



# Austen After 200

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## New Reading Spaces

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*Edited by*

Kerry Sinanan · Annika Bautz · Daniel Cook

palgrave  
macmillan

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ISBN 978-3-031-08371-6      ISBN 978-3-031-08372-3 (eBook)  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-08372-3>

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The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

## FOREWORD

### *Austen After 200: Reading the Novels in the Bicentenaries*

She left it all behind her, all but the recollection that such things had been.

—Anne Elliot in *Persuasion* (1818)

It is with joy and gratitude, but not without a little melancholy, that a Janeite might look back on the 200th anniversary celebrations of Austen's novels in the 2010s—and especially at the July 17, 2017, bicentenary of her death. I'm hardly alone in experiencing it all as far more blissful than mournful. As audiences came together, in greater numbers than most of us imagined possible, new opportunities emerged to share passion for and knowledge of the author.

It's estimated that 20 million copies of *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) have sold over the course of two centuries—a number that's surely climbing higher still.<sup>1</sup> In recent years, Janeites have revealed themselves in surprising, even opposing, political places, from Chelsea Clinton at the Democratic National Convention to the funeral of former First Lady

<sup>1</sup>John Walsh, "Austen Power: 200 years of *Pride and Prejudice*," *The Independent*, 19 January 2013, <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/austen-power-200-years-of-pride-and-prejudice-8454448.html>

Barbara Bush.<sup>2</sup> It was a happy surprise to me to learn that Cornel West considers himself a “Jane Austen freak.”<sup>3</sup> With heady moments like these (and despite reminders to think of the past only as its remembrance gives us pleasure) it may not be so simple to leave the Austen-infused 2010s behind for whatever might come next.<sup>4</sup>

Those of us who study and teach the literature and history of late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries may find ourselves working these days with mixed emotions. To have had global attention turn to “our” period—and to have had Austen’s books and readers regularly making headlines—was an extraordinary thing for scholarship, public outreach, and classrooms. That attention opened doors and started unfinished conversations of all kinds. Must it really be over? Surely not, if you’re reading this book. We’re in a moment well situated to reflect, assess, and deliberate on the meanings of Jane Austen over time—then, now, and in-between. That’s precisely where the essays in this book come in.

As *Austen After 200* sets out to show, scholars, critics, writers, influencers, and audiences are constructing and remembering Austen in new ways that speak to her time and to our own. In her essay in this volume on Austen at her death, its centenary, and its bicentenary, Annika Bautz reminds us that stock-taking at signal moments itself has an important history. Critics continue to investigate the possibilities and problems of Austen’s plots and characters, through readings that incorporate scholarly, historical, and political insights. These include necessary re-engagements with topics such as racism, slavery, abolition, colonialism, imperialism, and the abuse of economic power, as with Kerry Sinanan’s essay on *Pride and Prejudice*’s iconic Mr. Darcy and Mariam Wassif’s essay on *Emma*’s powerful Emma in this volume. As Wassif puts it, we are living in a moment of mainstream re-examination of the centrality of white canonical authors.

<sup>2</sup> Gwen Glazer, “Books in Chelsea Clinton’s DNC Speech,” *New York Public Library Biblio File* Blog, 29 July 2016, <https://www.nypl.org/blog/2016/07/29/books-dnc-speech>; Kristian Wilson, “Caroline Bingley Misquoted Again, This Time At Barbara Bush’s Funeral,” *Bustle*, 23 April 2018, <https://www.bustle.com/p/caroline-bingley-misquoted-again-this-time-at-barbara-bushs-funeral-8871384>.

<sup>3</sup> The Morgan Library & Museum, “Cornell West: Reflections on Austen,” *YouTube*. 6 mins. Morgan Library, New York. <https://www.themorgan.org/videos/cornel-west-reflections-austen>

<sup>4</sup> See Janine Barchas and Devoney Looser, “Introduction: What’s Next for Jane Austen?” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 61.4 (2019): 35-44. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7560/TSL161401>.

Reassessing Austen in intersectional terms is and must continue to be a part of these crucial conversations.

As a new wave of anti-racist and more inclusive Austen scholarship reaches print, so, too, are critics and commentators in new media expanding popular interest, knowledge, and reach, as Margaret C. Sullivan describes in her essay on blogging Austen. The power of virtual spaces is something that Lauren Burke and Hannah Chapman have harnessed in their groundbreaking podcast, *Bonnets at Dawn*, as they describe in their essay, where they also offer a reading of big and small screen Mr. Collinses. In conversation with Sinanan, Bianca Hernandez-Knight describes the efforts she spearheaded with *Virtual Jane Con*, among other designedly diverse and inclusive spaces. It is fitting that this dialogue concludes this book, for all of the work that it lays out and conversations that it highlights and points forward to.

Many of the chapters in this book rightly take stock of what has just passed. The simultaneous resurgence of Austen print adaptations seems unstoppable. A high-profile series of them, published by HarperCollins, invited bestselling, critically acclaimed novelists to rewrite Austen's stories in contemporary settings, in what was called "The Austen Project," as Daniel Cook's essay explains. (This series should not be confused with Kathleen Flynn's gripping time-travel novel, *The Jane Austen Project*.) Austen for the stage, too, experienced a revival, led by actor-playwright Kate Hamill's promise to adapt all six major novels, in order, a project that was paused—one hopes only briefly—by the pandemic. Another hallmark was the return of the Austen musical.<sup>5</sup> New films emerged, including Whit Stillman's tour de force *Love and Friendship*, the first feature-length adaptation of *Lady Susan*, as Nora Nachumi describes here in her piece.

Austen played a leading role in our classrooms during this period, as Misty Krueger's essay makes clear. The gender make-up of those classrooms, and other Janeite audiences, as well as the emergence of Regency costuming and cosplay, deserves scrutiny, according to Sarah Raff, as she explains in her essay. Beyond the classroom, historically informed scholarship on Austen never slowed down. If anything, it has intensified, as digital access and manuscript studies provide opportunities for new insights to understand Austen in context, as Emily Friedman shows us in her essay

<sup>5</sup> See Kate Hamill, *Sense and Sensibility*, New York, Dramatists' Play Service, 2016. On the musical, see Christopher Nagle, "The Problem of the Jane Austen Musical," *Women's Writing* (2018): 1-13. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09699082.2018.1510085>.

making sense of literary fragments and transformative fanfiction. To say that the 2010s were a galvanizing moment for Austen studies is to state the obvious.

Our looking back on this work ought not to imply that it must therefore be dying down. At the time of this writing, innovation continues, and important concerns have come to the fore in Austen-inspired pop culture. A wave of multicultural, multiethnic, and decidedly global Austen-inspired adaptations has been published. Haitian-born Ibi Zoboi's retelling of *Pride and Prejudice*, titled *Pride* (2018), is set in today's Brooklyn and features Zuri and Darius, instead of Elizabeth and Darcy. Soniah Kamal's beautiful, humorous, and moving *Unmarriageable* (2019), places its Austen-inspired characters, Alys and Darsee, in modern-day Pakistan. Uzma Jalaluddin's *Ayesha at Last* (2018) is a *Pride and Prejudice*-inspired novel set in Toronto's Muslim community, optioned for film.<sup>6</sup> Sonali Dev has published a series of Austen-inspired novels. Much more might be mentioned, and reports suggest more to come.

It's no accident that this wave of print works is reaching large audiences now, when questions of Austen, gender, race, age, ability, sexuality, ethnicity, and nation—past and present—rightly capture attention. Austen-inspired films perhaps led the way to print, among them Gurinder Chadha's English-language Bollywood film *Bride and Prejudice* (2004), Rajshree Ojha's Bollywood adaptation of *Emma*, *Aisha* (2010), and Rajiv Menon's *Kandukondain Kandukondain or I Have Found It* (2000), a Tamil language rewriting of *Sense and Sensibility*. Angel Garcia's *From Prada to Nada* (2011) was a Latina rewriting of *Sense and Sensibility*, set in contemporary Los Angeles. There is so much more one could say about Austen, the BBC *Sanditon*, and the arrival of *Bridgerton* on Netflix. (Wassif's essay in this volume touches on it.) It may suffice to note here that a number of twenty-first-century filmmakers have understood the power and possibility of telling Austen's stories in a more diverse range of settings, with color-conscious and color-blind casting. Audiences today are rightly demanding diverse and inclusive Regency-era content, as Kerry

<sup>6</sup> Ibi Zoboi, *Pride* (New York: HarperCollins, 2018); Soniah Kamal, *Unmarriageable: A Novel* (New York: Ballantine, 2019); Uzma Jalaluddin, *Ayesha at Last* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 2018). On the film rights, see Jane van Koeverden, "Film rights to Uzma Jalaluddin's *Ayesha at Last* acquired by Pascal Pictures," CBC, 28 August 2018. <https://www.cbc.ca/books/film-rights-to-uzma-jalaluddin-s-ayesha-at-last-acquired-by-pascal-pictures-1.4801933>.



Sinanan and Bianca Hernandez-Knight’s conversation in this volume points out.

These things are well worth celebrating and recognizing. Austen is no longer—and perhaps never was—a figure belonging only to privileged white male literati or to aspiring middle-class straight white girls and women. Her appeal has long been broader, with the implications of her fiction demonstrably wider. As I described in *The Making of Jane Austen*, the first Darcys to take the stage in the 1890s were female, meaning that the first on-stage love scenes acted out between a Darcy and an Elizabeth were likely between two female actors. Adaptation and performance history went through so many iterations before a hot actor strode around the English countryside in a wet white shirt. Then, too, there’s the fact that the queer performance history of Austen’s life story dates back at least to 1932.<sup>7</sup>

More work is needed, including on a Marathi-language adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, published in 1913. Its author, Kṛṣṇājī Keśava Gokhale, was a Kokanasth Brahmin who served as a judge and later as Divan of Jath. He calls his novel a rupantara—a conversion or a variation of *Pride and Prejudice*, with the title *Ājapāsūna pannāsa varshānū Āṅgla kādambarīkartrī “Jena Ōṣṭina” yāñcyā “Prāīda eṇḍa prejudisa” yā kādambarīcē rūpāntara*. Gokhale explains that his title may be translated “Fifty Years from Today,” because he sees Austen’s fiction as a blueprint for a more class- and gender-egalitarian future.<sup>8</sup> Jane Austen’s fiction was, is, and remains, a literary focal point for imagining heritage, inheritance, and handing-down, in positive possibilities and limiting shortcomings, in many nations and categories of identity.

Following the remarkable decade of attention, adaptation, and reflection in the 2010s, then, *Austen After 200* is an excellent, timely, and welcome book, because it takes stock and it ignites conversation. This fine collection of essays is proof that we haven’t (yet?) left Austen behind. I owe much to the friend who brought the above epigraph to my attention.

<sup>7</sup>On female Darcys and queer Austen-inspired stage performances, see Devoney Looser, *The Making of Jane Austen* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017). See, too, Devoney Looser, “Queering the Work of Jane Austen is Nothing New,” *The Atlantic*, 21 July 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2017/07/queering-the-work-of-jane-austen-is-nothing-new/533418/>

<sup>8</sup>I discuss this work briefly in *The Making of Jane Austen* and in Devoney Looser, “Emma Woodhouse is Your Friend,” *Outlook (India)*, 6 November 2017. <https://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/emma-woodhouse-is-your-friend/299469>

It is the narrator's line about heroine Anne Elliot, near the end of *Persuasion*: "She left it all behind her, all but the recollection that such things had been."<sup>9</sup> After my friend recalled this line to me, we exchanged thoughts on what it meant to notice it anew now, especially at our own significant life transitions, of milestone beginnings and endings. Anne Elliot's steadfast, stoical, and nostalgic "recollection that such things had been" serves as a beautiful tribute to time passed, as well as to the restorative and painful parts of remembering and forgetting things that bring comfort, as well as those that make us rightly uncomfortable.

Austen's Regency era is certainly well past. Austenian anniversaries are now passing, as we head into the 2025 sestercentennial of her birth. But, for many of us, her novels remain vividly present, pointing toward the future. As I like to tell my students, Austen's novels have, for a very long time, inspired individual readers to ask better questions about how to live a meaningful life in a world that is deeply unfair. It's true that Austen's comic novels don't set out to provide a blueprint for remaking the world's flawed and unjust institutions. I believe there are hints in that direction in her texts, for those looking for them. Reasonable people may disagree.

In any case, this collection of essays, put together by three visionary co-editors and first-rate scholars, is not a blueprint either. Its chapters, taken together, raise questions and spark debate, more often than they provide pat answers. *Austen After 200* offers us a series of sophisticated and thoughtful ways to look back on a remarkable author's posthumous travels across the 2010s. Whether you read this book from cover to cover, or dip in where you like, you should find that its contents, like Austen's fiction itself, inspire opportunities for productive glimpses inward, outward, and forward, for recollections and remakings yet to come.

Tempe, AZ, USA

Devoney Looser

<sup>9</sup>Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, ed. Janet Todd and Antje Blank (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 133.

## PREFACE

The idea to collect together in one volume a range of voices in different and new reading spaces on Jane Austen emerged as various events commemorating Austen's bicentenaries that ran from 2013–2017 were underway. As each novel reached its 200th anniversary of publication, so too did Austen's own untimely death reach its bicentenary on July 18, 2017, commemorated by readers in academia, fandoms, digispheres and bookclubs alike even as they felt the absence of the novels she might have written as she lived longer. Austen is now more popular, highly regarded and prolific of other works, crafts, adaptations and critical approaches than ever. The second series of her unfinished novel, *Sanditon*, is in production as we put the finishing touches to this volume, one of the many adaptations that the bicentenaries have given rise to. This collection's purpose is to show that new spaces for reading Austen continue to develop as we move into a more multi-media world and that the collective of voices that contribute to these spaces need to be heard in conversation with one another. Austen's novels show us the dangers of keeping our circles too small and have shown themselves to be robust adaptors to multi-generic, heterogeneous readings. In the spirit of celebrating this profusion, rather than seeking to curb or dismiss it, we gather essays from a range of reading spaces to show how we are all adapting as we continue to read.

San Antonio, TX, USA  
Plymouth; Dundee, UK

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The editors are very grateful for the ongoing support given to this volume by Professor Devoney Looser whose belief in the concept never wavered. We would also like to thank Chawton House and the Chawton House library for offering so much to many contributors here. Annika and Daniel would like to thank Kerry for the initiation of the project: the volume would never have existed without her energy, passion and generosity.

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## CHAPTER 1

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# Introduction

*Kerry Sinanan, Annika Bautz, and Daniel Cook*

This volume shows how new spaces for engaging with Jane Austen have emerged and evolved since the bicentenaries. These spaces are much more interlocking and related than is usually acknowledged by scholarly publications: the collection itself is therefore a physical space in which essays written by academics, and readers and writers from other realms, have been deliberately put together and brought into conversation. The actual collecting of the essays has been consciously undertaken to refuse the binaries of popular and “high” culture, or of “criticism” and fandom, within Austen discourse, and to show that, while we might talk about Austen in different ways, these are ultimately strands of thinking and producing that feed into and influence each other. Gillian Dow and

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Switzerland AG 2023

K. Sinanan et al. (eds.), *Austen After 200*,  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-08372-3\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-08372-3_1)

Clare Hanson remind their largely academic audience that “in these competitive days for academic scholarship, there may be considerable advantages in working on such a popular canonical author.”<sup>1</sup> The present collection goes further to try to dismantle the “popular”/ “academic” divide so that our conversations can merge and forge a more open community. Many events that occurred throughout the bicentenaries have inspired the curation of the essays you find here. Moreover, the essays themselves consider different spaces in which Austen is read and how these impact our engagement with the novels, from classroom to conference, from blog to review.

The initial idea for this collection began in 2013 in the Arnolfini Theatre, Bristol, UK, at a public event organized by Kerry Sinanan and her colleagues at the University of the West of England, “Reading Jane Austen: *Pride and Prejudice* (1813).” It aimed to create a space for readers and fans of Austen to talk with English and Film lecturers in order to share ideas about adaptation, reading the novels, and the ever-burgeoning Austen cultures that we could see forming around the bicentenaries. Seth Grahame-Smith’s *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* had been published in 2009, and it was already clear that the bicentenary celebrations to take place over the coming years would extend Austen’s readerships into territories where even, or especially, devotees might fear to tread. The explicit goal was to break down barriers and hierarchies between academic readings of Austen and public readings, and to explore what brought us to her books and their afterlives.

There was also an institutional driver behind the event, which was to prove that our research and subject, English Literature, had what the Research Excellence Framework in the UK had now termed “impact”. This new governmental measurement of research output had, by the early 2010s, moved from being a category used to assess citation rates, to being about “socio-economic worth”. Impact was defined as research “with *reach* and *significance* on the economy, business, civil society, government and on public and policy debates”.<sup>2</sup> As this category of measuring the output of universities became tethered to notions of productivity and

<sup>1</sup>“The uses of Jane are multiple: this collection picks through just some of their twentieth and twenty-first-century manifestations” (*Uses of Austen: Jane’s Afterlives*, ed. Gillian Dow and Clare Hanson [Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012], 14).

<sup>2</sup>Richard Watermeyer, “Impact in the REF: issues and obstacles,” *Studies in Higher Education*, 41.2 (2016), 199–214 (199).

usefulness, humanities subjects like English Literature found themselves having to adapt to new metrics to show how books, reading, and literary and media cultures could be measured as having “reach and significance”. All of this might seem to have nothing at all to do with Jane Austen but it is important to note this sector context, contemporary with the bicentenaries. Austen herself has become what Diane Sadoff calls a global “product brand” marketed in multiplexes, museums, and multi-media industries, as well as in quiet Bath bookshops.<sup>3</sup> While post-millennial Austen pop-culture, digital fandoms, and adaptation cultures are driven by commodification, so too are the universities in which she is studied: ivory towers no more, if they ever were. Inside and outside of academia, Austen, and those of us reading her work, are embedded within neoliberal capitalist forces that, while they proliferate Austen’s afterlives and create new generations of readers, often seem to threaten what readers in all spaces might hold dear—the novels themselves. In organizing the day at the Arnolfini it felt as if we might unravel the institutional demands upon us and, in the final session in which we focused on the beauties of Austen’s free indirect discourse in a shared close reading exercise, it seemed like we might have escaped “the white glare” of commodity culture altogether.<sup>4</sup>

Acknowledging the socio-economic contexts inside and outside of the university and literati is important because while the many spaces in which Austen is appreciated may have “multiple” “uses” to which they put her work, they are all determined, to a large extent, by these contexts.<sup>5</sup> Yet the economic realities surrounding the “Reading Jane Austen” day in 2013 did not determine its outcome nor those of many of the bicentenary events that were used to capitalize on Austen during the rest of the 2010s. Most attendees, notably, were writing books related to Austen and adaptations. One woman was focusing on the untold story of Mary Bennet, who, she felt, had not been treated entirely fairly by either Austen or her readers. But industry and capital were not the motivation (even if they were the conditions) for these readers and writers of Austen, even if the evidence of a profitable world of spin-offs might tempt any academic, like Janet Todd, to turn to writing fiction. This day offered an opportunity to show that literature, particularly Austen’s novels, did have a non-economic kind of

<sup>3</sup> Dianne F. Sadoff, “Marketing Jane Austen at the Megaplex,” *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 43.1 (2010): 83–92.

<sup>4</sup> Austen, *Persuasion*, Chapter 5.

<sup>5</sup> Dow and Hanson, *Uses of Austen*, 15.

impact that matters to a wide range of people, and not just to academics in their own echo chamber. It was to be followed by many others during the bicentenaries that commingled academic, scholarly spaces with fandom and multi-media Austenites; and the idea grew that this aspect of bicentenary culture deserved a collection of essays that did not just analyse, but that also properly represented the diverse voices in those spaces. The essays in this volume come from a range of Austen spaces: blogs, podcasts, costuming, review culture, adaptation debates, museums, curation, heritage, and academic criticism too, to consider how, in each case, a return to reading the novels is prompted by new ways of engaging with the many artefacts and media produced by Austen cultures.

English professors are well aware that their students come to Austen via adaptation and pop culture, and that she, more than any other author they might study, is situated within an enormously varied set of debates and cultural conversations globally. In her book *The Making of Jane Austen* (2017), which tracks the history of how the Austen we engage with today was made as a complex cultural icon, Devoney Looser notes: “Jane Austen has been and remains a figure at the vanguard of reinforcing tradition *and* promoting social change.”<sup>6</sup> The paradoxes around Austen have never been more apparent, then: conservative but radical, classic yet malleable, an iconic repository of British literary value, yet a global commodity that moulds into endless forms in the textual and the digisphere, the epitome of romance, yet also the Regency period’s sharpest wit, rhetorically severing the heads of aristocrats from their stultified bodies. Austen’s generative force is burgeoning after the bicentenaries, and this collection registers her persisting relevance across a range of worlds that make up the Austen universe.

At many Austen events, such as those of the Jane Austen Societies of North America, the UK, and Australia, academics and fans share the same spaces physically, and present alongside one another. JASNA’s peer-reviewed journal, *Persuasions*, provides an online space for essays by a range of writers, and so the essays here further represent that meeting of Austen worlds which has only grown after the bicentenaries. While there has been much important recent work on adaptations and afterlives, notably *Janeites: Austen’s Disciples and Devotees* (2000), edited by Deidre Lynch, *Uses of Austen: Jane’s Afterlives* (2012), edited by Gillian Dow and

<sup>6</sup> Devoney Looser, *The Making of Jane Austen* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017), 3.

Clare Hanson, *The Making of Jane Austen* (2017) by Devoney Looser, and *After Austen: Reinventions, Rewritings, Revisitings* (2018), edited by Lisa Hopkins, there has simultaneously been a steady stream of books that show how Austen continues to be an exemplary subject of literary high theory and criticism, such as *Jane Austen and Critical Theory* (2021), edited by Michael Kramp, *Jane Austen and Literary Theory* (2021) by Shawn Normandin, and *Jane Austen and Science of the Mind* (2017), edited by Beth Lau.

The newest theoretical paradigms are elucidated by reading Austen even as global meme culture thrives on her. Laurence W. Mazzeno's *Jane Austen: Two Centuries of Criticism* (2011) discusses the "immense number of critical works" for readers beyond academia as well as within. Mazzeno notes the potential blurring of boundaries between scholarly criticism and other forms that take place in the Austenverse:

Later in the twenty-first century, it may be that distinguishing between written academic criticism and more imaginative forms of interpretation—especially as that practice is being influenced by the Internet—will be largely irrelevant. But for now, the distinction still seems worth making, as Austen's fiction continues to be read and written about within the academic community, even more so than in the decades past.<sup>7</sup>

At the Arnolfini it appeared as if we could see this distinction becoming, not less clear, but perhaps less necessary. And other events proved that this merging of critical spaces was being forged during the bicentenary celebrations. At the celebration of *Pride and Prejudice* organized by Janet Todd at Lucy Cavendish College, Cambridge, in June 2013, both academics and other readers presented their papers dressed as zombies or in Regency ball costumes; and we enjoyed talks from P.D. James on her sequel *Death Comes to Pemberley* (2011). In the present volume criticism is written in different styles appropriate to the arguments outlined, but offers equally valuable insights. Questioning learned response dictated by theoretical frameworks is indeed something that Austen's work does: Catherine Norland's readings of Gothic literature turn out, after all, to be more useful to her than Henry Tilney's academic lectures on the picturesque. Two hundred years after Austen's death, debates in Austen studies

<sup>7</sup> Laurence W. Mazzeno, *Jane Austen and Two Centuries of Criticism* (New York: Camden House, 2017), 4.

and Austen popular culture are ever expanding, in scope, topic, location, and type. Yet while opinions and approaches vary greatly, and have come to be more often based on cultural constructions of “Austen” than on the texts themselves, some of the themes discussed in relation to her, particularly gender and realism, have remained remarkably stable and continue to inform engagements with her, her texts, and the multitude of spin-offs. Gender continues to be the lens through which Austen is most frequently seen, as a feminist and a “radical woman” who raises “key issues women are still fighting today: women’s right to education; to not be confined to the private, domestic sphere; to have financial independence and equal opportunities to men.”<sup>8</sup> Similarly, the focus is frequently on what is seen as Austen’s realistic depiction of the quotidian, “of people and their problems, their dysfunctional families, why, and even if, women should marry,” connecting realism and gender, and again emphasizing that “those issues were relevant then, and they’re relevant now.”<sup>9</sup> Other themes that often come up include humour and comedy, politics, history, class, marriage, race, and colonialism. Increasingly, discussions take place on why she is so enduringly popular, and how and where that popularity manifests itself. Lionel Trilling asserted over sixty years ago that “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.”<sup>10</sup>

Academic studies and more popular fora alike discuss how Austen is used. *The Making of Jane Austen* and *Uses of Austen* place Austen in a critical history. *Jane Austen: Two Centuries of Criticism* probes the paradoxes that Austen discourse produces: “Do we read Austen to flee modernity, or to see it clearly?” or “Why is it that Austen and her novels still matter in

<sup>8</sup> Emily Broughton, “Romance and Radicalism: Why the works of Jane Austen are still relevant,” 13 March 2021, <https://www.theoxfordblue.co.uk/2021/03/13/romance-and-radicalism-why-the-works-of-jane-austen-are-still-relevant/> [accessed 14 July 2021]; Lorna Stevens, “Jane Austen, feminism and the future,” 19 March 2018, <https://blogs.bath.ac.uk/business-and-society/2018/03/19/feminism-and-the-future/> [accessed 14 May 2021].

<sup>9</sup> Marilyn Joice, cited in Jodie Halford, “Why is Jane Austen trending 200 years after her death?” <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-40644085>, 18 July 2017 [accessed 14 May 2021].

<sup>10</sup> Lionel Trilling, “*Emma* and the Legend of Jane Austen,” in *Beyond Culture: Essays on Literature and Learning* (London, 1965).



today's society?"<sup>11</sup> Two hundred years after Austen's death, these questions are more widely debated than ever, though they are asked in a variety of ways, usually one of three: a more self-reflexive way of why we continue to engage Austen, in a more absolute way that asks what about her is relevant or timeless, and a third that is primarily concerned with *how* we have engaged, and are continuing to engage, with Austen. The answers to these questions also vary. Rachel Brownstein, for example, claims that "such matters as class, gender, and nation [are Austen's] themes and ours, partly because her novels have informed our culture,"<sup>12</sup> while Nicholas Dames explores what it is about Austen that makes her relevant in an absolute sense, on the assumption that she always has been so: "Two centuries is a long time to be contemporary, long enough for us to wonder what exactly keeps her so."<sup>13</sup> By contrast, Looser, in a very different way, shows how different groups of people, now and then, have appropriated Austen to suit their readings: while elite men in early twentieth-century London clubs read her as a "safe" author, suffragists marched the streets of London with Jane Austen's name on a banner, together exemplifying both conservative and change-promoting uses of Austen.<sup>14</sup> She has, and continues to be, interpreted, adapted, and made central to the contemporary debates of different cultures and groups.

The author and her works have been conflated or at least held with equal interest: for example, the Jane Austen Society of North America's descriptor reads: "The Jane Austen Society of North America is dedicated to the appreciation of Jane Austen and her writing. Join us in celebrating her life and works." In this case her life even precedes her writing. Based in the UK, the Jane Austen Society's "main aim is to foster the appreciation and study of the work, life and times of Jane Austen, and the Austen family," again emphasizing a focus much broader than that of simply the

<sup>11</sup>Looser, *The Making of Jane Austen; Uses of Austen*, ed. Dow and Hanson; Laurence Mazzeno, *Jane Austen*; Nicholas Dames, "Jane Austen is Everything," September 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/09/jane-austen-is-everything/534186/> [accessed 14 July 2021]; Hannah Kinglsey, "What Makes Jane Austen Relevant to Modern Society?" <https://www.digitalausten.org/node/50> June 2017 [accessed 15 July 2021].

<sup>12</sup>Rachel Brownstein, *Why Jane Austen?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 8.

<sup>13</sup>Dames, "Jane Austen is Everything," [accessed 14 July 2021].

<sup>14</sup>Looser, *The Making of Jane Austen*, Chapters 8 and 9.

works.<sup>15</sup> Her name continues to denote a historical period and helps to make this period interesting for modern readers—note, for example, the recently published history book *England in the Age of Jane Austen*, or literary-critical titles such as *The Novel Stage: Narrative Form from the Restoration to Jane Austen*. We also have studies that are only connected to Austen through the period they are about, such as *Gentlemen of Uncertain Fortune: How Younger Sons Made Their Way in Jane Austen's England*, in which Rory Muir explores the fates of known and unknown younger sons in early nineteenth-century Britain.<sup>16</sup>

Other uses of Austen include Christian and spiritual guides, such as Natasha Duquette's *30-Day Journey with Jane Austen*, which describes the Regency author as one of “our greatest spiritual thinkers.”<sup>17</sup> Scholarly engagement continues to take a range of forms, from cognitive literary studies, to books exploring material cultures, to studies of her style.<sup>18</sup> The number and variety of enquiries is exemplified by the diversity of titles of books, articles, blogs, and websites: *Jane Austen and the Reformation*, *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment*, *Jane Austen and the Navy*, *Jane Austen and Literary Theory*, *Jane Austen and the State*, *Jane Austen and the Province of Womanhood*, *Austen and the Mobility of Woman*, *Jane Austen and her Readers*, *Jane Austen and her Time*, *Jane Austen and her World*, *Jane Austen and Food*, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, *Jane Austen and Abolition*, *Jane Austen and the Gothic*, *Jane Austen and Classical Music*, *Jane Austen and Comedy*, *Jane Austen and Masculinity*, *Jane Austen and the Body*, *Jane Austen and Charles Darwin*, *Jane Austen and the Clergy*, and *Jane Austen and the Gentry*, among them.

The canonical six novels (and some of the less well-known materials) continue to be read and adapted, and spun off, in increasingly diverse fora. Still associated with conventional reading spaces (schools, universities,

<sup>15</sup> JASNA, <http://jasna.org> [accessed 15 July 2021]; <https://janeaustensociety.org.uk> [accessed 15 July 2021].

<sup>16</sup> Jeremy Black, *England in the Age of Jane Austen* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2021); Frank Marcie, *The Novel Stage: Narrative Form from the Restoration to Jane Austen* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2020); Rory Muir, *Gentlemen of Uncertain Fortune: How Younger Sons Made Their Way in Jane Austen's England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

<sup>17</sup> Natasha Duquette, *30-Day Journey with Jane Austen* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2020).

<sup>18</sup> For example: Beth Lau, *Jane Austen and the Sciences of the Mind* (London: Routledge, 2020); *Art and Artifact in Jane Austen*, ed. Anna Battigelli (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2020); Joe Bray, *The Language of Jane Austen* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).