived slight,

> readers' responses to Austen have been shaped by and have shaped their responses to issues of public concern: war, for instance; or the rise of mass literacy in the nineteenth century and the appearance onto the cultural stage of new classes of readers and new ways of settling the boundaries between education, government, and popular culture." (Lynch, 2000, p. 14-15)

These responses have also been able to reach farther than the limits of the British Isles, to the point where her popularity became global and enduring, and it can only be because the themes to which Austen aders to – love, family, friendship, the struggle between reason and feeling – resonate beyond her time and her geographical location.

Initial readers' response also regarded Austen's work as one of high quality, not fit for an undiscerning reading public used to popular fiction. In *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, Henry Jenkyns proposes a definition of fan that is useful to understand contemporary readers' response to Austen, especially in the context of the 1995 Austenmania and its consequent industry. While Jenkyns is focusing on fan communities of television shows, his definitions also fit Austen readers because the relationship between fan and text is similar. Moreover, after 1995 the reach of Austen's works expands to more than novels and film adaptations and reaches new levels of readership and interaction. The consequence is the questioning of the fan's claim of authority over the text, but that implies that such authority lies elsewhere and is not to be questioned. Jenkyns' definition works well in the context of Literature because it contemplates the tension between academic and amateur reading of a canonical text: "the reader is supposed to serve as the more-or-less passive recipient of authorial meaning while any deviation from meanings clearly marked forth within the text is viewed negatively, as a failure to successfully understand what the author was trying to say" (JENKYNS, 1992, p. 25). Deirdre Lynch suggests that such approach from the part of academic scholarship "obscures the intimate relation between the history of the novel, Austen's chosen genre, and the histories of mass literacy and the commodity form" (LYNCH, 2000, p. 13) and, as seen in Chapter 1, raises questions over Austen's canonicity as if it could not be concurrent with her popularity. For Jenkyns, "the price of being taken seriously as an academic subject has been the acceptance of certain assumptions common to other forms of scholarship, assumptions that link the interests of the academy with the interests of producers rather than with the interests of the consumers" (JENKINS, 1992, p. 25). In the context of Austen studies, academy and producers are one and the same: they are responsible for the determination of acceptable and unacceptable readings and appropriations of her novels and her biography, as if the popular appeal of her stories and the intimate relationship between her readers and her image are irrelevant.

To contemplate the reception of Austen's work through the lens of fan studies, is a way to realign these marginalized readings of Austen with the more academically acceptable avenues of research: "Fan culture stands as an open challenge to the 'naturalness' and desirability of dominant cultural hierarchies, a refusal of authorial authority and a violation of intellectual property" (JENKYNS, 1992, p. 18). Austen fans stand in advantage because they do not need to worry about copyrights, as all her novels are in public domain, so the only violation they

can be accused of is that of the proper confines of criticism from which Austen can be contemplated. The fan who does not respect those boundaries is immediately labeled a Janeite, referring to the 19th Century critics whose attachment to Austen was almost religious. Today's Janeites are no longer bound to the strict position of consumer; they can also become producers of meaning:

> Fan interpretive practice differs from that fostered by the educational system and preferred by bourgeois culture not simply in its object choices or in the degree of its intensity, but often in the types of reading skills it employs, in the ways that fans approach texts. From the perspective of dominant taste, fans appear to be frighteningly out of control, undisciplined and unrepentant, rogue readers (Jenkyns, 1992, p. 18)

Despite belonging to the same elite who based the developing academic criticism, the early Janeites were accused of extrapolating the limits of proper admiration – their devotion is often compared to a cult – but it is also because of them that Austen's image is preserved and propagated. Early Janeites were the ones who kept the name of Jane Austen being talked about within literary circles, even if just for the criticism of their personal attachment. They were the ones who sought to preserve the letters, manuscripts, and any token available that the family did not care for. In the second chapter of *Everybody's Jane: Austen in the Popular Imagination*, Juliette Wells presents an overview of the life of Alberta H. Burke, an American Austen enthusiast whose collection fostered a wide range of items, from Cassandra Austen's letter to Fanny Knight after her sister's death in 1817, to newspaper clippings that were somewhat related to popular appropriations of Austen, such as radio plays and stage productions. In doing so, Wells reveals how the early Janeites, differently from their colleagues, who limited their perception of Austen to academic interest, were welcoming of these popular manifestations. The story of Alberta Burke also coincides with that of the Jane Austen Societies and the Jane Austen Memorial Trust, institutions that sought to preserve Jane Austen's life as well as her novels, and in their approach, they strike a balance between academic and popular interest. Meanwhile, Austen was also adopted by people who operate outside this context, and these are the fans that

> constitute a particularly active and vocal community of consumers whose activities direct attention onto this process of cultural appropriation. As such, they enjoy a contemporary status not unlike the members of the "pit" in 19th-century theatre who asserted their authority over the performance, not unlike readers of Dickens and other serial writers who wrote their own suggestions for possible plot developments, not unlike the fans of Sherlock Holmes who demanded the character's return even when the author sought to retire him. (Jenkyns, 1992, p. 27)

That such demonstrations of fandom were already present in the 19th Century, when Austen gained popular attention, is significant to show that this behavior is not restricted to a post-1995 public. According to Henry Jenkyns, the fandom, or the collective of fans of a certain object within a fan culture, is "a subculture that exists in the 'borderlands' between mass culture and everyday life and that constructs its own identity and artifacts from resources borrowed from already circulating texts. (JENKYNS, 1992, p. 3).

As seen in the previous section, much of contemporary Austen adaptations subscribe to the postmodern paradigms as proposed by Linda Hutcheon, in which any reclaim of the past is not reproduction, but critical reflection on the boundaries between history and fiction, and the approximation between what is deemed prestigious and what is popular. Henry Jenkins defines the fandom as a "social group struggling to define its own culture and to construct its own community" within this context of postmodernism by being "insistent on making meaning from materials others have characterized as trivial and worthless. (JENKYNS, 1992, p. 3). Also within the context of postmodernism, fandoms have found that the internet is "a vehicle for collective problem solving, public deliberation, and grassroots creativity" (Idem, 2008, p. 175); as well as a convergence gateway for all forms of text, regardless of the medium. On the internet, audio, video, and print texts can and are combined and reorganized, and shared, in a free and open space, with similar-minded people. The reading experience – as well as other forms of cultural consumerism – lose the individual quality for which they were known to give way to a collective, shared experience. The materials and circulating texts pertaining to the Austen fandom include, besides the novels, the film adaptations, their readings and appropriations. Derivative works based on Austen's novels and life are popular and are intertextual, as they appropriate not only the original text but also some or all derivative readings. Derivative, here, refers to works of fiction that more than allude to, or reference previous works of art; they departure from and are modeled by their sources

(BREUER, 1998, electronic information). To the examples of adaptation presented in the previous section, two more than can be added, as they illustrate the points which this section is trying to make about the changing role of the reader, and their increasing symbiosis with both text and author; and the role the internet plays in today's fan culture. Continuing with the classification provided by Geoffrey Wagner, both adaptations can be labeled as analogies.

The first is the mini-series *Lost In Austen* (2008), produced by ITV. It proposes the retelling of *Pride and Prejudice* with a twist, by having its protagonist, Amanda Price (Jemima Rooper) trade places with Elizabeth Bennet (Gemma Arterton) when the two meet in Amanda's bathroom. Amanda, who is obsessed with *Pride and Prejudice*, sees this as an opportunity to live out her dreams of a more slow-paced life where manners prevail. Amanda is discontent with her life, which consists of a menial job, a boyfriend who pays more attention to football matches on TV than to her, and a mother who is pressuring her to get married – apart from the inattentive boyfriend, Amanda's life is very much like Bridget Jones' life, and this realization will also be important to comprehend the layers of intertextuality in this series. Amanda claims to be obsessed with Mr. Darcy, and much of the premise of the series lies on her assertion that she re-reads *Pride and Prejudice* so often that she feels as if she lives in it. However, from the moment Amanda discovers Elizabeth in her bathroom and decides to trade places with her, Amanda is stuck in a struggle between living the life that she always wanted and being unable to comprehend or emulate the speech or the manners of that time. Amanda is representative of the readers and fans who "seemingly blur the boundaries between fact and fiction, speaking of characters as if they had an existence apart from their textual manifestations, entering into the realm of the fiction as if it were a tangible place they can inhabit and explore. (JENKYNS, 1992, p. 18). At the same time, the story is no longer *Pride and Prejudice* as we have known it for the past 200 years; it becomes Amanda's story and with Elizabeth's absence, she struggles between maintaining the status quo of the novel and trying to win over Mr. Darcy.

The time-space travelling aspect of the story is never fully explained, and we are left to wonder the reasons for Elizabeth to run away from her world, committing Amanda to hers. When they meet again in Amanda's world, Elizabeth seems much more adaptable to the future than Amanda is to the past she claimed to idolize. Her interference in the story leads to

different outcomes, such as Bingley (Tom Mison) falling in love with her and not Jane (Morven Christie), which leads the eldest Bennet to accept Mr. Collins' (Guy Henry) marriage proposal. Amanda's relationship with Mr. Darcy (Elliot Cowan) is as unpredictable as the original storyline, but mostly because Amanda is torn between introducing Darcy and Elizabeth so that balance is restored to their world, and committing to a relationship with him, which demands giving up his and her world. As much as Amanda claims to be familiar to the story, her reactions to Darcy are similar to Elizabeth's in the novel – she seems affected by his criticism even though, as an avid reader, she should know to expect this. This is the only storyline which keeps closer to the original, perhaps because it is the only one in which Amanda acts like Elizabeth, and not herself. Besides the initial similarities with *Bridget Jones' Diary* already pointed out, *Lost In Austen* also dialogues with its predecessor by elevating the 1995 BBC mini-series as primary predecessor: besides shared costumes, there is a very emblematic scene in which Amanda asks Darcy to enter a pond and come out of it with his white shirt wet – a nod to the iconic scene with Colin Firth and an acknowledgement of its influence; Amanda is faced with the realization of another dream, and her response is "I am having a bit of a strange postmodern moment here". In the end, *Lost in Austen* certainly raises, but does not adequately answers, the questions of readership and blurring of the boundaries between life and fiction. The script seems to focus on the emotional aspect of Amanda's decision without bothering to answer the more practical consequences of her choices. We may choose to believe that Amanda gave up reality for the emotional security she felt in fiction, but that does not really help the cause, as it suggests that Austen fans are idealistic, and that Austen's novels are mechanisms for escaping rather than coping with their reality.

A more recent example of fan engagement with *Pride and Prejudice* is the YouTube series *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, which first aired in April 2012. Austen's novel is modernized and presented to a new generation that already is inserted in fan culture and, therefore, expects the interactive nature that these narratives can provide. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* – in short, *LBD* – is told primarily from Lizzie's point of view, through a vlog (a video blog) posted on her channel on YouTube, where she addresses the audience directly, thus inviting interaction between her character and the viewers. Fans can also engage the characters through Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr: in the *LBD* universe, social media is a vital way of communication. The series re-imagines Elizabeth as a graduate student of Communications, who still lives with her parents because of her student loan debts. As an exercise for class, Lizzie (Ashley Clements) and her best friend Charlotte Lu (Julia Cho) create the videoblog, in which Lizzie discusses

her everyday life. Two more videoblogs were created, which serve as windows to the pieces of the story that would be usually told offscreen: in *Maria of the Lu*, Maria (Janice Lee), Charlotte's sister, gives a glimpse into the life of her sister after she leaves to work in Ricky Collins'(Maxwell Glick) producing company; and *The Lydia Bennet*, in which Lizzie's younger sister also produces videos to talk about her life. As Lizzie's vlog is filmed in her room, she is constantly interrupted by her two sisters, Jane (Laura Spencer) and Lydia (Mary Kate Wiles) – Mary (Briana Cuoco) is presented as a cousin, and appears first on Lydia's videos, and Kitty is, indeed, a cat. The only other adaptation to which we can compare *LBD* is *Pride and Prejudice: A Latter Days Comedy*, which Deborah Cartmell deems "a very poor quality adaptation, easily forgotten and unworthy of critical commentary", and the reason why, according to her, reviewers believe that *Pride and Prejudice* "cannot be adapted to a contemporary setting" (CARTMELL, 2010, p.10). In the 2003 film, discussed in the previous section, the alterations made to contextualize Austen's story in the 21st Century were informed by the moral codes of the Mormon faith, which are close to ideals and values of the 19th Century. However, by abiding to these limitations, the creativity to re-interpretate the text is constrained and gives way to readings that do not fit with that of general audiences outside that religious context. In *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, the producers decided on altering some of the more antiquated references to contemporary, relatable ones: as previously mentioned, Lizzie and her sisters still live at home because of student loan debts, Charlotte goes away with Collins not to marry him, but because he presents her with a professional opportunity that she cannot refuse. It approximates the characters' lives to the audiences', who are invested in the story and are compelled to participate, as the events can be followed on social media websites and platforms, where the characters interact with fans and with other characters in the story, widening the scope in which the story is told. One of the writers of the show, Kate Noble, remarks on this interactive quality:

> Obviously, the original story (super rich snobby guy falls for poor but smart everywoman and she SAYS NO, then, as they get to know each other better their first impressions of each other are challenged) holds up for modern audiences. The myriad of television and film adaptations attest to that. However, I think that with the LBD, the way the show is set up to deliberately break the 4th wall and involve the audience via Twitter and Tumblr[8], gets the fans invested as they never have before. Combine that with the fact that this is all unfolding in real time – i.e. a week in the show is a week in real life -- it feels like we are on this journey with Lizzie. It heightens the anticipation: you can't wait to see what

[8] Twitter and Facebook are social media websites, while Tumblr is a blogging platform that was widely adopted by fandoms for its simple structure that allows the uploading and sharing of images and texts.

> happens next, but you have to, because in our story, it's still in the process of happening. (Wendell, 2013, electronic information)

As the number of adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* presented here attests, Austen's most popular novel has been absorbed within a culture which dialogues with the text in several different forms, and not all passive. In *Convergence Culture*, Jenkyns brings the notion of fandom to a context in which the internet plays a significant role in the processes of appropriation, sharing and consumption of fan generated texts, but also destabilizes accepted reading practices in which the reader takes a passive role and does not engage creatively with the text. For Jenkyns, fandom is "an institution of theory and criticism, a semi structured space where competing interpretations and evaluations of common texts are proposed, debated, and negotiated and where readers speculate about the nature of the mass media and their own relationship to it" (JENKYNS, 1992, p. 88). The Jane Austen fandom has been established long before theoreticians like Jenkyns started contemplating fan practices in these terms, but the general concepts apply. I say general because Jenkyns' focus is on television series' fandoms, which have to deal with restraints of meaning – what is acceptable and non-acceptable for the holders of the rights, and consequently of copyright. Fan-produced content is published and shared on the internet under the assumption that, being a non-profitable activity, it does not violate the rights of the content owners. The idea of restraining fan expression through creative appropriation can only be accepted if we consider that there is an authoritative claim to the text, and that unauthorized readings have to be discredited. For Jenkyns, "To speak as a fan is to accept what has been labeled a subordinated position within the cultural hierarchy, to accept an identity constantly belittled or criticized by institutional authorities" (Idem, p. 23). With Jane Austen, the nature of the fandom differs from those presented in *Textual Poachers* because her work is in public domain; therefore, fan created content can be freely shared and even published for profit. The major products generated in the Austen fandom are either film adaptations, which resemble the structure within television fandoms of there being an authoritative claim to the readings, but with which the fans interact, nonetheless, and fan fiction in its advanced stage: derivative fiction.

## 2.3 Fiction

Only 33 years after Jane Austen's death, the first novel based on her works appeared. Her niece Catherine Hubback, Frank Austen's daughter, and a fellow novelist published in 1850 *The Younger Sister*, "with a dedication 'To the memory of her aunt, the late Jane Austen'. The first five chapters are based quite closely on the Austen fragment 'The Watsons', and it appears that Mrs. Hubback simply remembered the opening, from Cassandra's retelling, and completed it" (SUTHERLAND, 2002, p. xxvi). Outside the family, the first Austen-inspired novel was Sybil Brinton's *Old Friend and New Fancies: An Imaginary Sequel to the Novels of Jane Austen* in 1914, and it started a trend that is still very much present in a share of the publishing market, and that has been rising consistently in the last few years: derivative novels based on Jane Austen.

Rolf Breuer compiled a list that contains almost 400 derivative novels based on Austen's finished and unfinished works, as well as fictionalizations of her life, up to 2000. In the past 13 years, these numbers kept increasing, and their variety, expanding. In her overview of derivative works related to Austen's novels, Deirdre Lynch actually uses the terms "sequels" "to label those works which, in either prolonging the novels' action or re-narrating it from different perspectives, also transfer their characters into a different generic register – anything from soft-core pornography (…) to fantasy" (LYNCH, 2005, p. 160). Breuer proposes a classification of derivative texts which is closer to the terms used by fan fiction writers to classify their stories:

> *sequel* is the continuation of a literary work in the same genre (…). A sequel uses the same or some of the same characters of the original and continues the action of the original into the future; sometimes it views the same action from a different perspective. (…) A *completion* is the finishing off of a fragment. A *pastiche* is an imitation of the style of an author, without being a sequel to, or a completion of, any specific original. (…) the *counterfeit* (…) by which I mean the re-writing and transforming of a text by taking it out of its historical and aesthetic context and transferring it into the respective present, creating, as it were, the contemporary counterpart of a famous older work. Finally, a special case must be mentioned, a literary text in which an author appears, written in the style of this author. I call such texts *fictionalizations* (of the author's life). (1998, electronic information)

Considering that Austen only wrote six novels, the numbers are astonishing – how many variations of the same story can be made? Sheenagh Pugh believes that "The wish to find out 'what happened next' – or invent it if it didn't – is familiar to most of us from our childhood reading and it is responsible for a lot of fanfic" (PUGH, 2005, p. 47). As seen in the previous section, within participatory culture the roles of producer and consumer are, in many cases, the same. In that sense, the industry surrounding Austen derivatives becomes a case study for fan culture and behavior; but it also works differently from other fan communities. In the Austen fandom, fans are able to commercially explore their products, as there are no longer copyrights applied to Austen novels. It is the possibility of commercial exploration that differentiates derivative works from fan fiction. Evolving models of self-publication platforms also freed these writers from the need to look for an agent, or editor or publishing house. Internet-based production and distribution of e-books are also part of this phenomenon.

Derivative Austen-inspired novels usually belong to niches of popular fiction, and as such are not regarded as literary works. Imelda Whelehan remarks on the contradictory nature of this dismissal, especially because, as seen in Chapter 1, Austen aligned herself with popular fiction:

> Popular romantic fiction is assigned the position of a "debased" genre and most commonly spoken about in terms of the mass market romance, which nonetheless claims its inspiration from some canonical classics, including *Pamela*, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Jane Eyre*. In commercial terms it is a lucrative market, but critics regard its content as predictable, ideologically conservative, and undemanding of its reader. (Whelehan, 2007, p. 138)

Fan authors will explore spaces within the story which are not contemplated in other appropriations not because they contest or disagree with the resolution provided by the author, but because they feel free from restrains of authoritative meaning, and can answer whatever question is left any way they like. Sometimes it is exactly because the original resolution is satisfactory that fan authors feel the need to continue their relationship with the characters: "Even though we may feel the canonical end is 'right' artistically, if we liked the story we may still not be ready for it to end, for the characters and milieu that have become real to us to be folded up and put back in the puppeteer's box" (PUGH, 2005, p. 47). The predominance of

romantic re-telling and variation is caused, according to Juliette Wells, by the "tendency of everyday readers to concentrate exclusively on Austen's love plots and also sexed-up modern versions of Austen's novels, including screen adaptations" (WELLS, 2011, p. 177). Imelda Whelehan suggests that, instead of setting aside such texts because of their repetitive nature, we should try to comprehend the reasons that lead women to produce and consume these kinds of text repeatedly (WHELEHAN, 2007, p. 140).

For Sheenagh Pugh, "Fanfic happens in the gaps between canon, the unexplored or insufficiently explored territory. For that to happen, the gaps must be left, and the territory must exist (…) there must be somewhere to start from and something to build on (PUGH, 2005, p. 92). In the case of the Austen fandom, that is precisely the incentive to write *about* their favorite author. For Ellen Moody, the gaps in Jane Austen's biography allows readers to connect these gaps to Austen's novels, even if there is no factual evidence that it might have been true: "The myth has lasted because it is too useful; it has allowed and will continue to allow biographers to conjecture stories out of the silence, from the lack of evidence, or present a picture of her which the extant letters contradict" (MOODY, 2004, electronic information). Stephanie Barron uses the "lost years" when Jane Austen lived in Bath – and from which almost no letter survived – to cover the historical tracks in her series of books called The Jane Austen Mysteries. Since 1996, Barron has published eleven books in the series, all following the tropes of mystery novels, and using Jane Austen as the detective who has to solve every case.

In *The Lost Years of Jane Austen*, first published in 1984, Barbara Ker Wilson re-imagines Austen's life from an event in her life which is erased form the *Memoir*: the trial of Jane Austen's aunt Mrs. Leigh Perrot on the charge of shoplifting. Mrs. Leigh Perrot was absolved, but Wilson starts her story wondering what would happen if the verdict had been the opposite and Jane had to accompany her aunt to Australia. Several novels focus on the relationship between Jane Austen and various members of her family: Jill Pitkeathley wrote two novels, *Cassandra and Jane* (2008), about the two sisters, and *Dearest Cousin Jane: A Jane Austen Novel* (2010) in which the focus is Jane Austen's cousin and sister-in-law, Eliza de Feuillide. The young adult demographic is a prime target for authors who try to present Austen to a new generation of readers; in this vein we have Veronica Bennett's *Cassandra's Sister* (2007) and

Cora Harrison's *I Was Jane Austen's Best Friend* (2011) and *Jane Austen Stole My Boyfriend* (2011), in which the main character is another Jane Austen cousin, Jane Cooper. Author Syrie James explores avenues of possibility in *The Lost Memoirs of Jane Austen* (2007) and *The Missing Manuscript of Jane Austen* (2013). The variety of situations in which authors pose Jane Austen when they appropriate her as a character, shows that "fictional characters and universes can transcend both their original context and their creator" (PUGH, 2005, p. 222). But of those described here, not one seems to focus solely on a romantic relationship between Jane Austen and any of her suitors. This is a void that was filled by filmic appropriations of Austen, as will be discussed in Chapter 3.

Austen derivative novels became a self-sufficient market, especially after the unexpected commercial success of *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, by Seth Grahame-Smith in 2009, a re-telling of Austen's novels with the addition of undead enemies which the Bennet sisters, having been trained by ninjas, must kill. The success of Grahame-Smith's novel initiated a wave of supernatural Austen-based fiction, such as Amanda Grange's *Mr. Darcy, Vampyre* (2010) and Vera Nazarian's *Northanger Abbey and Angels and Dragons* (2010). Michael Thomas Ford seems to be the first one to incorporate supernatural elements in a fictionalization of Jane Austen, as well as establishing an intertextual relationship with questions of authorship and the discussion about elite and mass culture. In 2009, he released the first volume of a trilogy that re-imagines Jane Austen's life as a vampire living in the present day. Entitled *Jane Bites Back*, Ford's vision for Austen goes beyond the shock of crossing genres such as romance and paranormal: Jane – now calling herself Jane Fairfax, like the character from *Emma*, is the owner of a bookstore in upstate New York. She has been trying to publish a manuscript – which she finished after her "death" – for 116 years but has been rejected every time. When she is finally published, she finds herself thrown in a world completely different from that which she experienced with her other novels: her editor expects her to engage with readers and attend events such as a convention for writers of romance novels. Not only is she not used to it, but her status as a vampire makes it difficult for her to get close to other people for fear of losing them if they learn the truth. To make matters worse, the vampire who turned her reappears and it turns out to be Lord Byron. An emblematic moment comes when Jane is accused of having plagiarized someone else's life in her successful "new" novel and – knowing that she is the basis for the story – she defends

herself by saying: “It’s *fiction*. All fiction is based on some kind of truth. My book is not literally about my friend. It is *inspired* by her” (FORD, 2009, p. 187).

Austenmania did not become restricted to English speaking countries, although its main products are originated there. For the past three years, there has been an increase in commercialization of Austen products in Brazil, with the belated release of the DVDs of film and television adaptations; new translations or re-editions of the novels in Portuguese from several different publishing companies and, in a minor scale, some derivative works such as the aforementioned *Pride & Prejudice & Zombies* (*Orgulho e Preconceito e Zumbis*), the young adult novel *I Was Jane Austen’s Best Friend* (*Eu Fui a Melhor Amiga de Jane Austen*), by Cora Harrison and *Jane Bites Back*, by Michael Thomas Ford – released in Portuguese as *Jane Austen, A Vampira*.

Like in *Jane Bites Back*, all Austen fandom production is inspired, if not based on, Jane Austen and her novels. This chapter tried to summarize the evolution of the filmic adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* as illustrative of Adaptation Studies as a whole. The engagement between readers and texts, and the creative consequences of this relationship were discussed within the notions of participatory and fan culture. Henry Jenkins’ *Textual Poachers* goes a long way in helping clarify that fan culture is “a complex, multidimensional phenomenon, inviting many forms of participation and levels of engagement” (JENKYNS, 1992, p. 2). The “scene in the lake” in the 1995 BBC adaptation became the mark not only of that production but of almost all adaptations of all Austen novels that came after: at least one scene in which the main male character is shown all wet – usually in the rain – as a callback to the image of Colin Firth as Darcy, in a wet white shirt. In 2008, YouTube user DreamyViper posted a video in which edited scenes from several Austen adaptations and period dramas are shown to the sound of Geri Halliwell’s version of “It’s Raining Men”. This very entertaining video is also emblematic of the fan culture that intensified with the advent of commercial internet in the 1990s and the form with which Austen was embraced by those in it.

The culmination of all this tradition – of *Pride and Prejudice* filmic adaptations, of fan-produced fiction, and of fiction centering on Jane Austen's life instead of her work – can be found in the film *Becoming Jane* (dir. Julian Jarrold, 2007), which will be the focus of Chapter 3. The story of the film centers on a brief period in Jane Austen's life, when she met an Irish Law student, and established a brief relationship over the course of a few weeks. As a production backed by a well-known studio, Miramax, *Becoming Jane* reaches a wider, general public that may not be familiar with the biography of Jane Austen. With the popularity of *Pride and Prejudice* even among people who are not familiar with the rest of Austen's work, *Becoming Jane* uses the relationship between Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy in *PP* as model to that of Jane Austen and Tom Lefroy. Although, as a biographical film, it is bound to the documented facts about Jane Austen, *Becoming Jane* takes advantage of the gaps in the biography and, in a process similar to those derivative works based on her life and novels, creating a fictional narrative about her development as a writer. The following pages will pay attention to the appropriation of Jane Austen's image for use in a fictional context, and the way such derivative works end up merging the author's image with that of her characters, especially Elizabeth Bennet, which are attested by the visual connection established by *Becoming Jane* with the last adaptation of *PP*, *Pride & Prejudice* (dir. Joe Wright, 2005).

# 3 BECOMING JANE AUSTEN

> *Seldom, very seldom, does complete truth belong to any human disclosure; seldom can it happen that something is not a little disguised, or a little mistaken.*
>
> Jane Austen, ***Emma***

In the previous chapters I have tried to present an overview of the evolving image of Jane Austen throughout the last 150 years, from the first biographies written by family members to today's icon of popular culture, and how the changes in that image can be attributed to the appropriation that her reading public has made of her and her novels. The gaps in Jane Austen's life, as attested by incomplete documents, lost and destroyed letters and the reticence of family members to disclose more in-depth information on the author by the time her identity was made public, opens the door to speculation not only from scholars, but also from readers. The attempts at reconstructing those gaps vary, from researched documentaries and biographies that cling to the few surviving letters written by Jane Austen to the speculative fiction written by fans who would like to give Austen the same fate as her characters', even if only in fiction:

> Austen fans in real life too seem to want Austen to guide them toward love. And this might be why, as *Becoming Jane* indicates, we have to imagine Austen as Elizabeth Bennet and grant her a Darcy of her own—even if in the end we take him away again. We can't bear to think that her wisdom was not based on experience. (Lynch, 2007, electronic information).

The idea that there must be a clear division between what is "fact" and what is "fiction" reinforces the idea proposed by the Janeites of the late 19th Century that Austen is paragon of high culture, and that the common reader is prompt to make a wrong reading of the author's work. This implies that only academic-trained readers will be able to determine what is acceptable in Austen studies. On the other hand, if the general reader's claim to do any kind of speculation is accepted, this freedom may open other avenues of investigation that can be achieved through the production of popular fiction which incorporates the elements of this investigation.

## 3.1 BECOMING FICTION IN FILM

Roger Sales reinforces the importance of these non-academic reading practices since "readers construct an idea of the author, and therefore of her works and their historical period, from the materials that are readily available within a particular culture at a particular time" (SALES, 1996, p. 29). The use of Jane Austen as a character in derivative fiction – be it a book or a film – is a safe way to speculate on those aspects of her life and work that even critics seem to not be able to touch for fear of misreading anything. Sales goes on, saying that "It would be very arrogant indeed to assume that all those who teach or study Austen are necessarily exempt from, rather than implicated in, this cultural process" (Idem, p. 29), as they are readers of Austen as well, and are not completely isolated from the effects of her popularity in popular culture. For those still apprehensive of the results of such exercise, instances in which Jane Austen is presented as a character can also provide "a lively, economical way of not only raising but actually embodying such postmodern concerns as representation, the (im)possibility of historical knowledge, the share of the author in the genesis of a text, and intertextuality" (FRANSSEN & HOENSELAARS 1999, p. 11). Nothing embodies the idea of intertextuality better than a filmic appropriation of Jane Austen which dialogues not only with the facts of her life, but also with her novels and previous filmic adaptations, as is the case of *Becoming Jane*.

Films in which the main character is a fictionalization of a historical author can be seen as successors to the *vie romancée*, novels that function as fictional biographies, a subgenre of

historical fiction that was much in vogue in the 19th and 20th Centuries. As much as they "usually attempt to recreate as much of the historical setting as possible" (FRANSSEN & HOENSELAARS 1999, p. 16), the so-called biographical pictures (or biopics) are still works of fiction, and their claim to the truth is in no way similar to those of more scholarly biographies. What they do, in fact, is to appropriate elements and events of a historical person and try to recreate those events in a filmic narrative that can be understood by both the audience that is familiar with the life of the author and that which is not. In doing that, the biopic is not different than a regular filmic adaptation of novels, and therefore cannot be judged by the aspects that it gets wrong, or changes or omits – fidelity is not the objective of the biopic, otherwise it would be a documentary – and even those, are, sometimes, biased or speculative. That said, we can apply to biopics the same criteria used to classify and analyze other kinds of adaptation: in the case of the biopic, the life of the author may be the primary source-text, but it is by no means the only one: the author's body of work, as well as trends criticism can also be used to achieve the adapter's intended result.

The biopic can also be viewed in light of Linda Hutcheon's concept of historiographic metafiction, as it is an attempt at reconstructing historical events while at the same time undercutting the idea of one single historical referent, subverting it by pointing to several referents that come from historical narratives as well as fictional narratives. As Hutcheon states, "History's referents are presumed to be real; fiction's are not" (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 119), thus the burden of proof lies with those who wish to see a work of fiction as more than it proposes to be. Some scholars blamed the producers for "sensationalizing" Jane Austen's life for the film, and took umbrage especially with the idea – the same idea defended by Spence in his biography – that "an early experience of being loved and left was the true source of her artistry", as put by Deirdre Lynch in her article "See Jane Elope" (LYNCH, 2007, electronic information). She argues that, contrary to what Spence does in his biography, the producers of *Becoming Jane* do not disclose the fictional aspects of their film:

> In the book, Spence does identify Tom Lefroy as the love of Austen's life and her relationship with him as the origin of her genius. But he never suggests that there was an aborted elopement (much less subsequent reading sessions with any of Lefroy's children). And [Spence] is careful, as the filmmakers are not, to clarify that in speculating about Austen's romantic experience he is reading between the lines of the family records and of the three rather opaque Austen letters that are his principal sources." (Idem, 2007, electronic information).

The promotional material of the film seems to contradict this. In the back cover of the North-American DVD release, *Becoming Jane* is described as "an enchanting and *imaginative* film" (emphasis mine). Another thing Lynch seems to disregard is the notion that while the general public may not be acquainted with every aspect of Jane Austen's biography, they are mostly aware of the characteristics of a biographical picture and, therefore, are attentive to the differences between a fictional and a historically accurate account of a person's life. It is not as if *Becoming Jane* is the first film to present the life of an author in light of the fiction they wrote. The same studio that produced *Becoming Jane* also produced the Academy Award winning *Shakespeare In Love* in 1998. The film, directed by John Madden, was written by playwright Tom Stoppard, and reimagines William Shakespeare's London theater days as a romantic comedy that plays with the plots of some of the Bard's famous plays – with *Romeo and Juliet* front and center – but with a less tragic ending. In Madden's film, young Will Shakespeare (Joseph Fiennes) finds himself involved with aristocratic Lady Viola de Lesseps (Gwyneth Paltrow), and their forbidden romance is what inspires Shakespeare's writings.

In *Shakespeare In Love*, to the intertextuality between the film's story, Shakespeare's work and the gaps in the author's biography is added "the literary topos of the romantic poet in love" (FOKKEMA 1999, p. 47), very common in literary works featuring authors as character. Fokkema also notes that most authors portrayed as characters in novels are male, and that the few female authors that are accounted for are shown simply as "figureheads, not portrayed for their writing" (Idem, 1999, p. 49). The cinematic production of biopics in the 2000's shows that the same is not true when it comes to films: in Michael Cunningham's *The Hours* (2002), Virginia Woolf becomes a character in one of the three parallel stories, while the other two stories portray a woman who reads Woolf's work, and a woman whose live mirrors that of one of Woolf's characters, Mrs. Dalloway. In all three stories, the questions of writing and representation are present, as each woman represents a facet of the reading process: writer, reader, character. To Fokkema, it is the presence of these properties, writing and representation, that characterize a work as part of the genre of author as character. In light of this, and of so many other films produced in the last 15 years that focus on women writers, why was *Becoming Jane* criticized for not faithfully portraying Jane Austen's life? It is billed as a romantic comedy – same as *Shakespeare in Love*, not a documentary; and shares with Madden's film the characteristics of a work of historiographic metafiction and of author as character.

In the past fifteen years, two films other than *Becoming Jane* have portrayed an image of Austen that is merged with that of her characters. The first was Patricia Rozema's *Mansfield Park* (1999), which is known mainly for bringing forth social and economic issues that are buried in the novel, in light of the more contemporary readings of Post-Colonial Studies. It also presents an interesting twist in the characterization of Fanny Price, by attributing to her the characteristics, narrative voice and production of Austen, her creator. Even in her discussion of slavery, "Rozema draws on Austen's well-known attachment to fervent and eminent abolitionist writers – such as Samuel Johnson and William Cowper (…) and Thomas Clarkson, an abolitionist Austen described herself as in love with" (JOHNSON, 2010a, p. 4); she does so by highlighting Sir Thomas Bertram's dealings in Antigua in a manner that is more explicit than what Austen does in the novel. Fanny Price is perhaps the controversial main character in all Austen's novels: "Restraint and piety are Fanny's main virtues, hard ones for us to warm to," according to Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield (TROOST, 2001, p. 191). Rozema's Fanny (interpreted by Frances O'Connor) is more energetic, assertive and presented as a writer whose work resembles (and in fact *is*) Austen's more satirical stories from the Juvenilia. She goes "from a silent, emotional sufferer to an active figure who can create her own success" (Idem, p. 189): this newfound agency can be observed in the inserted episode of Fanny's acceptance of Henry Crawford's (Alessandro Nivola) proposal. In the novel, such a possibility is implied only when Fanny accepts the possibility that her cousin Edmund, with whom she is in love, will certainly marry Crawford's sister, Mary. In the film, Crawford follows Fanny to Portsmouth, where she is staying with her very poor family, in an attempt by her uncle and benefactor Sir Thomas, to humble her and convince Fanny of the perils of marrying for love – like her parents did –, and not for the security (and money) that Crawford can afford her:

> A residence of eight or nine years in the abode of wealth and plenty had a little disordered her powers of comparing and judging. Her Father's house would, in all probability, teach her the value of a good income; and he trusted that she would be the wiser and happier woman, all her life, for the experiment he had devised (MP, p. 250)

There, he reinforces his proposal of marriage and uses money and influence to improve her parents' situation by relocating the extended family to a more suitable house. Confronted by the contrasting standards of living between Mansfield and Portsmouth, Fanny decides to accept Crawford's proposal, only to withdraw it the next morning, in the same manner that in

1802 Jane Austen accepted and rejected, in a short period of time, Harris Bigg-Wither's marriage proposal. Reinforcing the idea that the film's Fanny is, like Austen, a writer, Troost and Greenfield speculate that "[O]ne can imagine Austen briefly capitulating, going for socially conventional success one evening but, a few hours later, throwing over social and financial security for the life of literary art" (TROOST & GREENFIELD, 2001, p. 190). Having been released in 1999, Rozema's *Mansfield Park* is the first film to present Austen as a character, even if in a roundabout way.

After the release of *Becoming Jane* in 2007, the BBC commissioned a television film that would look at the author in her maturity. Released in 2008, *Miss Austen Regrets* also departs from documented events in Jane Austen's life to investigate the author's reconciliation of her personal and professional choices but, like in *Becoming Jane*, Austen's novels are also used to frame the events, as it begins immediately with Jane's (Olivia Williams) hurried acceptance of Harris Bigg-Wither's (Samuel Roukin) marriage proposal. The scene fades into the title and it proceeds to a shot of Manydown (the Biggs' estate) in the early hours of the morning, in the rain. A carriage awaits the Austen sisters, who flee the house after Jane rescinds her acceptance after thinking about it all night. The immediate connection here is with *Persuasion*: both Jane Austen and Anne Elliot are 27 years old in the beginning of their stories. While Anne being persuaded by Lady Russell to not marry Frederick Wentworth happened seven years prior to the beginning of the novel, in the film as Jane is congratulated by the Bigg sisters, on her engagement to their brother, it is her sister Cassandra (Greta Scacchi) who asks her: "Jane… Are you sure?". As Jane sees the house being left behind through the rain-soaked window of the carriage, Jane asks herself, in a voice-over: "Tell me I have done the right thing. Tell me I was right to change my mind. Dear God, let me never regret this day" – an echo of Anne's internal turmoil after learning of Wentworth's return: "More than seven years were gone since this little history of sorrowful interest had reached its close (…) She had been forced into prudence in her youth, she learned romance as she grew older: the natural sequel of an unnatural beginning" (*P*, p. 20-21) – passages which Jane repeats to Cassandra, as she reads from the manuscript of *Persuasion* later on in the film. As she goes visit her brother Edward, on the request of her niece Fanny, who is being suited by a gentleman and seeks her aunt's help. A letter from that period written by Jane to Fanny warns about attachments and prudence in marrying, and alludes to personal experience as basis for this advice:

> my dear Fanny, having written so much on one side of the question, I shall turn round & entreat you not to commit yourself farther, & not to think of accepting him unless you really do like him. Anything is to be preferred or endured rather than marrying without Affection; and if his deficiencies of Manner &c &c strike you more than all his good qualities, if you continue to think strongly of them, give him up at once.—Things are now in such a state, that you must resolve upon one or the other, either to allow him to go on as he has done, or whenever you are together behave with a coldness which may convince him that he has been deceiving himself.—I have no doubt of his suffering a good deal for a time, a great deal, when he feels that he must give you up;—but it is no creed of mine, as you must be well aware, that such sort of Disappointments kill anybody. (Letter 109, 1814, p. 280-281)

Jane reflects on the choices she made in her life, and to what way she is content with their consequences. The reappearance of an old friend also brings back the memories of broken attachments and unfulfilled promises. At first *Miss Austen Regrets* may seem a response to *Becoming Jane*, in the sense that it ignores completely the Lefroy affair and tries to focus on Jane's choices regarding her career, but the elements of *Persuasion* – mainly its nostalgic and yearning atmosphere – make it another example in which Austen's life is made to fit one of her novels.

Instead of focusing on the details that the producers get wrong, audiences regard biopics such as *Shakespeare In Love* and *Becoming Jane* as derivative works of fiction, in which questions of fidelity to documented facts and/or academic interpretations might not apply. In fact, Linda Hutcheon says that "What historiographic metafiction explicitly does (…) is to cast doubt on the very possibility of *any* firm 'guarantee of meaning'" (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 55). Their narratives are set in an alternate universe in which –why not? – William Shakespeare fell in love with Lady Viola, and Jane and Tom almost ran away together.

## 3.2 BECOMING *BECOMING JANE*

In the biography *Becoming Jane Austen*, Jon Spence states that the picture of the relationship between Jane and Lefroy that he paints is speculative, based on *his* reading of the facts and documents available. Central to his argument is the idea that the relationship with Lefroy was

the catalyst for the writing of *First Impressions*, but Spence tries to enforce this by claiming that all of Austen's work up to that point – essentially, the Juvenilia – was somehow connected to the people in Jane Austen's life. He claims, for example, that "Love and Freindship" was young Jane's attempt at understanding the complicated relationship between her cousin Eliza de Feuillide, to whom the story is dedicated, and her brother Henry. But Henry himself said, in his Biographical Notice, that his sister drew from life, but not from specific people or situations. Even so, it is not difficult to think that Eliza's presence at Steventon might have impressed and inspired Austen in her first attempts at fiction. Her cousin from the paternal side had an interesting and exotic life: she was born in India, and later married to a French count, a situation which was made even more dramatic when she had to leave France for England on account of the Revolution. Her decade long flirtation with Henry Austen resulted, finally, in marriage after she became a widow. With Henry being Jane Austen's favorite brother, she would be very close to Eliza as well. This relationship is shown in the film from the start, by presenting Eliza as a permanent resident as Steventon, and almost another sister to both Jane and Cassandra. There is a brief allusion to her marital status early on, when on first meeting with Lady Gresham, she reveals that her husband had been killed in France. This information is important because her relationship with Henry is developed on the background of Jane and Tom's story.

Even if Eliza was, at one point, a source for Austen to write her stories, by the time she wrote *First Impressions* her writing experience already allowed for a decrease in dependence to other texts: her pastiches gave way to original stories, or they were better developed – such as in "Catherine", later *Northanger Abbey* – to not look like a simple copy of other works with just a few change in names. If she used parts, or all, of her experience from late 1795 to mid-1796, and if that experience included Tom Lefroy – to base *First Impressions* on, we will never know because there is no manuscript and no correspondence that can help shed light on this subject. So, as much as Jon Spence tries in his book to "marshal the evidence that relationship was serious and more enduring than the brief flirtation that previous biographers had assumed" (SPENCE, 2007, p. ix), evidence he displays in his text is circumstantial at best. Other scholars and biographers who had access to the same set of documents make a different reading of the same letters that Spence uses as evidence for his reading; some even dismiss outright the idea that Lefroy was the love of Jane Austen's life. In Letter 11, from 1798, where Jane Austen relates to her sister the visit from Mrs. Lefroy in which she learns about Lefroy going back to Ireland, Spence sees the signs of a young woman still recovering

from the perceived betrayal from a loved one, while critic Paula Byrne reads it as Jane Austen being eager to hear news about her friend's nephew but being too proud to ask (BYRNE, 2013, p. 176).

Thankfully, the Jane and Tom we meet in *Becoming Jane* are not the same Jane Austen and Tom Lefroy that met in Hampshire over 200 years ago. Their names and circumstances were appropriated and re-contextualized in order to tell a fictional story, thus freeing itself from the restrictions of historical accuracy, although not as far as proposing an alternative ending. As we have seen in previous chapters, the presence of Austen's fiction in any re-telling of her life is a consequence of these silences in her biography caused either intentionally or unintentionally by Cassandra Austen, when she chose which of her sister's letters to dispose of, and which were harmless enough to be distributed within the family, as keepsakes. Kathryn Sutherland affirms that these gaps are welcomed, because they give insight into the creative process of the author: "To carry conviction, the written life of a writer needs to expose a gap and then have the writing fill it. By this, the fiction becomes the conduit between outside and inside, telling something about the nature of artistic creation" (SUTHERLAND, 2005, p. 88). The absence of original manuscripts, and the periods of silence in Austen's correspondence fit well in this concept, and it is through fictional derivative works that Austen's novels find a way to fill in those gaps. In the case of *Becoming Jane*, the presence of Jon Spence as a consultant to the production might give the impression that they were aiming at a more historically factual account of events, but as commented here, not even among Jane Austen's biographers one can find an absolute truth about her life. Grounding the construction of the film to documented information available may give a sense of verisimilitude to the relationship between Jane Austen and Tom Lefroy, but ultimately their story, as presented in the film, is purely fiction.

As previously discussed, *Becoming Jane* would not constitute an example of use of author as character if it centered its story only on Jane Austen's personal relationships. But because it is also a film about the genesis of a writer, it is interesting to notice the instances in which these two facets intersect. This is established early on in the film, in the opening credits: images of Hampshire – where Jane Austen was from and where the film was shot – alternate with images of pen & paper, and of a woman writing, trying to compose a story while the rest of the household sleeps. In an analysis of this opening sequence, Richard Burt highlights some of the cinematography choices in terms of framing and its possible meaning in this context:

"the window and door frames in relation to women reading and writing, sometimes through superimposition of text on image; the open book as figure of female openness to sexual experience" (BURT, 2008, p. 58). The writing and piano playing increase in intensity as the woman's ideas start to pour, to the point that the early morning silence on the house is broken by a sudden attack on the piano. Burt's analysis continues by saying the "the camera's use of extreme shallow focus and Jane's reflection obscured or distorted—are developed artfully in later shots of the film (…) into an account of how Jane became Jane Austen" (BURT, 2008, p. 58), and that the story to be presented will try to articulate and defend the idea that "Austen's fame as a writer rested precisely, and rather precariously, on her myopia, the self-protectively small aperture of her vision, and a tone deafness, all of which place her, as a writer and reader, outside maternity and heteronormativity" (Idem, pp. 58-59). The burst of music playing wakes up everyone who is in the house – Jane's parents, her sister Cassandra and her cousin Eliza, all except her brother George. The presence, in the film, of the Austens' second son is surprising, especially in view of the fact that he was deleted from family history in Austen Leigh's *Memoir;* the third son, Edward, is presented as the second. Not only is George ignored, but with this overview we lose the opportunity to learn, from family sources about the nature of his sickness. In this opening sequence, George is used as comic relief – he is presented as deaf, therefore immune to Jane's piano playing, but throughout the film he also functions as a support for Jane, once Cassandra is away.

The presence of these relatives and relations in the Austen household on this first scene may seem odd, but it helps establish the context through which the film will try to converge several different narrative threads so that they can be told concurrently. As seen in Chapter 1, the duration of Tom Lefroy and Jane Austen's acquaintance was about four weeks, in the Christmas season of 1795. In the film, not only is this time frame stretched, but there are also other adaptations and adjustments to the recorded chronology that we have access to. For one, no definite date is given for when the film is set, we infer that it is 1795 because that was the year Jane Austen and Tom Lefroy met during Christmas season, and because *First Impressions* was written some months later, in 1796. However, the film makes no reference to the holiday, nor the weather is compatible to that of winter months in England. This can be explained by the fact that it would not be viable to film entirely during winter; and also that much of the scenes where Jane and Tom are left alone to talk are set in the woods between Steventon and Ashe – a place which snow would make it impossible for them to go to. In addition to the aforementioned George, Cassandra's fiancé is also at the house when Jane

wakes everyone up with her piano playing. Later in the film, Jane refers to Fowle as Robert, although the records show that his name was Tom. The change was probably made to avoid confusing him with Lefroy when both sisters refer to their respective love interests by their first name. In fact, the chronology of Cassandra and Fowle's engagement is also changed in order to fit the film's narrative: records indicate that they had been engaged since 1792, and that Cassandra is not at home when Jane meets Tom because she was staying with Fowle's family before he set sail to the West Indies. There is no documentation that Cassandra ever met Lefroy – in fact, if it weren't for her absence at Steventon, Austen would never have written those two letters in which Lefroy first appears. In the film, not only do Cassandra and Tom meet, but they do so when the Austens are celebrating her engagement to Fowle, at Steventon.

This is not, however, Tom's first appearance in the film. He first appears fighting in what probably is an underground boxing ring in London. By doing so, the idea of the character's virility is established early in the film, and in a much more direct way than in other adaptations. This sequence also differs from the previous films for exposing costumes and behaviors that are never mentioned in Austen's works, or even implied. In this case, after Lefroy's victory in the boxing ring, he celebrates it with his friends and a woman who we are led to believe is a prostitute – later in the film, after his uncle's permission to marry Jane is denied, Tom is again shown in an environment such as this, but refuses the advances of a woman because, at this point, his feelings for Jane prevent him from doing so. The friends that are shown at the beginning of the film are no other than Henry Austen and John Warren, Jane's brother and friend, respectively. We know from the letters that Lefroy met John Warren: as seen in Chapter 1, Jane Austen was teased by friends on the possibility that Warren was interested in her, which she dismisses completely, using the fact that he gave her a drawing of Lefroy after the Manydown ball as proof. This becomes relevant when, in the film, it is revealed that it was Warren, and not Lady Gresham or Mr. Wisley, who sent a letter to Judge Langlois disclosing the attachment between Jane and Tom. There is, however, no indication that they had met prior to his visit to Hampshire, or that he met Henry at any point. In Austen's letters about Lefroy, she only mentions her brother James' presence at home during that season.

Differently from what we know from the letters, in *Becoming Jane* Tom's first appearance is not at a ball, but in Steventon, where the Austens are celebrating Cassandra and Fowle's

engagement. Lefroy arrives late, causing a bad first impression, much like Darcy when he arrives at the Assembly Ball. When Lefroy enters the room, Jane is reading a text composed in honor of her sister. He looks bored and his reaction affects Jane, but she is able to finish the reading and the family congratulates her. Warren compliments Jane's text, but Lefroy criticizes the content as being juvenile and not metropolitan. Like Elizabeth at the Assembly Ball, Jane overhears the unflattering comment which causes her impression of Tom to be even worse. From what we learn in the letters, there is no indication that Lefroy ever read or heard any of Austen's work, but in the context of this film such opposition is necessary so that the protagonists can step, for the moment, into their templates of Elizabeth and Darcy. Tom's comment about Jane's writing is also part of his characterization as an urban citizen, not interested in life in the country, and that is what motivates his uncle, Benjamin Langlois to send him to Hampshire as a form of punishment – when in reality he went to visit the Lefroys at Ashe by his own accord, before the beginning of his studies. Austen's description of Lefroy as gentlemanlike, while others describe him as being quiet and shy, is also in conflict with this characterization – the description of the "real" Lefroy is closer to how Darcy is described in the novel, when he finally admits that what others perceive in him as pride, is simply the fact that he is not comfortable around strangers.

The question of authorship, so central to works that feature an author as character, is retrieved in the interaction between Jane and Tom, who share an interest in Literature. Their conversations consist of opposing views on Literature, many of which reflect some of the criticism Austen's fiction received in its time, especially those who complained about the limitations of "domestic" themes and settings in women's fiction as non-realistic. For Jane "a novel must show how the world truly is, how the characters genuinely think, how events actually occur. A novel should, somehow, reveal the true source of our actions" (*Becoming Jane*). She feels as if it is not necessary, as Tom argues, to acquire experience and knowledge of the world to write as well as a man. Tom's views on male superiority in writing serve as a counterpoint for Jane's defense of women's fiction, and not an indication of his (or the producers') true opinion on Literature. In fact, his position in all of their discussions is aligned with that of 18th/19th Century critics, and their belief that in fiction "vice leads to difficulty, virtue to reward, bad characters have a bad end", in a passage that is voiced by Tom (*Becoming Jane*). The mutual interest in books is also representative of the sexual awakening of Jane, as pointed by Richard Burt in his analysis of the first scene. Commenting on a book

that Jane recommended, Tom teases her by pointing to all sexual references in it, as it was a book on Natural History; he then recommends that Jane read Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones.* The specific mention to Fielding may be because, in her letters to Cassandra, Austen makes a reference to *Tom Jones* when talking about Lefroy's jacket – an indication that the subject had come up and was of mutual interest, but also that she had already read the book before meeting Lefroy, as she states this is a way that implies that Cassandra knew that Jane had read it. In the film, Jane is conflicted during this reading, and keeps putting the book away and almost immediately returning to it, almost like her attraction to Tom appeals and repulses her at the same time. As Jane reads the book, her reading in voice over mashes up with Tom's voicing over of the same passages, as if in Jane's head, those words are from Tom, and not Fielding.

Jon Spence's biography is not the first to highlight the attachment between Jane Austen and Tom Lefroy, but the suggestion that the visit to Cork Street, described in Chapter One, consists in a record further meeting between Jane Austen and Lefroy had not been made till then. *Becoming Jane* incorporates this episode into its story: after acknowledging their feelings, Jane and Tom plan on how to convince his uncle to accept Jane as Tom's bride, despite her lack of money. With the help of Henry and Eliza, they concoct a plan to visit Cassandra – away visiting their brother Edward in Kent. The long journey would force them to make a stop in London, and the friendship with Tom could render them an invitation to stay at Judge Langlois' house. The real reason for the visit, however, would be to present Jane to the judge, and hope that he could be persuaded to give his consent. At this point, the film steps away from the *Pride & Prejudice* structure, and models the incident according to another Austen novel: *Northanger Abbey*. In this context, Benjamin Langlois is no equivalent to Lady Catherine de Bourgh, especially because his influence on the outcome of the relationship was heavier than Lady Catherine's leverage against her nephew. Here, the judge is better compared to General Tilney from *Northanger Abbey*, who invites poor Catherine Morland to his house under the impression that she is an heiress, only to send her away in a brutal manner after finding out the truth, to the consternation of his son, Henry, who is in love with Catherine. The presence of Eliza in the party, alongside Jane, blinds Langlois to his nephew's true intentions, as he imagines Tom is trying to marry a rich widow, and not a poor woman intent on writing for a living. As Tom finally gains the courage to ask his uncle for the permission to marry Jane, Langlois receives a letter from Steventon that spoils these plans.

Jane and Tom believe the letter was sent by Mr. Wisley or Lady Gresham, as they were the only ones with something to gain from their separation. The Austens and Eliza leave London immediately, as Jane is humiliated by the judge, who accuses Tom of using Eliza as obfuscation when his true intention is really to marry a husband-hunter.

Before the confrontation with the judge, however, another scene is constructed around pure fiction, in that the film promotes a meeting between Austen and Ann Radcliffe, author of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, which Austen parodies in *Northanger Abbey*. Still unaware of what the judge's reaction to their intent to marry might be, Tom takes Jane to visit Mrs. Radcliffe, the experienced writer whom Jane admires. Expecting to receive advice on her writing, what Jane hears from Mrs. Radcliffe is a warning about choosing carefully whether or not she can live by her pen: "To have a wife who has a mind is considered not quite proper. To have a wife with a literary reputation is nothing short of scandalous" (*Becoming Jane*). Jane realizes that she might have to sacrifice something – even Tom – in order to achieve her goal. Later, when Tom convinces Jane to elope as a last resort for them to be together, it is perhaps the memory of this advice that makes Jane change her mind and go back home – for her novels, without Tom.

It was not my intention to recount the entire film in a chronological order, merely to point out some of the alterations needed in order to condense several different episodes in the life of Jane Austen and her family, some of which happened with years of difference, into a coherent narrative that could not only portray as carefully as permitted the relationship between Tom Lefroy and Jane Austen, but also illustrate and contextualize the genesis of a writer in a time when such activity was seen as unsuitable to women of Jane Austen's social stand. Although some of the scenes analyzed here present a similarity to others in *Pride and Prejudice*, both the novel and the 2005 adaptation, the next section will look further into the relations that can be made between both films, in terms of both structure and visual, and how *Becoming Jane* distances itself from the focus on Jane and Tom's relationship as a variation of Elizabeth and Darcy, thus signalizing that the ending will differ significantly from its predecessor.

## 3.3 BECOMING ELIZABETH BENNET

As seen in Chapter 2, the intertextual and postmodern nature of some adaptations is partly characterized by the use of references that go beyond that of a primary source text. *Becoming Jane* does so when it connects facts on Jane Austen's life to elements from the novel *Pride and Prejudice*. While *Becoming Jane* is not an adaptation in the general sense, it presents a structure that is similar to that of adaptations of individual Austen novels. This similarity helps what Linda Hutcheon calls "unknowing audiences" (HUTCHEON, 2006, p. 120), those spectators who are unfamiliar with the source material, to connect it with something which they known. Acknowledging that adaptations feed from their predecessors, creating a visual link to other works that have probably been seen by the audience they share, we can establish a connection between *Becoming Jane* and *Pride & Prejudice*, directed by Joe Wright. This film, released in 2005 – two years prior to *Becoming Jane* – was only the second direct adaptation of Austen's most popular novel to the screen. In doing so, the image of Jane Austen is, for the first time, explicitly merged with that of Elizabeth Bennet in film. Deborah Cartmell argues that such connection fulfills "a desire to read her novels as a means of finding out something about the author, a taboo up until recently in English studies, but a practice which is undeniably present in adaptations of Austen's work" (CARTMELL, 2010, p. 109). Adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* emphasize in Elizabeth Bennet "her energy and wit, as well as her confidence in her own critical spirit and powers of judgment" (HUDELET, 2006, p. 15), attributes which audiences can easily ascribe to her creator.

This particular adaptation chooses to present Elizabeth to the audience as a reader right on the first scene: she is reading while she walks, and the book is no other than *Pride and Prejudice*, "a witty acknowledgement of the film's source and status as an adaptation and a sly intimation that Elizabeth, like Austen, is in command of her own story" (CARTMELL, 2010, p. 112). By highlighting this quality in Elizabeth, the film is reinforcing the connection between character and creator, as Austen had a vast interest and knowledge of Literature, while Elizabeth, in the novel, declares herself "*not* a great reader" (*PP*, p. 26). At the same time, the improvement of one's mind by extensive reading is part of Darcy's list of attributes of the accomplished woman (*PP*, p. 27); by turning Elizabeth into an avid reader, the film is

indicating upfront, to those familiar with this passage in the novel, that Elizabeth and Darcy will be together in the end. In *Becoming Jane*, the conversations between Tom and Jane at the beginning of their acquaintance are centered around their mutual interest in Literature, although they present somewhat dissenting views on the subject.

Image 4 – On the left, Elizabeth (Keira Knightley) reads her own story in *Pride & Prejudice*. On the right, Jane (Anne Hathaway) reads Tom Jones in *Becoming Jane*.

As seen in the previous section, other films that present a fictional portrait of Jane Austen have chosen to associate her to characters such as Fanny Price, from *Mansfield Park* and Anne Elliot, from *Persuasion* – coincidentally, both characters are also avid readers. For Cartmell, the association to Elizabeth Bennet is always implied and constantly reinforced by film and television adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice*, be it for the attribution, to Elizabeth, of some of the narrator's commentaries, especially the first sentence in the novel (CARTMELL, 2010, p. 110-113) or the coincidences between incidents in Jane Austen's life that find mirrored scenes in the novel.

In the novel, Elizabeth's "physical travelling is echoed by a moral and intellectual journey for the heroine, from the 'first impressions' to a questioning of her previous notions" (HUDELET, 2006, p. 15); similarly, biopics such as *Becoming Jane* are generally structured as "a portrait of the artist as a young person, concentrating on the events leading up to success and ending with the price that success brings" (CARTMELL, 2010, p. 114). The relationship between Jane and Tom presented in *Becoming Jane* is "the movement of two people who are

impelled apart until they reach a climax of mutual hostility, and thereafter bend their courses towards mutual understanding and amity" – this description, written by critic Mary LASCELLES (1939, p. 160), is about Elizabeth and Darcy. Their journeys may be similar, as "[T]he apparent simplicity of the structure of the love story is doubled and complicated by a very modern questioning about identity, perception, and understanding on the part of the heroine" (HUDELET, 2006, p. 16), but Elizabeth has the advantage of being a purely fictional character, whose fate is determined by an author. When Elizabeth and Darcy meet at Pemberley, they both have gone through a process of self-reflection that culminates in a change of impression of the other – the mutual understanding that Lascelles refers to. For Elizabeth, "The ideal happy ending does not outshine the drama of the individual progress towards self-knowledge" (Idem), but in Jane's case, her journey is still bound, in part, to historical facts. As much as the film presents itself as a fictional account of her life, the fact is that it is modeled in part by the structure of *Pride and Prejudice*, but the promise of fulfillment – the ideal happy ending – for an audience that recognizes this structure from other sources, cannot happen. Choices had to be made to reconcile the idea of Jane's journey being similar to that of Elizabeth, while accounting for the factual consequences of some of the events in Jane Austen's life as portrayed in the film that contradict audiences' expectations, especially for those unfamiliar with Jane Austen's biography.

In Chapter 2 it was discussed how casting choices can visually connect a film to previous productions. These decisions can attract publicity for a project, especially when the actors involved are associated with previous similar roles in productions which knowing and unknowing audiences alike would be familiar with. The casting of Academy Award nominees and/or winners, for example, can grant a film the kind of degree of respectability that distinguishes it from other, more commercial productions. To illustrate the use made of this resource in the production of *Becoming Jane*, I will make a visual comparison between the casting choices in this production and that of its elected predecessor, *Pride & Prejudice*. As we will see, correspondent roles in both films are given to actors of similar reputation, and sometimes even physical similarity. References from adaptations of other Austen novels are also present in the film, an aspect which Deborah Cartmell questions:

> (…) this biopic is so immersed in its own generic associations that it becomes a curtain call of the most well-known Austen adaptations preceding it; on one hand, its dense and multi-layered intertextuality can be vigorously applauded, but on the other hand, it can be regarded as cynically cashing in on an over-worn commercially-driven formula. (Cartmell, 2010, p. 119)

Cartmell's criticism seems to be directed to the fact that she believes *Becoming Jane* focuses as much on the relationship between Jane and Tom as it does on Jane's awakening as a writer, as means to please an audience that recognizes in the film a similar structure to countless other productions, the "over-worn commercially-driven formula" of romantic comedies – to which *Pride and Prejudice* became a very popular template. Cartmell acknowledges that "The Romantic notion that art is inspired by love is strikingly central to films that depict the life of an author" and in the eagerness to do so, biopics can be inaccurate, but that they are a popular form of entertainment just the same (CARTMELL, 2010, p. 114). Again the question of whether Austen is being consumed in proper or improper ways emerges, if we consider the academic aspects of the discussion. But no one questions the *commercial* aspect of a *product* that is being *sold* to a *popular* audience, as if the fictional portrait of an author, despite its focus on her genesis as a writer, somehow devalues her image because of an speculative reading of her love life. The fact is that *Becoming Jane* is one of very few attempts of introducing the icon Jane Austen to a more general audience, one that is unfamiliar with the derivative novels discussed in Chapter 2, or inattentive to the references made in other Austen adaptations because of their ignorance of her biography. Despite her continuing popularity as an author, Jane Austen is still as elusive as ever; this time, a film is portraying her *own* story, and not one of the stories she wrote. The irony that it has been done so by mirroring *Pride and Prejudice* is not lost, but even to unknown audiences, the historical fact that Jane Austen never married implies that, despite her relationship with Tom Lefroy being shown to resemble that of Elizabeth and Darcy, the ending cannot be the same.

The more interesting cast decisions in both *Pride & Prejudice* and *Becoming Jane* have to be that of the two protagonists, Elizabeth and Darcy and Jane and Tom, respectively. For his film, Wright selected British actress Keira Knightley for the role of Elizabeth and Matthew Macfadyen for Darcy. Wright and Knightley established a close work relationship that led the director to cast the actress in two of his subsequent productions: the adaptation of Ian

McEwan's novel *Atonement* (2007) and more recently, his take on Leon Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (2012). Such displays of preference between directors and actors are not uncommon, especially if we remember Alfred Hitchcock's constant reuse of the same actress, and even more, of the same *type* of actresses. So it was no surprise that, when announcing the cast of his next production, Wright chose not only the same actresses he had worked with in *Pride & Prejudice*, Keira Knightley and Brenda Blethyn; the same composer, Dario Marianelli, for the soundtrack; and several other crew members. In fact, a brief search on the Internet Movie Database shows that there are at least 134 overlaps between the cast and crew of *Pride & Prejudice* and *Atonement*. Perhaps because of this decision of maintaining most of the team from one film to another, Wright ended up creating in *Atonement* a film with much of the same qualities of its predecessor. For the lead male character, however, Wright opted for actor James McAvoy, who also plays Tom Lefroy in *Becoming Jane*. Even with *the latter* premiering at least six months before *Atonement*, willingly or unwillingly, the resulting product of Julian Jarrold's production is related to both of Joe Wright's films.

The use and re-use of the same actors in the three films links them in the audiences' minds, even more so because the stories can be compared, on a very superficial level: the romantic plot in all three stories show an initially adversarial relationship that grows into love. In both *Becoming Jane* and *Atonement*, the question of the boundaries between fact and fiction is challenged, and the development of a young woman into a writer is central to the story. The image below is separated in three parts, each showing the lead actors in each film: Image 5a shows Keira Knightley and Matthew Macfadyen as Elizabeth and Darcy in *Pride & Prejudice*. Image 5b shows Anne Hathaway and James McAvoy as Jane and Tom in *Becoming Jane*. At the bottom, image 5c shows Keira Knightley and James McAvoy as Cecilia and Robbie in *Atonement*.

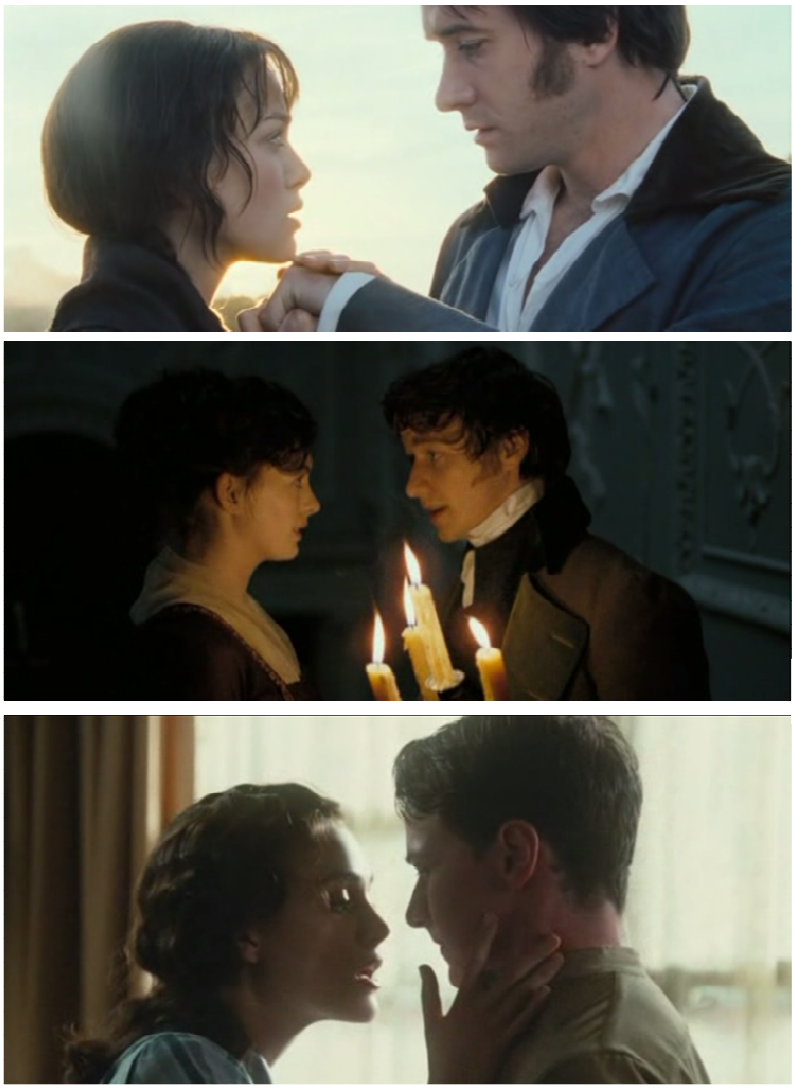



Image 5 – 5a Scene from *Pride & Prejudice*; 5b Scene from *Becoming Jane*; 5c Scene from *Atonement*

The overlapping of some of the cast in the three films would be enough to connect, in the audiences' minds, that these stories share similar traits. In Brazil, this connection was made even more forcefully through the choice of title for each film: *Orgulho & Preconceito* (*Pride & Prejudice*), *Amor e Inocência* (*Becoming Jane*) and *Desejo e Reparação* (*Atonement*).

Those are not the only casting choices that connect *Becoming Jane* to *Pride & Prejudice*. The image below shows actresses Brenda Blethyn, on the left; and Julie Walters on the right. They play Mrs. Bennet and Mrs. Austen in *Pride & Prejudice* and *Becoming Jane*, respectively.

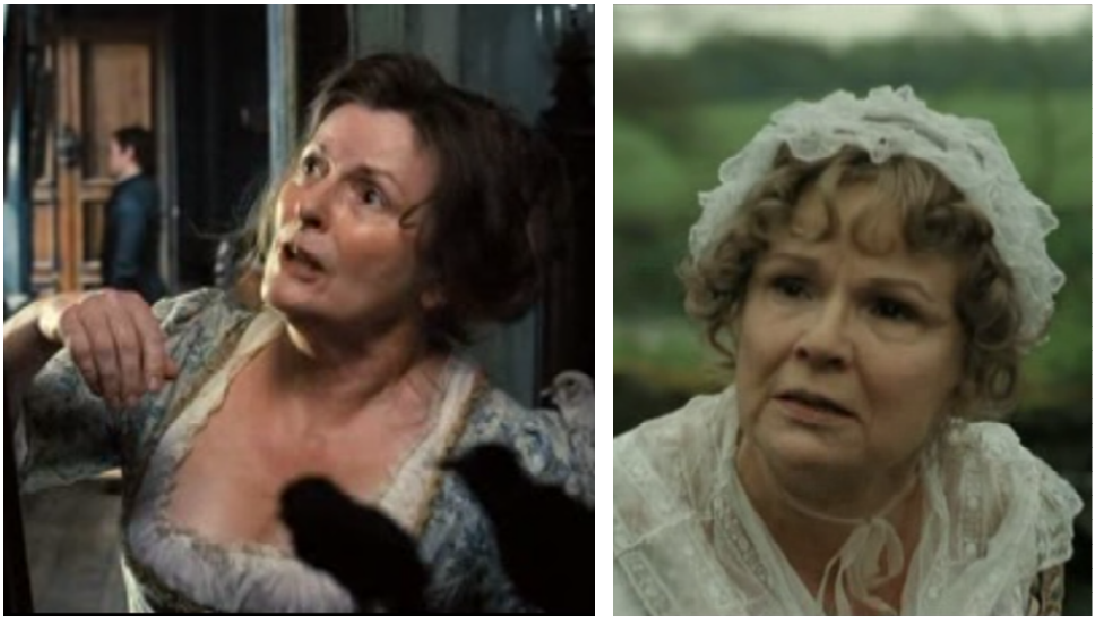


Image 6 – The mothers in *Pride & Prejudice* and *Becoming Jane*

The images shown here are from corresponding moments in both films: Mrs. Bennet is urging Mr. Bennet to convince Elizabeth to accept Mr. Collins' marriage proposal, while Mrs. Austen is urging Jane to accept Mr. Wisley's proposal, an argument that is witnessed by her husband. Their motivations, in both films, are similar: seeing a daughter married well, thus secure for the future. For Mrs. Bennet, the task seems even more urgent because having only daughters, should Elizabeth marry Mr. Collins, she would become mistress of Longbourne, keeping the property in the family and being placed in a position to help her mother and sisters. As will be discussed later, the Austens had no such impediments, as they had sons, but in the context of the film, Jane's mother seems eager to have her daughter married well. It is implied that the Austens' marriage was for love, but that Mrs. Austen resents her husband because their situation is lower than what she expected. Her wish for Jane to marry Mr. Wisley is so that one of her daughters will not have to settle into a less comfortable life – at this point, Cassandra is engaged to Fowle and is expected to be, like her mother, a clergyman's wife.

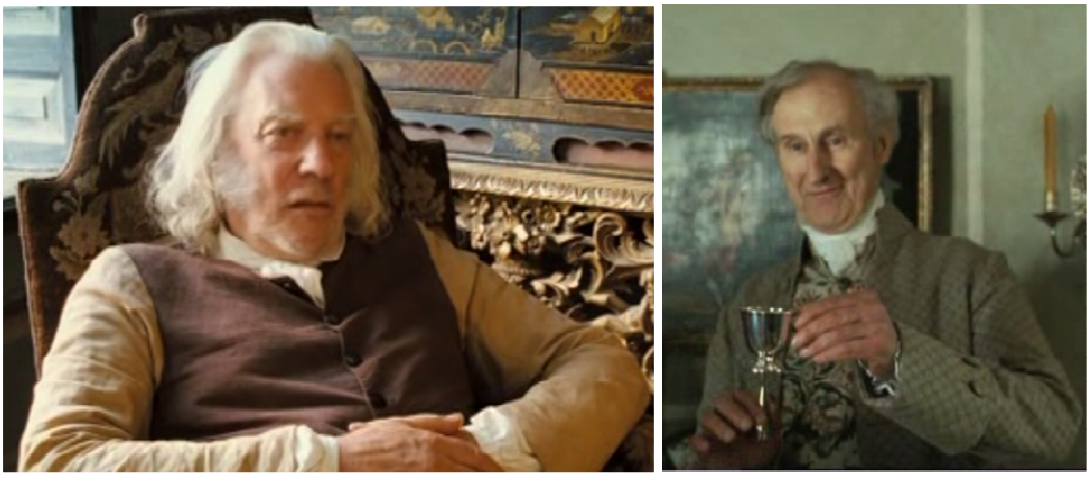


Image 7 – On the left, Donald Sutherland as Mr. Bennet in *Pride & Prejudice*;
on the right, James Cromwell as Reverend Austen in *Becoming Jane*

In both scenes, the father tries to run interference in favor of the daughter, in a direct challenge to the wife's wishes. We know from *Pride and Prejudice* that Elizabeth is Mr. Bennet's favorite daughter, but we do not have the same information about the relationship between Jane Austen and her father, Reverend Austen. We can only suppose, based on the information available, that George Austen was very proud of his daughter's achievements, to the point of encouraging her to publish her works. Mr. Bennet is the benevolent yet absent father, choosing to engage mainly with Elizabeth, his declared favorite among his daughters. In *Becoming Jane*, Reverend Austen is shown as very affectionate towards his children, even if only four of the total eight are depicted, and even so, one of these four is George, the son who, as documents show, was not a constant presence in Steventon as the film tries to imply. Nevertheless, these associations, and the side by side comparison between the actors involved in these roles, shows that this similar choice in casting helps to reinforce the actions of the Austen parents to that of the Bennets, furthering the link between Jane and Elizabeth Bennet by way of their parents in a way that the audience is able to recognize and relate to.

As seen in Chapter 1, the relationship between Jane Austen and Tom Lefroy played out mostly without interference from family members, aside from the teasing of friends and later, Mrs. Lefroy's attempt at disengaging Jane Austen's thoughts from Lefroy by introducing Reverend Blackwell. Other than a supposed opposition from his uncle, there were no apparent impediments to Jane and Lefroy's relationship. In order to play out a similar scenario to that of *Pride & Prejudice*, *Becoming Jane* introduces two new characters: Lady Gresham (Maggie Smith) and her nephew, Mr. Wisley (Lawrence Fox). The Austens, who had several sons,

were never threatened to lose their house, and their two daughters were never pressured into an advantageous marriage because of their poor prospects for the future – on the contrary: the fact that both Jane and Cassandra Austen never married, and even so were able to lead a comfortable life with the help of their brothers, shows that their situation, while not ideal, was far from that of the Bennet sisters, or even the Dashwood sisters in *Sense and Sensibility*. When Reverend Austen retired and moved the family to Bath, James Austen was appointed as his father's successor at the rectory in Steventon, but he would only become full owner of the living upon the elder Austen's death. However secure the Austens were – especially after Edward's adoption by the Knights – they still hoped to benefit from the fortune of other relations, such as Mrs. Austen's brother, James Leigh Parrot. By introducing Lady Gresham as Reverend Austen's rich benefactor, the film reinforces the connection of the character with Lady Catherine de Bourgh in *Pride & Prejudice*, but helps illustrate the economic aspects of the marriage market and how a young woman's choice on the subject left her hovering over the thin line between prosperity and poverty.

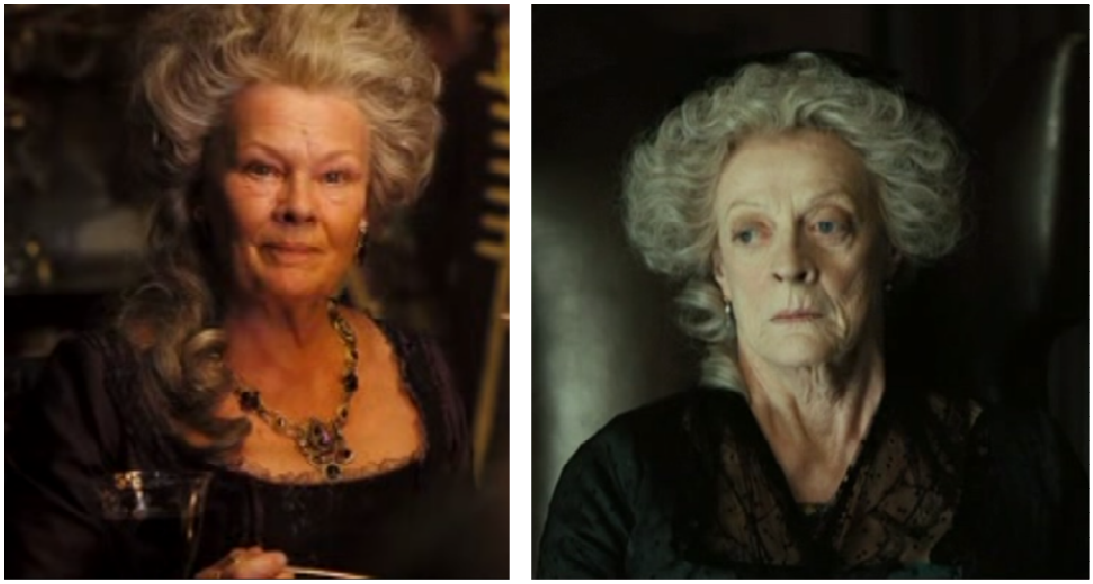


Image 8 – On the left, Judi Dench as Lady Catherine de Bourgh in *Pride & Prejudice*; on the right, Maggie Smith as Lady Gresham in *Becoming Jane*

The choice of Maggie Smith as Lady Gresham relates to the fact that the corresponding role in *Pride & Prejudice*, that of Lady Catherine de Bourgh, is played by Judi Dench. Both actresses carry the same regal title of Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire and have had an extensive career in both stage and screen. Their presence also suggests that

these are figures of authority, a role that both actresses have performed in several different productions, and the public associates with them.

Mr. Wisley is perhaps the character that better embodies this mashing up of Jane Austen's biography and work: at the same he can be seen as the equivalent of Mr. Collins, he is not portrayed as revolting, as most of the adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* tend to do. His awkwardness around Jane also links him to Harris Bigg-Whiter, the man whose marriage proposal Jane Austen accepted and later rejected, as Jane does to Wisley. On learning that Tom is engaged to an Irish woman – an arrangement made by his uncle – she accepts Mr. Wisley's proposal despite her lack of affection for him. If in *Pride and Prejudice*, Mr. Collins follows Elizabeth's rejection with a sudden engagement to Charlotte Lucas, Mr. Wisley proves a patient and understanding suitor to Jane, even in the face of her obvious attachment to Tom Lefroy. While Jane is aware that Wisley would be a safer choice – not only because he has money and is willing to marry her despite her social status, but also because he is supportive of her writing –, but she is determined not to marry without affection. After the botched attempt of elopement with Tom, Jane returns to her family and is humiliated by Lady Gresham, who up to this point tolerated the idea of her nephew marrying Jane, declares that he would no longer accept "someone without family, fortune, importance and fatally tainted by suspicion"; as her parents defend her, Jane replies: "Importance may depend upon other matters than Your Ladyship can conceive. As to fortune, a young woman might depend upon herself" – alluding to the fact that she is prepared to write not as a diversion, but as a profession (*Becoming Jane*). To show that he disagrees with his aunt, Wisley invites Jane for a walk, where they have one final conversation (Image 9) about their broken engagement and Jane's aspirations as a writer. Wisley remarks that he respects Jane for not wanting to marry without affection, as he wants the same for himself. In discussing her fiction, he remarks that "The good do not always come to good ends," which he complements by saying, in a throwaway line, "It is a truth universally acknowledged" (*Becoming Jane*).

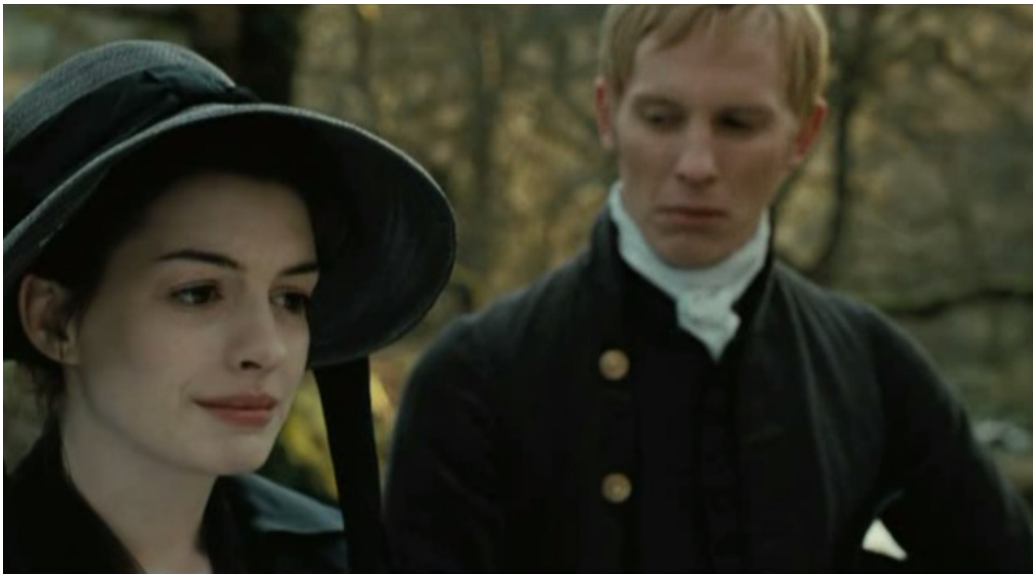


Image 9 – Jane (Anne Hathaway) and Mr. Wisley (Lawrence Fox) in *Becoming Jane*

We know from Jane Austen's own words that she and Tom Lefroy met on at least five occasions, four of which were balls, both public and private, hosted near Steventon. In the Georgian period, in which both films are set, balls were one of the few places where young men and women had a little freedom to interact without breaching etiquette. In Austen's novels, and its adaptations, the scenes featuring balls usually mark shifts in the narrative – Marianne Dashwood's discovery of Willoughby's betrayal in *Sense and Sensibility*, Elizabeth overhears Darcy's dismissal of her at the Assembly Ball in *Pride and Prejudice*. But more specifically, the act of dancing is representative of the sexual tension, or lack thereof, between two people. In the mind of a 21st-Century reader/viewer, that information has to be made very explicit, as it is one of the factors that leads the audience to decide whether to root or not for a happy ending for the characters.

In *Becoming Jane* there are only two balls, as in *Pride & Prejudice*; and the first ball combines elements of the Assembly Ball and the Netherfield Ball. At this point, Tom and Jane have already met, but entertain a mutual dislike, so when he arrives late to the ball, he sees Jane dancing with Mr. Wisley, who is a bad dancer, which humiliates Jane. She later complains about Tom to Henry and Eliza, and in a reversal of roles, this times it is he who overhears her criticism. Seemingly unfazed, Tom asks her to dance which leads them on a conversation in much of the same vein as Elizabeth and Darcy's at the Netherfield Ball. As the Austens leave the ball Henry and Eliza remark on the fact that Jane spent so much time

with Lefroy during the event – implying that, after their dance, their conversation continued. It also references the letter sent by Cassandra Austen, to which we only know the response from Jane, about the impropriety of behaving in such a way. As in this context Henry is friends with Tom, he warns his sister about the Irishman's reputation; reputation that was informed to the spectator in the first scene in which Lefroy appears. Jane tries to placate her brother and cousin by describing Tom as "the most disagreeable, insolent arrogant, impudent, insufferable and impertinent of men" (*Becoming Jane*), a line which continues, in voice over, into the next scene where Jane is writing – a contrast to *her* first appearance in the film, where she was frustrated over her writing. More than echo, in Jane's words, Elizabeth's description of Darcy, this scene serves as an indication that, even before it turned romantic, Jane's relationship with Tom had influence over her writing.

As much as the film tries to structure Jane and Tom's relationship in the same way as Elizabeth and Darcy's in *Pride & Prejudice*, the fact that the film is bound, although not tightly, to historical facts, makes it essential that, at some point, they have to retreat from this proposed model. This shift is made during the second ball, hosted by Lady Gresham, where Jane is expected to accept Mr. Wisley's proposal. Her answer has been delayed by her developing feelings for Tom, and the conflict of affection versus duty put in front of her by her mother in a previous conversation. Aware that she has an obligation – at least within this fictional universe – to her family, which could be easily fulfilled by marrying Wisley; as it would be to Elizabeth, had she accepted Mr. Collins. In retrospect, it is probable that during the Netherfield Ball, before any official proposal, Elizabeth felt similarly pressured but, like Jane, she ultimately chooses affection over duty. In this scene, Jane is dancing with Mr. Wisley and her expression reflects the conflicts described above. During the dance, however, she sees Lefroy, and her expression changes completely, to the point where Mr. Wisley is aware of this transformation. This sequence seems to combine the one where Elizabeth dances with Mr. Collins and is constantly distracted looking for Mr. Wickham, and the one, later on, where she dances with Darcy. The similarity of the screen captures shown below serve as another reminder of the visual connection between *Becoming Jane* and *Pride & Prejudice*, but also mark the point where the model of relationship between Jane and Tom starts to differ from that of Elizabeth and Darcy. For Jane and Tom, it is the moment when they both become aware of the other's feelings, and they have to decide, from this point on, how to proceed, as they are both aware of all the impediments to their union.

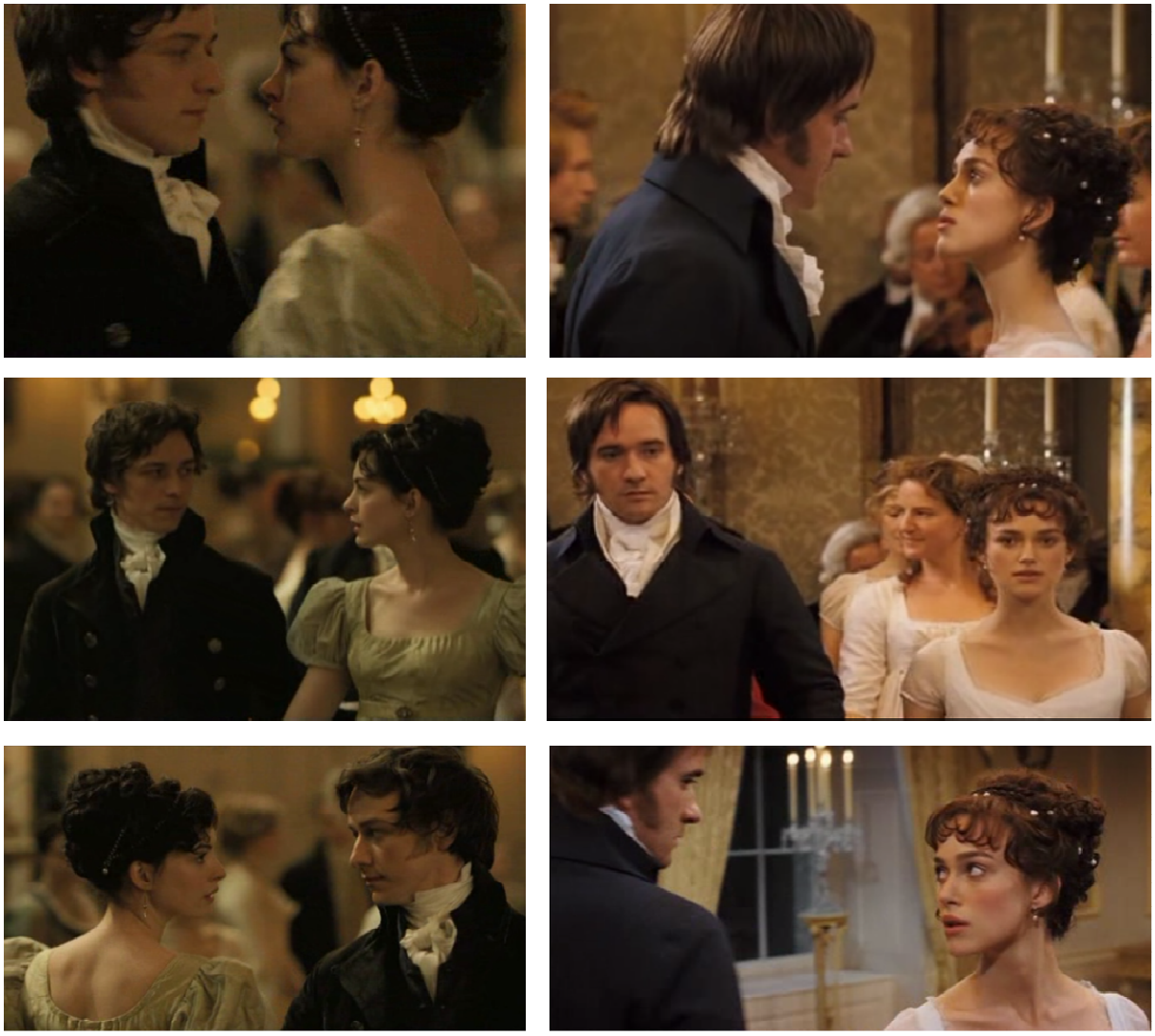


Image 10 – The sequence on the left shows Jane and Tom at Lady Gresham's Ball. The sequence on the right shows Elizabeth and Darcy at the Netherfield Ball.

In both Spence's biography and the film *Becoming Jane*, it is acknowledged that a central element to the relationship between Jane Austen and Tom Lefroy ignited the composition of *First Impressions*, which would later become *Pride and Prejudice*. The similarities between the film and plot points in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Northanger Abbey*, and cinematography and casting choices in *Pride & Prejudice* help reinforce that the story *of* Jane Austen can be told through stories *written by* Austen. Other films have done a similar thing, with other Austen novels such as *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion*. However, *Becoming Jane* was the first biographical film to portray Jane Austen's life through the fictionalization of her historical person, thus abiding at the same time it challenges, the notion of historical truth, in a concept proposed by Linda Hutcheon which she named historiographical metafiction. Because the

film *Becoming Jane* depicts the process of development of Jane as a woman and as a writer, the exercise of filling in the gaps in an author's biography with their own fictional work can be fruitful to identify the steps of the creative process. The approximation with *Pride & Prejudice* can only carry the story of *Becoming Jane* so far, to the point where the weight of some historical facts is so much that there leaves no room to fictionalize or alter it. Also, because of conventions of the cinematic genres –romantic comedy, adaptation, biographical picture – to which *Becoming Jane* belongs, any indication of a possible resolution to the central conflict – in this case, whether or not Jane and Tom will be together – that appears too early into the film also signals that another conflict will rise and that the resolution will be delayed and may not be what the characters expected.

After the dance sequence presented in Image 10, Jane and Tom walk into the garden to talk, and finally admit their feelings for each other. The generic conventions previously mentioned require that true love should be celebrated with a kiss. As anachronistic as it may seem, the kiss has a function in films such as this: as an indication, to the audience, that this relationship and the feelings manifested by both characters are true. Other productions, including previous adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice*, use this resource at the end of the film, "the kiss at the end" that implies a happy ending for the characters. Contemporary adaptations of the story are exempt of this because it would be anachronistic of the characters *not* to kiss although, as seen in Chapter 2, some productions are able to work around this issue for different reasons: the religious connection of *Pride and Prejudice: A Latter Days Comedy* (2003) or different sets of cinematic rules, like in *Bride and Prejudice* (2004). Even the 1995 mini-series, starring Colin Firth and Jennifer Ehle, generally considered the most faithful adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, ends with a kiss between Elizabeth and Darcy. *Pride & Prejudice* could have been an exception, as its original version does not feature a kiss between the protagonists, but there is an alternative ending available as an extra on the DVD, and which was used for the release in the United States, that shows an intimate scene – with a kiss – between an already married Elizabeth and Darcy at Pemberley. What differentiates this scene in *Becoming Jane*, to those here mentioned, is the fact that the kisses between Tom and Jane signal not the end of the story, but the end of *their* story. By anticipating the kiss, the film indicates that something will come to an end soon, as it is still only the first half of the film, the prospect of Jane and Tom overcoming the obstacles in their way is very pessimistic. This brief moment of happiness is followed by the visit to Cork Street, where Tom's uncle vehemently refuses to give his

blessing, and they are separated. When they meet again, they are both engaged to other people.

It is at this point that Tom convinces Jane to elope, believing that this will be the only way they can be together, without interference from either family. He chooses to ignore the fact that Jane has no dowry, and that his professional prospects depend on his uncle's good will. Still bound by affection to Tom, Jane agrees and not even Cassandra's plea that she rethink the decision makes her back down. As they make the decision to run away together, the model for Tom and Jane's relationship can no longer be Darcy and Elizabeth. Keeping to the general structure of *Pride & Prejudice*, they become Mr. Wickham and Lydia Bennet, whose situation is rectified by Darcy before it can cause even more damage to the Bennet family. As honorable as Tom's intentions are, the realization that this solution will take its toll on both of them further down the road impels Jane to return home, giving up on the man she loves, but determined to keep working towards her goal of becoming a writer. Being bound to fact, the film distances itself from fiction, which was the only realm where this ending could have been avoided. Contrary to what happens in Austen's own novels, Jane and Lefroy cannot be together, so the film steps back one more time into fictions, to promote one final meeting between them. After a concert, an older and frail Jane is introduced to Tom's daughter, who has received her name. The girl asks for a reading of *Pride and Prejudice* – the novel which, within the heterocosm[9] of this film, was inspired by Jane and Tom's relationship and that gives them, in fiction, the ending they could not achieve in life; much like in *Atonement*, Cecelia and Rob's story only reaches an ending through Briony's fiction.

The visual connection between *Pride & Prejudice* and *Becoming Jane* is also present in the promotional posters for both films (Image 11). The similarities in the choice of photos for each poster reinforce the connection between Elizabeth and Jane, and the emphasis given in *Becoming Jane* to an episode that occurred when the author was still a young woman, here presented as a fictionalized story that highlights the romantic aspects of the relationship between Jane Austen and Tom Lefroy.

[9] Another term used by Hutcheon, in *A Theory of Adaptation*, meaning all the "settings, characters, events, and situations" that belong and are pertinent to a story (HUTCHEON, 2006, p. 14).

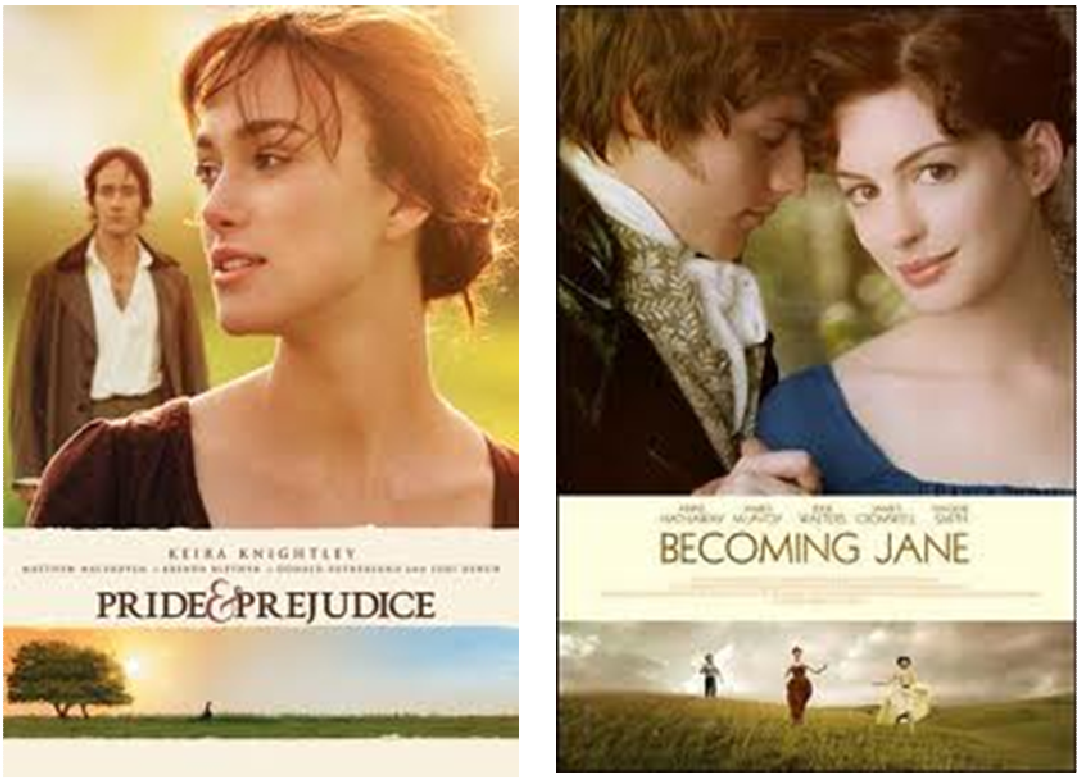



Image 12 – Promotional posters of *Pride & Prejudice* (on the left) and *Becoming Jane* (on the right)

By weaving the narrative with elements from both Austen's life and fiction, the film aligns itself with a tradition of biographical pictures, or biopics, that focus on the life of writers and the process by which they develop their craft. Such narrative of artistic development is usually interposed with elements lifted from the writer's own fiction, which helps the audience connect to the story as they are familiar with the works in question, and also using these same fictional elements to fulfill any gaps left in the author's biography by incomplete documents and family records.

For the past 150 years the image of Jane Austen has gone through several transformations informed mainly by the speculation about her life, given the very guarded way in which her circumstances were made public by her family, and only after her death. Also impacting these transformations was the way in which Austen's literary achievements have been regarded, in view of her status as both canonic and popular author: the appropriation of her image changes according to whom is making the appropriation and, as such, it can vary deeply whether it is made by a scholar or a general reader. As seen in Chapter 2, the changes in mode of engagement of the general reader with the text have led to an increasing production of fan-made fiction with entertainment purposes and are, therefore, not bound to the same restrictions that a more scholarly view of the author would have. *Becoming Jane* clearly

identifies more with the former than with the latter, as in it explores more freely the boundaries between what is “fact” and what is “fiction” with no definite claim to either. As non-academic as such readings might be, their existence is a reflection of the increasing engagement between reader and text, which contributes to the continuing popularity of Jane Austen’s image with all kinds of reading public.

# CONCLUSION

> *Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands. I will not allow books to prove anything.*
>
> Jane Austen, ***Persuasion***

This year we celebrate the 200th anniversary of the publication of *Pride and Prejudice*, which would become Austen's most popular novel. Had she known that, she probably would have asked for more than the £ 110 the publisher gave her for the rights to the novel. Nevertheless, after 15 years waiting to be published, the prospect of a second novel being released, after the successful run of *Sense and Sensibility* two years earlier, was a tremendous reward for someone who longed to see her work in print. Although *Pride and Prejudice* achieved relative success at the time, that is nothing compared to what we have today. For almost 20 years now, *Pride and Prejudice* has taken a life of its own, one not always associated with its creator, but is nonetheless connected to her. The familiarity of the reading public with the story of the Bennet sisters – whose loving mother only wants the best for them, in the form of rich, handsome bachelors – can be perceived in several other successful novels and films which play with this plot but remain, at the core, the same story Austen wrote.

Much has been said about Austen's work and legacy, and many wonder what she would think of the myriad of merchandise being sold in (and with) her name. But not much is known about her person, other than the image of the pious amateur writer her nephew described, or the ironic writer who laughs at her readers, as D.W. Harding means to present her in the 1940s. The fact is that the several different personae Austen has incarnated in the last 200

years have more to do with how people *perceive* her than with what she might have truly been like. When James Edward Austen-Leigh wrote the *Memoirs*, all the people who had known Jane Austen were dead. He and his sisters had spent some time with their aunt, but – in view of their difference in age and of the social restrictions and Victorian moral values – probably not enough to be able to apprehend the proper way to cast a light on her in order to write the biography. With the destruction of the letters by Cassandra and other family members, we are left with second-hand accounts about Austen, which makes it impossible for one to say something concrete about her exact nature and disposition.

In the ever evolving image of Jane Austen we deal with conjecture, with wild guesses and wishful thinking. We deal with a number of different, carefully constructed Jane Austens who, like her novels, have, at the same time, a restricted and universal appeal that lends itself to biographers' agendas, general readers' interests, and fans' imagination. Like in *The Jane Austen Book Club*, we all have a private Austen that fulfills our needs. In our minds, Jane Austen can be anything. The only concrete thing Austen left us are her words and her novels. If the scarcity of that material demands a response from the readers in any form, then it is up to the readers to decide whether that response is going to be made by them, or made by others for them.

The relationship established between Austen fans and her texts is, in my perception, different from that analyzed by Henry Jenkins in *Textual Poachers*, or even in *Convergence Culture*: production and consumption need not be limited by disclaimers of fair use in internet message boards, as there is no copyright claim to Austen's novels. Fans who engage in derivative writing also profit from the tools provided nowadays for independent publishing through online platforms. Therefore, they are able to sell their version of Austen, which will be consumed by other Austen fans who take pleasure in reading more from her novels, even if not written by her. Some of these may be considered unauthorized readings because they tend to focus on the more superficial aspects of Austen's plots such as the love stories, without touching on social criticism and other, more "serious" themes. Jenkyns admits that "Fans recognize that their relationship to the text remains a tentative one, that their pleasures often exist on the margins of the original text and in the face of the producer's own efforts to

regulate its meanings" (JENKYNS, 1992, p. 24). That raises the question: in this context, to whom should be attributed the authority to regulate texts considered canonical? Academic critics? In this case, is the contemporary academic critical set of tools adapted to the function? If we consider the internal disagreement between academic *purist* Janeites, and *popular* all-embracing Janeites, not yet. But we are making progress. The very fact that this thesis on derivative novels has been accepted at an academic graduate program, along with others[10], shows that the area of Literature is taking to itself the task to investigate phenomena that are taking place in its own realm, a responsibility that it previously seemed to delegate to other theoretical areas of humanity.

Fan manifestations became more readily noticeable after the proclaimed success of Austenmania in 1995, in which several film and television productions based on Austen novels presented the author to a new audience, and garnered admirers for her through visual adaptations that appealed to more contemporary tastes. This triggered a number of consequences. For one thing, it enhanced the selling of Austen's novels to an unprecedented degree, and consolidated cult of the icon. Also, as happens with literature, the mutual influence exerted by the fictional world upon the historical world, and back from the historical world into the fictional world, is perceptible in the changes derivative production provoked in the reading of Austen's novels. Austen's Darcy, for instance, will never be the same again after Colin Firth's popular characterization in the 1995 mini-series.

The continuous prevalence and enhancement of Austen as a best-seller author, and of the films based on her novels as viable projects, has a reason. To Lynch, "The Austenmania manifested nowadays by Hollywood studios, television networks, and the publishers of sequels is motivated (…) by their faith in her broad commercial appeal—their sense, that is, that, ever the well-mannered lady, Jane Austen is 'safe'"(LYNCH, 2000, p. 5). But what is it that makes her work commercially safe, other than being in public domain? I think that Austen only becomes commercially safe because something in her novels – and even in her life story – has been appealing to audiences for over 200 years now; and in a more intense way in the last decades, for a number of reasons, out of which I pick two. The first is the rise of the internet, which connects aficionados of all possible subjects, and ended up changing the

[10] See, for instance, Luciane Oliveira Müller's dissertation on *The Jane Austen Book Club* (work in progress), or Lauro Iglesias Quadrado's thesis on mass culture (2011).

role of the reader from a passive into a more active stand. Readers can now interact with other readers, interact with the author (if he/she is alive, and connected), sometimes changing the course of a text that is still being written[11]). Readers can now write and sell their own derivative works. The second reason for this intensification (and again the computer has its part on this occurrence) is similar to what led to the first Janeites, back in Victorian times: the increasing speed in all aspects of present-day life. As a consequence, limits are crossed and values are questioned, provoking a collective abstract feeling of anxiety and uncertainty. In this sense, receding – even if while reading a book – into the solid genteel world of Austen's rural life can prove a soothing antidote to the fretfulness of contemporary life.

The overwhelming majority of fan-produced fiction is directly based on Austen's novels, especially on *Pride and Prejudice*, either establishing a relationship of continuation (sequel), explanation (prequel), speculation (variations and alternative universes) or analogy (contemporary set stories that use the themes and outlines of characters from Austen's novels). These speculative readings can be useful and profitable: for Brandy Foster, by "adapting Austen into popular, formulaic genres, reader-writers of Austen have ignored the notion that Austen should be bounded within any single, definable literary tradition" (FOSTER, 2000, electronic information). Even if they are markedly part of the popular fiction segment, and if they do not outright claim any authority on readings of Austen, these texts can prove helpful in providing alternative points of view from which to contemplate Austen's novels. Juliette Wells questions if "Austen scholars have tended to dismiss these fictional representations of Austen both because of the works' unapologetic inventiveness and because their authors work in genres – from detective fiction to romance to horror – that Austen herself did not choose in her mature novels" (WELLS, 2011, p. 142). This brings back the discussion of authorized and unauthorized readings raised throughout this dissertation, and illustrated by the unawareness of late 19th Century critics in saying that they do not believe Austen was for the taste of Victorian readers, who turned mostly to popular fiction such as detective stories and Romantic novels, not realizing that, in the context in which Austen began working as a writer, and even later as she started publishing, her influences and references were all of popular fiction.

[11] In this respect, see the thesis on J. K. Rowling written by Lísia Paiva Nunes (2010)

As the reader's interest seems to be focusing lately on Austen's private life, they find, in the available biographical information a kind of silencing of opinions and obfuscation of events, not all done on purpose. The selection of the surviving material made by Cassandra Austen after her sister's death left many blank spaces in Jane Austen's history. Because of that, biographers, and readers in general, would have to rely on speculation to be able to convey a likely narrative. Many of these gaps ended up filled by the content of her fiction, and the resulting texts –either scientific or fictional - became a form of continuation or complementation of her work. Therefore, the derivative body of fictional work created about Jane Austen is not to be taken as attempts at biographical truth, but as creative outlets for fans to engage with Austen's life and work.

Most of the derivative works based on Austen's novels and life can be classified as fiction: "Austen's example can also make orthodox ways of accounting for cultural reproduction— our concepts of influence, tradition, literary legitimacy, and canon; our schemes for segregating the literary from the popular— seem strange and skewed" (LYNCH, 2000, p. 9-10). Fictional biographical reinventions such as *Becoming Jane* fall within the category of historiographic metafiction for the appropriation they make of historical events and characters that are inserted into a fictional universe that may or may not resemble that which it reflects. The exercise in possibilities opens avenues of discussion on the breech between fact and fiction, and to what degree those concepts really apply. The notion of historiographic metafiction, as proposed by Linda Hutcheon, is also an exponent of postmodernism that can be reflected in art, including fiction, and points to the approximation between what we understand as History and fiction:

> What the postmodern writing of both history and literature has taught us is that both history and fiction are discourses, that both constitute systems of signification by which we make sense of the past ("exertions of the shaping, ordering imagination"). In other words, the meaning and shape are not *in the events*, but *in the systems* which make those past "events" into present historical "facts." (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 89)

Historiographical metafiction, in the format of its more specific subgenre, Author as Character, is a tool that can be used by different people in different ways. When Jon Spence wrote *Becoming Jane Austen*, he moved from the real to the fictional and back again, and did so very carefully, using the criteria demanded of a serious professional who undertakes to

write a biography, especially one that is technically difficult to be constructed due to the scarcity of concrete data available. Later, the same Jon Spence was invited to work as a consultant to the *fictional* biography, the movie *Becoming Jane*, where the traffic between fiction and reality was much less restricted. Students of Austen's work can profit from both, in different ways. In this thesis, Spence's contribution helped to illustrate in which ways the film *Becoming Jane* can serve as an instance of what speculative fiction is and can do, and also to present a reflection on Austen's formative years as an author, and on the potential importance of personal experiences and losses in her creative outpourings.

The film *Becoming Jane* establishes conversations with other texts: Austen's novels, their adaptations, and, mostly, with Joe Wright's 2005 film reading of Austen's most popular novel *Pride & Prejudice*. Setting Austen's story on the template created by her in *PP* is common among fan writers because they attribute to Jane the characteristics that are more attractive in Elizabeth Bennet: her intelligence, her wit, her style, and her views family and marriage. In *Becoming Jane*, the choice of Tom Lefroy as the male representative of Austen's romantic entanglements can be attributed to more than just that fact that Spence's biography focuses on this relationship. The underlying assumption here is that, in having been the first documented romantic interest in the author's life, Lefroy can be taken, in a way, as part of her formation as a writer.

The parallels created in the movie between Jane and Tom and Elizabeth and Darcy resemble more closely Wright's film than Austen's novel, but to present more direct obstacle to their relationship than simply the possible objection of Tom's uncle to the union, two new characters are introduced. Lady Gresham is featured in a role correspondent to that of Lady Catherine de Bourgh in *PP*, and her nephew, Mr. Wisley may be a stand in for the function of Rev. Collins. The visual choices made by both cinematographers are similar. Such visual links, discussed in Chapter 3, are made even clearer when we pay attention to the similar casting choices in two films. As seen in Chapter 2, casting choices provide an insight on adaptations, as we contemplate the reputation of each actor on the prospective audiences' minds, and cross-reference it with the role they are playing and previous casting choices to the same role.

The image that I believe the protagonist of *Becoming Jane* conveys is that of a talented girl unafraid of using personal experiences for creative purposes. She does not give up on love as much as she decides that the price to pay for her happiness would be too high for both her and Lefroy to pay. On the one hand, having the intention of fully committing herself to a profession that was not well received, especially for a young lady of her situation, she decided not to burden anyone else with the consequences of her decision. On the other hand, according to the social practices of the time, she understood that she was not the appropriate match for a man like Tom Lefroy, who was sponsored by wealthier relatives who had higher expectations for him, and whose whole family depended economically on such designs. Some of the episodes may be enhanced and even exaggerated, but that is done in order to fit in the conventions of the film genre to which it applies. Ultimately, the film remains true to Austen's story when it does not reinvent the ending completely: the relationship between Jane and Tom had to fail for her career as a writer to develop.

For Claire Harman, Austen remains popular because her status is unique: "Austen is a genuinely great artist as well as a popular one" (HARMAN, 2010, p. xviii). The alterations Austen made to the style of sentimental novels from the 18$^{th}$ Century, allied with an approach to realism that differed even from that of Samuel Richardson, caused the effect of rendering her novels a study in contradictions: the use made by the readers will determine whether her novels are a profound study on the human nature in light of the social and philosophical changes of the 1800s; or if the stories offer, as Harman puts it, a simplistic plot that "fulfills every requirement of romance and erotic fantasy literature but also contains matter for a lifetime's rumination on relations between the sexes. Her clear prose style is extraordinarily accessible, while her irony allows illimitable interpretation" (Idem, p. xviii).

Fidelity is another concept that is being reevaluated in the light of this new critical era. The success of the adaptations to Austen's novels, derivative production included, contrasts with previous complaints about their lack of fidelity to the original novels. The point defended in this thesis is that faithfulness can no longer be considered a valid argument for the assessment of adaptations. The idea that these films and books thrive in spite of not being exact renditions of the novels relates to the present audience's need for a return to the past. Contemporary life lacks some elements that provoke a call for idealized manners and civility. Brandy Foster

argues that "[N]ostalgia seems to be an inadequate impetus for the explosion in Austen-related fiction" (FOSTER, 2000, electronic information). As for the novels that use Austen only as a starting point, in a discussion about the forms in which a work of art can be recreated, Rolf Breuer says that "sometimes a whole work takes its point of departure from, or is modeled on, another work" (BREUER, 1998, electronic information), and ends up discussing things that are not necessarily related to or at the core of the source work. This is the case with Karen Joy Fowler's *The Jane Austen Book Club* (2005), or with Shannon Hale's *Austenland* (2008)**.** The fact that such novels are starting to be turned into films shows that not only Austen's appeal is still going strong, but that there seems to be a shift in the way the public relates to those texts. What was once considered a therapeutic individual solution for the chaos of everyday life, now starts to be considered as a reflective mirror that allows us to understand many aspects of the society we are inserted in.

Novels were a relatively recent invention in Austen's time, and she paid a great contribution to the genre, if we consider how much it gained in psychological depth with her production. In the general epigraph that opens this thesis we have a quotation where Austen states that the greatest thing a novel can convey is pleasure. To her, the function of the artist is to convey pleasure. On the other hand, the role of the critics is to "abuse such effusions" (AUSTEN, 2004, cp. 3). She comes to the conclusion that, "Although our productions have afforded more extensive and unaffected pleasure than those of any other literary corporation in the world, no species of composition has been so much decried" (Idem). Two hundred years after this statement was made, here is a thesis that celebrates the genre, in an academic piece of criticism, written from within the scope of a Literary Program. It is only natural, thus, that this work addresses the discussion about the necessity of a bridge to connect the traditional and the popular responses to Austen, and a new position on the part of the academy to deal with the treatment of derivative works.

Austen's commitment to writing, and the body of her work, made her into a constant interest among literary circles and, eventually, also a success with the general reading public. This dual status of canonical writer and best-selling author, which has been fueled for the last 20 years with fresh perspectives on her novels and money-making film and television adaptations, keeps Austen firmly close to the public's imagination. The image they carry may

be one informed by the biographies, the portraits of the fictional reinventions in both book and film form. Nonetheless, it is an image that does not seem to give signs of going away.

The fact that Historiographic metafiction is inextricably connected with the postmodern world view is another possible explanation for the considerable enhancement in the position Austen occupies in the literary canon. Her critical fortune has never risen so high as it has now, for a number of reasons. Some of them are literary, some are not. The fact remains that as *Pride and Prejudice* celebrates its 200th anniversary, the world has never been so tuned with its style, and thematic lines, as it is now. These are the characteristics expected from a classic piece of fiction: that it resists the passing of time, that it travels easily to other cultural realities, that it keeps having a treasure to be passed to further generations, that readers react differently to it in different readings of the same text, in different places, in different times. The world is readier to read Austen now than it was 200 years ago. The new postmodern techniques to create fictional worlds often include a proactive movement on the part of the readers, who may respond to the reading experience by writing their own fictional derivative answer. The longer Austen's production lasts, the better appreciated it gets.

As a close to this thesis, in order to illustrate the tight connection between the circumstances of the person and the author, I bring the last thing ever composed by Austen, a set of verses known as "When Winchester Races First Took Their Beginning" or the "Venta" (*MW*, p. 452). Only two manuscripts survived, but none in Austen's handwriting. The first was probably dictated to Cassandra, three days previous to Austen's death, and a copy was made later by James. It is fitting that, among her last written words, we have these verses: "When once we are buried you think we are dead/But behold me immortal!"

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PRIDE and Prejudice. Directed by: Cyril Coke. Produced by: Jonathon Powell. Screenplay by: Fay Weldon. Cast: Elizabeth Garvie, David Rintoul, Clare Higgins, Sabina Franklyn. UK: BBC: 1980. Mini-series, 5 parts. DVD (265 min.).

PRIDE and Prejudice. Direction: Joe Wright. Production: Tim Bevan, Eric Fellner, Paul Webster. Screenplay: Deborah Moggach. Cast: Keira Knightley, Matthew MacFadyen, Judi Dench, Brenda Blethyn, Donald Sutherland. UK: Universal: 2005. 1 DVD (127 min).

PRIDE and Prejudice. Directed by: Robert Z. Leonard. Produced by: Hunt Stromberg. Screenplay by: Aldous Huxley and Jane Murfin. Cast: Greer Garson, Laurence Olivier. USA: MGM: 1940. Feature film (114 min, black and white).

PRIDE and Prejudice. Directed by: Simon Langton. Produced by: Sue Birtwistle. Screenplay by: Andrew Davies. Cast: Colin Firth, Jennifer Ehle. UK: BBC: 1995. Mini-series, 6 parts (300 min).

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SCENTS and Sensibility. Directed by: Brian Brough. Produced by: Brian Brough, Anthony Straga, Brittany Wiscombe. Screenplay by: Jennifer Jan and Brittany Wiscombe. Cast: Marla Sokoloff, Ashley Williams, Nick Zano. USA: Silver Peak: 2011. DVD (93 min.).

SENSE and Sensibility. Directed by: Ang Lee. Produced by: Lindsay Doran. Screenplay by: Emma Thompson. Cast: Emma Thompson, Hugh Grant, Kate Winslet, Alan Rickman. UK: Columbia Pictures: 1995. DVD (136 min.).

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WUTHERING Heights. Directed by: William Wyler. Produced by: Samuel Goldwyn. Screenplay by: Charles MacArthur, Ben Hecht. Cast: Laurence Olivier, Merle Oberon, David Niven. USA: MGM. 1939. DVD (104 min).

YOU’VE Got Mail. Directed by: Nora Ephron. Produced by: Lauren Shuler Donner and Nora Ephron. Screenplay by: Nora Ephron and Delia Ephron. Cast: Tom Hanks, Meg Ryan, Greg Kinnear. USA: Warner Bros.: 1998.DVD (119 min.).