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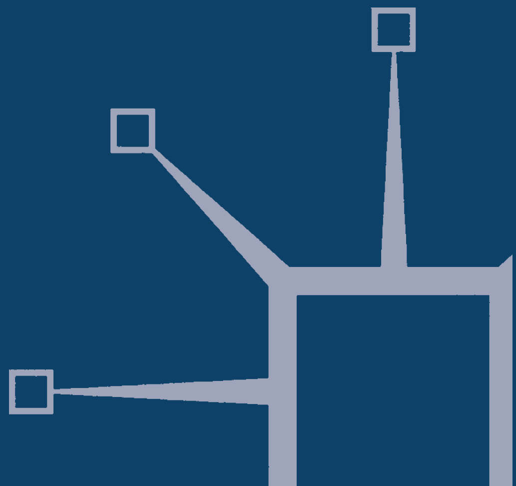
# Uses of Austen

## Jane's Afterlives

Edited by
Gillian Dow and Clare Hanson



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VIRGINIA WOOLF

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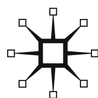

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# Introduction

*Gillian Dow and Clare Hanson*

In her classic essay on 'Austen cults and cultures', Claudia L. Johnson explains that its focus is on 'the uses to which we have put [Austen] and her achievement'.[1] John Wiltshire also invokes the term 'use' in his study *Recreating Jane Austen*, although for him it is a word that 'oscillates between exploitation and honourable deployment'.[2] Wiltshire's comment bears traces of the concern about fidelity that marked earlier analysis of film adaptation and that, as we shall see, has a long history in discussions about translations, adaptations and reworkings of Austen's texts. However, the contributors to this volume share Deidre Lynch's conviction that the questions raised by the cultural uses of Jane Austen are more significant and more intriguing than debates over the fidelity or otherwise of individual recreations.[3] Austen has for decades been a crossover author, bridging high and low culture, and more recently 'Jane Austen' has morphed into a cultural signifier with global recognition. In response to this phenomenon, the essays in this volume explore the values that Austen's life and works can be made to represent in diverse cultural contexts. They engage too with the history of her literary reputation and with her construction as a canonical author, and examine the long-standing tension that has existed between the responses of her 'common readers' (to borrow Virginia Woolf's term) and the views of the literary-critical establishment, a tension that has been strongly marked by gender.

There is a frequently quoted letter from Jane Austen to her niece Anna written in September 1814 that shows Austen's mock indignation on learning that Walter Scott is about to publish his first novel, *Waverley*:

> Walter Scott has no business to write novels, especially good ones. – it is not fair. – He has Fame & Profit enough as a Poet, and should

> not be taking the bread out of other people's mouths. – I do not like him, & do not mean to like Waverley if I can help it – but fear I must. – I am quite determined however not to be pleased with Mrs West's Alicia de Lacy, should I ever meet with it, which I hope I may not. – I think I *can* be stout against any thing written by Mrs West. – I have made up my mind to like no Novels really, but Miss Edgeworth's, Yours & my own.[4]

This extract is revealing of Austen's interest in, and knowledge of, the literary marketplace of 1814. It has been used by literary historians and by critics to demonstrate variously her mentoring relationship with some of her nieces and nephews, her professionalism, her acerbic wit, her sense of rivalry with Scott and her superiority over Jane West. Here we turn the quotation to a different use. By aligning herself with her would-be novelist niece, Anna, and the most popular woman novelist of her day, Maria Edgeworth, and with her rejection of Scott, Jane Austen situates herself firmly within a community of women writers. This quotation takes on increased importance when we remember, thanks to Kathryn Sutherland's scrupulous editing of the various Austen memoirs and biographies written by her brother and her brothers' descendants, that the first published version of this letter replaced the 'Yours' with 'James's', changing the emphasis on the female tradition. Similarly, Henry Austen's first 'Biographical Notice' of his sister published just after her death in 1818 praises her as the author of 'those novels, which by many have been placed on the same shelf as the works of a D'Arblay and an Edgeworth'.[5] In subsequent editions of this 'Biographical Notice', the reference to D'Arblay (Burney) and Edgeworth disappeared.

Yet Austen did privilege these women writers of novels, despite her family's insistence on her deep love of Richardson, *Sir Charles Grandison* in particular. In *Northanger Abbey*, Austen sets the authors of *Cecilia*, *Camilla* and *Belinda* against 'the abilities of the nine-hundredth abridger of the History of England, or of the man who collects and publishes in a volume some dozen lines of Milton, Pope, and Prior, with a paper from the Spectator, and a chapter from Sterne'.[6] It is in part this 'defense' of women writers – her 'laughing feminism', to appropriate the title of Audrey Bilger's 1998 study of Burney, Edgeworth and Austen[7] – that has attracted women readers throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But there are naturally many other reasons why women writers, critics, directors and actors, bloggers, teachers and students continue to be inspired and provoked by Jane Austen, and indeed 'Jane Austen'. The

essays in this volume examine the myriad responses of what we may broadly call the 'contemporary' to Austen's writing and, more generally, to her life and times.

In the introduction to his *Recreating Jane Austen*, John Wiltshire claimed that '[r]emaking, rewriting, "adaptation", reworking, "appropriation", conversion, mimicking (the proliferation of terms suggests how nebulous and ill-defined is the arena) of earlier work into other media is an important feature of the current landscape'.[8] In terms of the responses of women writers to Austen's work, however, the tradition has much deeper roots, which stretch back to the first Franco-Swiss translator of Austen's novels in 1815. The landscape of early nineteenth-century Switzerland was far removed from the twentieth- and twenty-first-century landscapes that this volume investigates. But in some ways, the preoccupations of the first female reader of Austen who has left a record of her sustained engagement with the novels are remarkably similar to those female voices that this volume traces through subsequent generations. The predominantly female-authored texts of the 'Austen industry' that is situated firmly in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century – the prequels and sequels, the Austen-inspired genre fiction including detective stories, murder-mysteries and time-travel novels, the film and television adaptations and the Austen self-help guides – have their ancestor in Austen's own lifetime.

Isabelle de Montolieu's translation of *Sense and Sensibility*, a 'traduction libre' or free translation in her own words, was published in 1815. Montolieu (1751–1832) was a novelist in her own right: such was her celebrity Europe wide in 1815 when her translation *Raison et Sensibilité* appeared that the anonymous English author Jane Austen was, as Valérie Cossy has pointed out, 'sure to be eclipsed by her translator'.[9] In the preface to her translation, Montolieu tells her reader that the English author is undoubtedly a woman writer, because of her ability to 'penetrate, with so much detail and with truth, women's hearts'. The attraction for Montolieu, then, is that this unknown English writer shares her preoccupation and concern with the lives of women at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries. Several critics have argued with varying degrees of indignation that the changes Montolieu makes to Austen's source text are little more than blasphemies. Certainly, a close reading of the translation demonstrates that Montolieu adapts and distorts the text throughout, changing both narrative and conversation, and forcing Austen's prose to meet contemporary Franco-Swiss tastes for *sensibilité*. Most importantly, Montolieu radically changes the ending of the novel: Willoughby transfers his affections back to Marianne, who then

discovers that she truly loves Brandon in a remarkable scene where she unveils her feelings; the 'conversion' of Willoughby is complete when he marries the second Eliza, Brandon's ward, thus legitimizing their child. Montolieu's ending has none of the loose ends of Austen's, and clearly demonstrates her discomfort with Marianne's 'extraordinary fate', a fate that has troubled generations of women readers, critics and film makers. It is worth noting that the French filmgoer who was prompted to buy a translation of *Sense and Sensibility* after having seen Ang Lee and Emma Thompson's 1996 adaptation of the novel would have bought a re-edition of Montolieu's free translation: Alan Rickman's distinguished portrayal of Brandon makes the Marianne/Brandon relationship just as palatable for a modern viewer with an appetite for romance as Montolieu's altered ending made it acceptable for an early nineteenth-century Franco-swiss reader with a taste for European Romanticism. In her essay on the uses of translation for foreign readers of Austen in the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries, Gillian Dow identifies a global Austen who is constructed by her translators, and whose global reception as 'classic' or 'world' literature follows a complicated trajectory.

One can read Montolieu's 'translation' as marking the starting point of a long tradition of female receptions of Austen's novels that involve the creative reinterpretation of a fellow woman artist. Indeed, Montolieu's engagement with *Sense and Sensibility* was not unique in the European translations of Austen's novels. In a recent work on translation in France and England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Julie Candler Hayes signals 'a small, but distinct, trend' of what she identifies as 'gynocentric translation'; that is, translations by women of women's writing.[10] In terms of Austen's reception outside of Anglo-American culture, 'gynocentric translations' loom large: of the nineteenth-century translations of Austen (into French, German, Swedish and Danish), a high proportion were undertaken by women, and women writers at that.[11] In twentieth-century Europe, Austen's appeal is frequently linked explicitly to feminist concerns. As Peter Mortensen writes in an essay on Jane Austen's reception in Denmark:

> The most recent wave of new Danish Austen translations all appeared within a few years in the mid-1970s […] It can hardly escape notice that all the new translators of Austen were women, and indeed there is a suggestive historical coincidence between the dates of the new Austen revival (1974–78) and the emergence of the women's movement in Denmark. […] Several of the new translators, not coincidentally, were active in the women's movement, and one,

> Eva Hemmer Hansen, chaired the Danish Women's Society (Dansk Kvindeselskab) from 1968 to 1970.[12]

Marie Sørbø, in an essay 'Jane Austen and Norway', points out that despite Austen's obscurity in early twentieth-century Norway, 'she was at least recognized by our most famous female novelist of the early twentieth century and winner of the 1928 Nobel Prize, Sigrid Undset'.[13] The first Serbian translation of Austen was by a woman, Danica S. Jankovic, who translated *Persuasion* in 1929. Jankovic was 'a highly educated woman, who graduated in Yugoslav and comparative literature, French and English, from the University of Belgrade (1918–22), studied in London and Oxford (1922–24), published her works on folk dancing in leading Yugoslav and foreign journals and translated books from English and French'; this, Svetozar Koljevic tells us, 'set the elitist academic, social, publishing and feminine patterns for several succeeding decades'.[14] In a study of Jane Austen's fiction in Slovenia, Vanesa Matajc points out that late twentieth-century 'Slovene responses to Austen as a classic author may have been partly prompted by feminist research, which aimed to recover the value of neglected women writers'.[15] There is significant evidence that women writers think back through their continental sisters, particularly in nations that do not have a recognizable tradition of women's writing, or where such a tradition is only just being reinvestigated. It is noticeable, too, that while male critics may be the first to publish 'appreciations' of Austen, it is women writers who publish creative responses and reworkings in their own fiction. In Japan, the great critic, professor of the University of Tokyo and novelist Natsume Soseki (1867–1916) is customarily credited with the popularizing of Austen in that country. He declared in his *Theory of Literature* that 'anyone who is unable to appreciate Austen will be unable to understand the beauty of realism'.[16] It is, however, Japanese women writers who have used Austen to creative ends. Nogami Yaeko's serialized novel *Machiko* (1928–30) creates a Japanese, socialist Elizabeth Bennet.[17] Later in the twentieth century, the experimental novelist Kurahashi Yumiko's *The Bridge of Dreams* (1971) sees the female protagonist, Keiko, writing a graduate thesis on Austen, and intertwines Austen's world with classical Japanese women's fiction. The novel is, Ebine Hiroshi points out, an experiment that 'introduces the unreal, the transgressive, and the erotic into Austenian domestic realism, resulting in a radical mutation of the Austen model'.[18]

In Anglophone culture, too, there have been significant disjunctions between the Austen constructed by professional critics and the responses

of women writers and readers. R.W. Chapman took the first step towards professionalizing Austen studies with his 1923 edition of the novels, published by the Clarendon Press at the very point when the academic discipline of English was emerging as a respectable alternative to the classics. Austen's reputation was strengthened by the growing prestige of English studies, while Chapman's linking of Austen with the classical tradition established continuities between the new classics and the old. In his edition, the methods that had been developed for the editing of Greek and Latin texts were for the first time applied to an English author, and the level of textual scrutiny to which the novels were subjected itself became a guarantee of their cultural value. In addition, the choices Chapman made in his extensive annotations to the texts ensured that Austen became more closely aligned with neoclassical rather than romantic values; her work was also firmly located in what Chapman perceived to be *the* major English literary tradition – Shakespeare, Milton and Johnson. As Kathryn Sutherland dryly notes, 'there is no suggestion that she shared literary or intellectual aspirations with a contemporary circle of female writers'.[19] Austen's reputation was further enhanced through the championing of her work by F.R. Leavis, whose influential *The Great Tradition* (1948) opens with the pronouncement: 'The great English novelists are Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James, and Joseph Conrad'. In this study, Leavis aims to create a tradition for the novel analogous to that which T.S. Eliot had created for poetry. Indeed, he borrows the terms of Eliot's argument in 'Tradition and the individual talent' to make the case for Austen as 'one of the truly great writers', drawing attention to the 'retroactive' effect of her novels in reshaping our view of her predecessors; he also stresses her 'impersonality' as well as her moral intensity.[20]

In contrast to this emphasis on the impersonality of the author – and the critic – twentieth-century women writers responded eagerly to what Virginia Woolf saw as Austen's direct invitation to readers and writers to enter into her novels and 'supply what is not there'.[21] In her earliest essay on Austen, Woolf describes the ease with which Austen's characters 'move out of the scenes in which she placed them into other moods and circumstances' and imagines a social occasion where

> if someone begins to talk about Emma Woodhouse or Elizabeth Bennet voices from different parts of the room begin saying which they prefer and why, and how they differ, and how they might have acted if one had been at Box Hill and the other at Rosings, and where they live, and how their houses are disposed, as if they were living people.[22]

As Emily Auerbach has suggested, Woolf here seems to have anticipated without anxiety a future in which Austen's novels would be transposed to California and Amritsar, and Jane Austen Society of North America conferences would be 'filled with devoted readers arguing over characters'.[23] And just as Woolf endorses the emotional investment of readers in Austen's characters, so Katherine Mansfield captures with warmth and wit their relationship to the imaginary author, writing that 'the truth is every true admirer of the novels cherishes the happy thought that he alone – reading between the lines – has become the secret friend of their author'.[24] For Woolf, Austen is 'the most perfect artist among women', and both she and Rebecca West align Austen with Shakespeare.[25] It is the unqualified nature of their admiration, perhaps, that licenses the multiple uses that modernist and inter-modernist women writers make of Austen, a topic addressed by Deidre Lynch in the opening essay of this volume, which considers the ramifications of the early twentieth-century invention of an 'Augustan Austen', and by Maroula Joannou, who discusses the reconfiguration of Austen's texts during and after the Second World War.

Austen was a key point of reference for women writers at mid-century, the fiction of Elizabeth Taylor being exemplary in this respect. Her second novel *Palladian* (1946) is set in a decaying country house, originally a medieval manor that was extended in the eighteenth century with the addition of a neoclassical façade.[26] As the orphaned protagonist Cassandra Dashwood explores the house, she is confronted by the history of social change that it embodies, and through the inhabitants of the house she also encounters competing cultural traditions, ranging from a taste for ancient Greek to a love of Hollywood movies and their stars. And as Cassandra negotiates her path between the classical and the romantic, high and low culture, Taylor undertakes a critical assessment of the uses of Austen in the context of the Second World War. In this text, the heroine takes a wrong turn because she is seduced by the faux-classical world of her employer Marion Vanbrugh, an effete gentleman-scholar; the destructive implications of his inertia are demonstrated when a crumbling statue kills his daughter Sophy. In sharp contrast to Marion are an eclectic mix of female characters who engage energetically with a more pragmatic (classical) Austen, ranging from Cassandra's old headmistress, author of *The Classical Tradition* and reliable source of hot bedtime drinks, to 'Nanny', the snobbish old servant who nonetheless makes sure that Sophy enjoys the Hollywood film version of *Pride and Prejudice*. Through her allusion to the 1940 film, Taylor also registers a crucial moment in the development of Austen's

fame, as her best-known novel was co-opted both for quasi-military and for mass commercial interests. The film, part scripted by Aldous Huxley and starring Greer Garson and Laurence Olivier, was seen by millions; it has also been interpreted by many critics as a piece of wartime propaganda designed to get the United States into the war as England's ally. Troost and Greenfield, among others, have drawn attention to the way in which the transformation of Austen's text into a screwball comedy worked to align supposedly English values with those of contemporary America.[27]

In addition, Taylor's reference to the film introduces a note of bathos that is pervasive in allusions to Austen in postwar women's writing. In Taylor's 1951 novel *A Game of Hide and Seek*, for example, in which the Austen intertext is *Persuasion*, the efforts of estranged lovers to rekindle their adolescent passion are thwarted by the sordid setting of their long-deferred tryst. For Harriet (the Anne Elliot figure), the mere sight of their hotel room creates a 'dismay so private, so profound that she could scarcely breathe', replete as it is with the evidence of similar assignations among a 'litter of match-sticks and cigarette-ends'.[28] In Barbara Pym's *No Fond Return of Love* (1961), the key moment in *Persuasion* when the sea breeze restores 'the bloom and freshness of youth' to Anne Elliot is reworked in a cool and deflationary mode. Like Anne, the protagonist of Pym's novel runs into the man she loves in a West Country resort. She is aware that the wind has 'whipped some colour into her normally pale cheeks', and reflects that if this had happened in a novel, 'he would have been struck by how handsome she looked'. However, 'he' is merely puzzled by her presence in this out-of-the-way spot and when it starts to rain, ungallantly suggests that she joins the 'disgruntled-looking occupants' of a crowded shelter, leaving him free to return to the comfort of his own home.[29] For writers like Pym and Taylor, such invocations of Austen serve a dual purpose. First, they suggest a disparity between the comfort of the past and the harsh conditions of life in postwar Britain. They also point to concerns about gender roles, which were changing as a result of women's increased access to education and employment. This opened up the prospect of greater independence but also created new tensions, as it was thought that women would have to choose between a career and marriage. Such anxieties were matched by male fears about readjustment to civilian life after six years away from the home front. In this context, Austen's fiction operates as a signifier of more traditional gender roles, the unravelling of which prompted feelings of both anticipation and uncertainty.

We might expect that as feminism entered the academy in the 1970s, Austen's novels would be read differently and celebrated as proto-feminist

critiques of patriarchy and the romance/marriage plot. However, Marilyn Butler's *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (1975) militated against such readings through its influential representation of Austen as an anti-Jacobin, socially conservative writer. Hence the feminist critics Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar offer a cautiously recuperative reading of Austen's work, presenting both Austen and her female protagonists as heavily constrained by dominant gender ideology, 'split between the conflicting desire for assertion in the world and retreat into the security of the home – speech and silence, independence and interdependency'.[30] Similarly, in *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* Mary Poovey reads Austen as an author who must continually negotiate between subversiveness and conformity.[31] The work of these critics was extremely important in historicizing Austen's writing, though their emphasis on Austen's 'gentility' resonated with a wider sense at this time that she was perhaps too 'ladylike' a writer, her work encoding, rather than critiquing, gender and class prejudices. Such a view is expressed by the narrator of Margaret Drabble's 1969 novel *The Waterfall*:

> How I dislike Jane Austen. How deeply I deplore her desperate wit. Her moral tone dismays me: my heart goes out to the vulgarity of those little card parties that Mrs Philips gave at Meryton, to that squalid rowdy hole at Portsmouth where Fanny Price used to live, to Lydia at fifteen gaily flashing her wedding ring though the carriage window, to Frank Churchill, above all to Frank Churchill, lying and deceiving and proffering embarrassing, extravagant gifts. Emma got what she deserved, in marrying Mr Knightley. What can it have been like, in bed with Mr Knightley? Sorrow awaited that woman: she would have done better to steal Frank Churchill, if she could.[32]

Drabble's novel can be read as a satirical reworking of *Emma* in which the narrator, who has the over-determined name 'Jane Grey', does indeed steal 'Frank Churchill', here represented by her cousin's husband James, a handsome, rather flash garage owner addicted to fast cars. Through James, Jane escapes from tedium and sexual frustration, experiencing orgasm for the first time after years of marriage; through James she also tries to break free of the class prejudices with which she has been brought up, which she describes as 'the Jane Austen distinctions of refinement and vulgarity, of good and bad taste' (93). That popular feminist journalists and columnists such as Caitlin Moran still use 'Jane Austen's characters' as an example of social conservatism at its worst demonstrates that the legacy of second-wave feminist readings of Austen has had a lasting effect.[33]

The last two decades have seen an exponential rise in 'Jane's Fame': Austen now stands with Shakespeare as a signifier with a global currency that is invested with multiple and contradictory cultural values. The transformation of 'Jane Austen' to international celebrity status can be ascribed to a number of interlocking factors, including the appearance in the 1990s of film and television adaptations of her novels with high production values; the rise of 'girlie culture', third-wave feminism and postfeminism; the emergence of book clubs, including celebrity book clubs; and widespread access to the internet. Andrew Davies's 1995 BBC TV adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* is widely recognized as having kick-started the contemporary Jane Austen film industry. Its success is inextricably linked with its transformation of the stiff, proud Darcy into an object of female desire through the (in)famous 'wet shirt' scene, in which the actor Colin Firth plunges into a lake in order to relieve the torment of his feelings for Elizabeth.[34] In making the sexual content of Austen's novel explicit, Davies brought it up to date for his viewers, while at the same time the film's period setting suggested that the happy resolution of heterosexual romance plots might now be a thing of the past. This adaptation spoke powerfully to a transitional phase in the working out of gender identity, at a time of backlash against second-wave feminism and the rise of 'girl power', which prefigured the emergence of third-wave feminism and postfeminism respectively.[35] And it has had a lasting legacy in televisual culture. The historian Amanda Vickery's 2010 BBC series *At Home with the Georgians* saw her reenacting David Bamber/Mr. Collins's walk up the staircase in the home that provided the set for his Hunsford parsonage, and gasping in delight at the shelves in the closet, suggesting that for many viewers, if not Vickery herself, Andrew Davies's version of Austen's characters may be the most famous Georgians of all. Davies's adaptation was followed by the much-praised Ang Lee/Emma Thompson film of *Sense and Sensibility* (1996) and by a succession of Austen-related films featuring stars such as Anne Hathaway and Keira Knightley. The success of these more recent films can be attributed to the way in which they offer space for a knowing, tongue-in-cheek revisiting of the conventions of heterosexual romance. As Shelley Cobb suggests in her essay in this collection, it is this ironic distance that offers the possibility of an exposure of 'postfeminism's double bind, that it both draws on and censors feminist ideology'.

The internet has also proved to be an extremely important platform for rereadings and rewritings of Austen. In personal blogs with titles such as lightbrightandsparkling.blogspot.com and AustenBlog.com,

reviews of fan fiction and observations on Austen in the media are frequently posted, while on resources such as YouTube, a viewer can choose from a wide variety of 'mash-ups', including tributes such as 'Jane Austen's Fight Club', and scenes from Austen adaptations and biopics spliced together and set to music. Juliette Wells argues in her essay in this collection that we should take Austen fan fiction seriously as a form of interpretation and commentary that can draw out 'the different nuances present in Austen's writing'. Certainly, the concerns of literary critics and creative writers often intersect in intriguing ways. For example, in her 2008 *Women Writers and Old Age in Great Britain, 1750–1850*, Devoney Looser points out that 'Austen is perhaps the most famous British author described so prominently as a spinster' and notes that 'we might wish that, as an old maid herself, Austen had become a champion of them in her mature fiction'.[36] As if on cue, the winning entry of the short story competition hosted by Chawton House Library in 2009, Victoria Owens's 'Jane Austen over the Styx', sees Austen facing a jury of six of her older female characters and charged with 'wilfully portray[ing]' every one of them as 'a snob, a scold, or a harpy who selfishly or manipulatively interferes with the happiness of an innocent third party'.[37]

Readers' appetite for Austen-inspired fiction seems insatiable, as does the enthusiasm for attempting to recreate her world, or the world of her novels. The Chawton House Library short story competition looks set to be a biennial event: where the 2009 competition sought entries that were inspired by Austen or by Chawton House, and was prompted by a desire to commemorate Austen's arrival in the village of Chawton in 1809 and judged by Sarah Waters, the 2011 competition was for stories inspired by Austen's heroes and villains, and was judged by Michèle Roberts. In the United States, one webmistress, Laurel Ann Nattress of Austenprose.com, announced an anthology of short stories entitled *Jane Austen Made Me Do It* on her blog in 2010; this anthology includes new work by 20 published authors, many of whom are primarily known for their Austen-inspired fiction. On websites such as 'The Derbyshire Writers' Guild' and 'Mrs Darcy's Story', numerous non-professional writers write into Austen's texts, filling in 'gaps' in the novels with imaginary scenes, and further extending the texts through prequels and sequels that betray a particularly lively interest in sexual and financial scandal.[38] Such fan fiction is part of a continuum that includes conventionally published prequels and sequels such as *Mr Darcy's Daughters* by Elizabeth Aston and *Mr Darcy's Diary* by Amanda Grange, as well as reworkings by more 'literary' writers such as Emma Tennant, whose Austen sequels are

discussed here by Rebecca Munford.[39] As Munford suggests, the hostile reception that Tennant's sequels provoked among both Austen fans and literary critics may be due to their productive extension of Austen's texts 'beyond the textual and (hetero)sexual ending of the romance plot'. It is likely, however, that in the second decade of the twenty-first century Tennant's earlier reworkings would meet with a more favourable reception than they did on publication in the 1990s.

Postcolonial readings of Austen began with Edward Said's groundbreaking essay on *Mansfield Park*, in which he argued that nineteenth-century English literature constituted a colonial discourse that both reflected and constructed England's place in the world.[40] Said's intervention opened up Austen's work to mappings that have attended to, among other aspects, the way in which *Mansfield Park* negotiates the tension between imperial expansion and the decline of the aristocratic family, and the exploration in *Persuasion* and *Sanditon* of anxieties about the 'health' of imperialism.[41] As an ostensibly 'international' popular culture has been created through global capital's control of culture and communications, the focus of postcolonial critique has shifted to the occlusion of cultural differences within this sphere.[42] These issues are tackled head-on in this volume in Stephanie Jones's contribution. In her examination of Gurinder Chadha's *Bride and Prejudice*, Jones reads it as articulating 'an understanding of reading Austen in most places in the world as – at exactly the same – an utterly logical and an utterly illogical thing to do: as both absorbingly relevant and entirely contingent'. In her chapter, on the other hand, Mary Ann O'Farrell considers the rhetorical uses to which Austen is put in contemporary political discourse. As a 'now-global villager', she suggests, Austen can be invoked in order to register 'an association, culturally widespread but infrequently examined, between manners and terror'. O'Farrell's examples are taken from American political journalism, but British commentators use the same rhetorical devices. A column by Rachel Sylvester in *The Times* in the run-up to the 2010 election in Britain, in response to reports about then prime minister Gordon Brown's bad temper, suggested in the headline that 'Mr Angry at Number 10 should read Jane Austen'.[43] Mr Knightley is proposed as the ideal model for Brown: 'As Austen's Mr Knightley tells Emma, superficial charms fade but good character endures. "Respect for right conduct is felt by everybody," he says. And that includes the voters.'

The cultural valency of 'Jane Austen' depends not only on her novels but on the mythology surrounding her life, in particular the familial (re)construction of 'Aunt Jane' as a quiet spinster living in contented rural seclusion. As Kathryn Sutherland notes, Austen's family biographers

have retained an exceptional degree of control over her biographical afterlife, and part of its power lies in 'its exact fit with an equally powerful and seductive myth of Englishness'.[44] Sutherland speculates that future biographers may come to interrogate Austen's 'English life' from a postcolonial perspective, just as feminist biographers have explored Austen's proto-feminism and assessed the importance to her of female networks and communities; indeed, there was a flurry of feminist lives of Austen in the 1990s, culminating in Carol Shields's thoughtful, self-reflexive *Jane Austen* in 2001.[45] At the same time, Austen's life moved from text to screen with Patricia Rozema's adaptation of *Mansfield Park* (1999), which melds fictional and biographical elements, and Julian Jarrold's biopic *Becoming Jane* (2007), which similarly elides the distinctions between life and fiction, positioning Austen as an Austen-like (or Austen-lite) heroine. Julian North assesses the romantic assumptions about the relationship between a writer's life and work that underpin these film-texts, while William May considers Austen's legacy from a different perspective, suggesting that through their very ordinariness Austen's letters have offered a space within which modern writers have been able to negotiate their relationship with Austen without being weighed down by the anxiety of influence.

Indeed, the number of references to Austen in recent fiction by women writers – from Amy Tan to Jilly Cooper and Marian Keyes, A.S. Byatt to Zoe Heller – suggests that Austen serves as a common point of reference and a unifying signifier: rather than an anxiety of influence, we might rather identify, through these references, a common desire to celebrate and to pay homage. Felicity James, in her essay on Chawton and the sense of being 'At Home' with Jane, notes that the postwar Jane Austen Society was largely set up by women writers, who included Elizabeth Bowen, Mary Lascelles and Elizabeth Jenkins, to 'save' the Austen house as a place of pilgrimage. This sense of duty to Austen's memory and the desire to commemorate continue today, most notably in the various regional and national Austen societies. The Jane Austen Society of the UK meets annually in the grounds of Chawton House, and is run primarily by descendants of the Austen family. Jane Austen Society of North America members are generous in their donations to sites related to Austen and her family, paying a large amount towards the recent restoration of the church bells at Chawton, and for memorial plaques in the church at Godmersham Park, home to Austen's brother Edward and his family. The Jane Austen Society of Australia publishes a journal, *Sensibilities*, and the Japanese society – largely composed of readers with academic affiliations – meets regularly to discuss the finer points of Austen's narrative style.

Places and organizations with links to Austen naturally wish to capitalize on their connections. Bath runs an annual Jane Austen Society festival and the National Trust property of Lyme Park is just one of many tourist destinations that exploit the Austen link: its website announces that the house is 'one of the most famous country-house images in England – the backdrop to where Darcy meets Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice*' – with no suggestion that it is the 1995 adaptation, rather than Austen's novel, that makes use of this setting.[46] In addition, the Jane Austen House Museum will be reprinting 'Chawton' editions of all six of Austen's novels in the bicentennial years of 2011, 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2018, with a foreword by its patron, Kathryn Sutherland. As we look forward to eight years of dates related to 200-year anniversaries of Austen's publications and her death, we can already foresee an explosion of commemorative events.

Finally, the essays in this collection serve to remind us that in these competitive days for academic scholarship, there may be considerable advantages in working on such a popular canonical author. Where ten years ago, in her collection *Janeites*, Deidre Lynch pointed out that the 'career conscious' academic would be best advised to conceal her desire to wear Regency dress and dance at an Austen ball, Janet Todd has written more recently that she doubts 'there is in reality such shame'.[47] In this age of quantifying one's own research in terms of 'impact', the scholar ignores – or, worse, mocks – the diverse potential readership for her research at her peril. JASNA AGMs certainly serve as places of pilgrimage in which the delegate can indulge in a love of all things Regency, including dancing and dressing up, but they increasingly have a serious critical component too. A meeting in Portland, Oregon in October 2010 saw two keynotes by Stephanie Barron, the author of the Jane Austen detective series, and Juliet McMaster, scholar and literary critic. There are certainly some tensions between scholarly and popular approaches to Austen, but these need not preclude useful dialogue. All of us who have taught undergraduate or indeed graduate courses with 'Austen' in the title have first-hand experience of the enthusiasm of student readers of Austen, particularly young female student readers. Many of these come to Austen via 'Austens', and via the film and television adaptations in particular; the University of Sydney's DarcySoc, run by the Period Drama Appreciation Society, provides a good example of the type of society that proliferates on university campuses. Students seem particularly receptive to field trips to Austen locations – behaviour analysed by Nicola Watson in her 2006 *The Literary Tourist*, and indeed by both Felicity James and Juliette Wells in this collection.[48] Field trips

to Chawton and Chawton House Library are now an important part of both the undergraduate and graduate curricula at the University of Southampton, and also for groups from local universities such as Portsmouth, Winchester and Chichester, and indeed institutions from further afield: the University of Notre Dame's London programme regularly brings groups of students to Chawton. Generation Y students of Austen frequently appear in the acknowledgements to the work of their tutors: Ashley Tauchert is just one scholar who gives a nod to 'all the vibrant and passionate students who took the level 3 "Colin Firth" module in 2005'.[49] The uses of Jane are multiple: this collection picks through just some of their twentieth- and twenty-first-century manifestations.

## Notes

1. Claudia L. Johnson, 'Austen cults and cultures', in *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, ed. by Edward Copeland and Juliet McMaster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 232.
2. John Wiltshire, *Recreating Jane Austen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 3.
3. Deidre Lynch, 'Introduction' to *Janeites: Austen's Disciples and Devotees*, ed. by Deidre Lynch (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 5.
4. Letter dated Wednesday 28 September 1814, sent to Anna Austen from Chawton. See *Jane Austen's Letters*, ed. by Deirdre Le Faye (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 277–8.
5. Henry Austen, 'Biographical Notice of the Author' (1818). Quoted in J.E. Austen-Leigh, *A Memoir of Jane Austen and Other Family Recollections*, ed. Kathryn Sutherland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 137.
6. Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, ed. by Claire Grogan (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2002), p. 59.
7. Audrey Bilger, *Laughing Feminism: Subversive Comedy in Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth, and Jane Austen* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1998).
8. John Wiltshire, *Recreating Jane Austen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 2.
9. Valérie Cossy, *Jane Austen in Switzerland: A Study of the Early French Translations* (Genève: Editions Slatkine, 2006), p. 195.
10. Julie Candler Hayes, *Translation, Subjectivity, and Culture in France and England, 1600–1800* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 156.
11. Information about Austen's reception in Europe is taken largely from Anthony Mandal and Brian Southam, eds, *The Reception of Jane Austen in Europe* (London: Continuum, 2007), which includes a timeline of translations, pp. xxi–xxxvi.
12. Peter Mortensen, '"Unconditional surrender"? Jane Austen's reception in Denmark', in *The Reception of Jane Austen in Europe*, ed. by Anthony Mandal and Brian Southam (London: Continuum, 2007), pp. 117–31 (p. 127).