

The Wrath of the Janeites: The Intimate Experience of Reading
Austen and How to Share It in the Modern Age

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“But you never read novels, I dare say?” “Why not?” “Because they are not clever enough for you—gentlemen read better books.” “The person, be it gentleman or lady, who has not pleasure in a good novel, must be intolerably stupid. I have read all Mrs. Radcliffe’s works, and most of them with great pleasure...” “I am very glad to hear it indeed, and now I shall never be ashamed of liking *Udolpho* myself. But I really thought before, young men despised novels amazingly.” “It is amazingly; it may well suggest amazement if they do—for they read nearly as many as women. I myself have read hundreds and hundreds...” (*Northanger Abbey*, 86)

Jane Austen understood that the novel as a literary form attracted a myriad of readers with different backgrounds. This passage from *Northanger Abbey* demonstrates the level to which Jane Austen was aware of her readers, and she uses Radcliffe here as a placeholder for herself. She understood that her readership would be composed of many types of readers, all with varied backgrounds and situations. Even what the reader expected to get out of an Austen text could- and would- be different. By being aware of her heterogeneous audience, Austen was able to craft her texts so that they would appeal universally, while also generating an inclusivity when a reader found a part of a text that seemed specifically created for them. Catherine Morland is so surprised to find that Henry Tilney has read *The Mysteries of Udolpho*- and indeed, any novel at all- because she thinks that this category belongs to women. Despite being proven wrong in the next few lines, Catherine actually exposes a very real opinion of the time. There must be something in a novel that appeals to this female readership, and specifically to Isabella, Catherine and Eleanor Tilney, who each enjoy the Radcliffe novel in separate ways.

Yet, despite their congenial conversation on the subject, the very fact that there is an *expected* difference between Catherine and Henry’s readings of *Udolpho* (as well as a difference in life situations) shows that their readings are inherently dissimilar; otherwise

it would not be so amazing that Henry enjoys these novels at all. Austen, while accepting of and acknowledging all types of readers, is aware that a reader may expect and understand another's reading to be different than their own. However, because Catherine feels the need to automatically defer to Henry's position as a gentleman as someone who inherently reads "better" than she (or the rest of her sex) might, she shows that readers can feel that there is a correct way to read a novel, and perhaps more than one wrong way. Though Catherine here feels that Henry's must be the right way, the intimacy inspired by a novel (and particularly Austen's) often gives the reader a sense that their personal reading is the most correct, and therefore the utmost authority upon the text. This helps to create a divide between readers, based on differing intimacies, that Catherine recognizes as there even before knowing that Henry reads Radcliffe. By thematizing the idea of right or wrong readership into her own text, Austen displays her awareness that her works inspire exclusivity as much as they foster inclusivity.

A reader of *Northanger Abbey* is already aware by this passage that Isabella Thorpe, Catherine Morland, and a whole slew of young girls are rabid Radcliffe fans. When these two very different sets of characters (the high-born, well-educated Tilneys, and the naïve and vapid girls of the country) find that they share such an author in common, therefore, there appears an opportunity to share their experiences with the texts of said author. Henry, Eleanor and Catherine go on to discuss their opinions on *Udolpho* and other works, and are able to do so in a way that contributes positively and expands each personal reading of a text. Their genial and constructive dialogue, in which no feelings are hurt and no readings delegitimized, represent, on a much larger scale, the goal of Austen's novels. Readers of Austen feel personally connected with her works,

while at the same time, they are part of a much larger community, a community that encompasses all types of readers and their individualized readings.

It is therefore crucial that any adaptations of her novels attempt to preserve and maintain the level of dual intimacy and community, exclusivity and inclusivity, with their audience that the original works provide. If they do not, they are being unfaithful to Austen and the original works- even if their content matches up with hers. By not getting to the heart of Austen's projects, each of which combines inclusivity and all-encompassment to form a unbounded and benevolent space for her heterogeneous readership, adaptations begin to appeal only to a certain readership (whether they mean to or not). Therefore, this neutral space is lost, and Austen readerships are divided from and against one another. In order to recreate and sustain this space, adaptations need to turn to the form of Austen and investigate the effects of her style on her readers.

The emergence of the internet, and specifically the popular video website YouTube, generates a platform on which anyone can interact and share their life experiences or projects. The video channel Pemberley Digital takes advantage of this in order to create a space that replaces the traditional Austen adaptation. With three full modern Austen adaptations in the form of first-person video-logs, Pemberley Digital's *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, *Welcome to Sanditon*, and *Emma Approved* provide Austen adaptations that audiences can connect to in a familiar medium (i.e. short internet videos located in a familiar place) and on a social level that simultaneously exists both within the videos and in the real world outside of them.¹ The medium of the internet fosters a

¹ Based on *Pride and Prejudice*, the unfinished and posthumously published *Sanditon*, and *Emma*, respectively.

sense of community among Austen fans, and allows for a coexistence between her readerships.

It may seem that these readerships may not necessarily get in each other's way, nor that their fundamental ways of interpretation are even limited to this author in particular. What makes them unique, however, is the sheer animosity between them—particularly the two main camps, the cultural Janeites and the critical Janeites. While the camps don't overlap other than their love for Austen, they still don't like each other. In fact, sometimes it appears that readers of one camp go out of their way to discredit those of the other. Critical Janeites often take to the media to express their intense dislike of cultural Janeites. During the boom of film adaptations in the 1990s, critical Janeites refused to have anyone think the cultural Janeites' interpretations of Austen were valid. They claimed to have the sophistication of academia (versus low-brow cinematic culture) on their side, and attempted to show how cultural Janeites were disrespecting Austen with their ceaseless pursuit of film adaptations. After the release of one of the 1996 *, critic Boyd Tonkin's most important statement about the film was instead one about the culture around the movie itself: "It's time to rescue Jane from the Janeites", while Louis Menand stated that "Austen is surely the novelist most thoroughly embarrassed by her admirers".² It is clear that, from the critical standpoint, the cultural Janeites "cannot be trusted to discriminate between the true excellence of *Emma* and the ersatz pleasure of *Bridget Jones* [a romantic comedy adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*]."³*

² Boyd Tonkin, "Emma", *New Statesman*, September 13, 1996, 39; Louis Menand, "What Jane Austen Doesn't Tell Us," *New York Review of Books* vol. 43, no. 2 (February 1, 1996), 15.

³ Deidre Lynch, "Introduction: Sharing with Our Neighbors" in *Janeites: Austen's Disciples and Devotees*, ed. Deidre Lynch (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 8, 12.

In turn, cultural Janeites actively bar their critical counterparts from sharing in their enthusiasm. This exclusion exists on websites and in forums, such as “The Republic of Pemberley”, where conversations are decidedly separate from the ones spurred by scholars and critics. It even exists in the physical world, in a more effective and hostile environment. Upon the formation of the Connecticut Chapter of the Jane Austen Society of North America, a newspaper article “suggests that people who see themselves as ‘expert lecturers’ had better stay away: ‘This attracts readers, not academics.’”⁴ To so publicly announce that they do not wish “serious” or theory-obsessed Janeites ruining their own readings and to go so far as effectively forbidding their presence at a gathering of Austen fans shows that the cultural Janeites had also not found a space which they can benevolently share with the critical ones.

“Janeite” culture began soon after Austen’s death, and, put simply, it is a movement that reads, interprets, defends and –to a certain extent- lives Austen’s books with an enthusiasm found seldom elsewhere. Both the literati and the mass public were swept up in the force of Austen’s novels, and the later Victorian and Edwardian eras saw a (primarily male) fan-base arise out of popular and highbrow authors. A national revival in the reading of her books was a product of the First World War, and during the Second World War, American readers were pulled into Janeite culture through Hollywood.⁵ There were a number of screen adaptations prior to the 1990s (about one adaptation per book every ten years), but it wasn’t until the mid-90s that the “Austen Boom” began. Hollywood and BBC/ITV period drama adaptations started this phenomenon, with the 1999 *Mansfield Park* film, the serial 1995 *Pride and Prejudice*, the made-for-TV

⁴ Ibid, 3.

⁵ Claudia Johnson, *Jane Austen’s Cults and Cultures* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 30, 126-131.

Persuasion (1995), the 1995 *Sense and Sensibility* film, and the two *Emmas* (both 1996). There has also been one period adaptation for each novel since the millennium.

In addition to all these period films are some modern adaptations as well. *Clueless*, director Amy Heckerling's 1995 updating of *Emma*, translates the original book into the 1990s' California high-school culture, with little variation from the original key themes. The 2001 *Bridget Jones' Diary* capitalized on (and therefore exaggerated without irony the importance of) *Pride and Prejudice's* marriage plot, but it helped sustain Janeite culture into the 21st century. *Lost in Austen* (2008) details modern girl Amanda Price's time-swap with Elizabeth Bennet and her (mis)adventures inside the fictitious world of *Pride and Prejudice*, poking fun at the Janeites without maliciously mocking them. The "Austenmania" phenomenon even extends beyond film, coming full circle back to the medium of print, with HarperCollins *The Austen Project*. Started in 2011, this is an ongoing project that has six contemporary and globally significant authors each rewriting one of the original six novels as a modern adaptation.⁶ With all these interpretations behind it, this "Boom" of adaptations shows little sign of waning.

Because cultural Janeites rely on adaptations so heavily to help them define their camp ideology, it is difficult to see that this Boom of film adaptations is actually a crisis for readers. It served ultimately only to fracture the readerships even more, and, as we have seen, generate more sources of animosity. Yet, it is the rift between the two camps that allowed this new medium to flourish. By being so against and unforgiving of the cultural Janeites, but doing nothing to stop their consumerism or film adaptations, the

⁶ Though this project shares the original's medium, the loss of Austen as author strikes many readers as somehow false or "wrong" at a fundamental author. They are changing her actual words, and are simply copying plot and characters. The prose style that makes Austen so beloved and that Janeites cling to is gone.

critical Janeites are actually giving the cultural Janeites even more freedom to do what they want. Through this, as the pushback from the critical Janeites pushes the cultural ones even farther away from the original text, the divide self-perpetuates and, in fact, grows bigger. Adaptations of Austen, therefore, have become a problem by generating a bad space, one that does not have the option for neutrality or benevolent discussion among Janeites.

I.

This animosity, however, is not a product of the 1990s. It is a phenomenon that has affected all of Austen's readers, since her works' original publication. Yet, each generation of Austen's readers have read, interacted with and interpreted her works in different ways. Factors included cultural events (war being among the most influential), social reform (feminist readings were introduced in the mid-twentieth century), and, of course, the introduction of film adaptations.⁷ And through it all, the animosity between readerships continues. As this shows that any specific type of societal change or adaptation does not generate opposition among Janeites, the animosity must come from a more direct source. It cannot be the readers either, as they are not above being influenced by their situation when experiencing Austen, and the constant addition of readers every generation must necessarily preclude a new set of ideals in each. Instead, this animosity is a result of Austen's texts themselves.

⁷ Johnson, *Jane Austen's Cults and Cultures*, 99-153; Katie Trumpener, "The Virago Jane Austen" in *Janeites: Austen's disciples and devotees*, ed. Deidre Lynch (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 140-165.

Rather than coming from what the reader brings to the experience of reading Austen, the animosity arises from what Austen's works offer the reader. Only once the reader has connected with an Austen novel can a dislike for other reader's experiences emerge. The divide between readerships was generated and is maintained by the interactions of the main camps with Austen's works and with one another. Yet, these camps are, in a sense, fictitious. Much like Catherine Morland's semi-imaginary divide between female and male readers, this readership divide is also somewhat unreal. The falseness is an important distinction to note because the existence of this divide both within and outside of Austen's novels shows that she was aware of the intimate bond between reader and text, as well as the protectiveness that arises from it. Because of the nature of exclusivity with Austen on the personal level, one of her readers has to say that his or her own reading is more legitimate or intimate than someone else's. This fundamentally requires an other. These other readers over whom a reader can hold his or her friendship with Austen has to be first believed to exist. Then they are given traits that are in direct opposition to that original reader. Though these other readers obviously do exist, the animosity against them is presupposed. It becomes difficult to define specifically each faction and the traits of the readers within them because they are built out of negatives: what I am, is what they are not- or, I am not what they are. Each group is whatever the group that imagines them as being, so long as it does not interfere with their own *designated* understanding and reading of Austen. Out of these suppositions then come real groups of readers who have come together in part because they are necessarily excluded from another group. The factions of Janeites therefore are as much a figment of another faction's design as they are a real group with legitimate intimacies.

The two camps of readership that best demonstrate this phenomenon are the cultural and critical Janeites. The cultural Janeites are usually the ones associated today with the broad term of “Janeites”. They generally represent readers who find friendship in the text via historical and social re-imaginings (and often, reenactments) and a personal connection with the author’s understanding of such things. Many of the first Janeites were undereducated in literary criticism and were simply looking for nostalgia, readers who “boasted of never reading [Austen’s novels] at all.”⁸ These readers were more interested in the *idea* of Austen and the time period and culture that she represents than her actual storytelling and style of prose. Due to the demographic of period drama audiences in the late 20th century, the term “Janeite” became synonymous with a female, white, middle-class readership that loved Austen for her adaptations, with their costumes and romance.⁹ Cultural Janeites are the consumers, a “conspicuously female-centered and female-staffed gift culture” that purchases “coffee mugs and Regency writing paper”.¹⁰ The cultural Janeites seem to have hobbies that do not directly involve Austen or her book, only the culture to which they are native.

For the critical Janeites, less is more — everything they want from Austen is already inside her books. Critical Janeites who befriend Austen “work with or within a tougher and more difficult version of friendship than the culture generally allows, not censoring or denying friendship’s difficulties but enacting... the edginess of its intimacies, its embarrassments and angers, tricky balancings and resentments.”¹¹ This is

⁸ Johnson, *Jane Austen’s Cults and Cultures*, 138.

⁹ A study conducted by Claire Monk regarding the demographic of period dramas, or “heritage films”, in the 1990s showed that 82% of the audience was female, around 75% were ethnically white, and about half were solidly middle class.

¹⁰ Lynch, “Introduction: Sharing with Our Neighbors”, 12.

¹¹ Mary Ann O’Farrell, “Jane Austen’s Friendship” in *Janeites: Austen’s Disciples and Devotees*, ed. Deidre Lynch (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 47.

taken to mean that critical Janeites are more honed in on the formalities of the text itself; their intimacy is related to the closeness and carefulness with which they pull apart the novel and work with Austen's actual words. They feel as though Austen herself is watching over their progression through and study of her work, guiding them towards the answer or theory or phrase they seek.¹² The critical Janeites, rather than studying period dances with the cultural Janeites, study "changes [in the texts] so subtle that they are virtually invisible."¹³ They build their friendship with Austen around the intricacies of her prose and the formal text.

Therefore, the space created by an adaptation should be one that provides both readership sects with room to interact with one another in a positive way without necessarily reconciling into one large readership or changing their personal connections with the novels. Such a space is needed because, for all the animosity that is created, all Janeites read from a place of adoration and friendship for the same author and the same books. An Austen novel can create a world that allows a reader to have an incredibly personal experience with Austen and her works. For Austen's readers, the act of reading that is usually viewed as a simple pastime or hobby is now transformed into a profound and intimate journey. The uniqueness of these experiences can be illustrated through the very name they give themselves, "Janeites". No other author can claim "a reading situation in which writer and fan will be on a first-name basis."¹⁴ The exchange that develops out of a response to reading Jane Austen in turn generates a construction of Jane Austen as friend. The natural reaction to connecting so personally to an Austen text is

¹² In *Jane Austen's Cults and Cultures*, Claudia Johnson, while trying to reconcile differences between editions of *Mansfield Park*, believes that a ghostly intake of breath was a sign from Austen as to whether the first edition comma placement or the second edition's was in the correct place (3, 10).

¹³ Johnson, *Jane Austen's Cults and Cultures*, 3.

¹⁴ Lynch, "Introduction: Sharing with Our Neighbors", 14.

then to try and connect just as personally with Austen herself. After all, if a reader finds so much of himself or herself within a book, it seems only natural that they would be able to find just as much of themselves within that book's author. By wondering and speculatively creating an Austen that would be a friend, the reader is already initiating "the structure of identification and complementarity and difference that is friendship."¹⁵ Just as any contemporary friend of the reader would be able to do, Jane Austen can embarrass the reader, make them feel suffering and delight, turn them at once possessive and then alienated, and subject them to indifference. The reader becomes so entrenched within her novels that to feel what Austen makes her characters feel is soon second nature.

This intimacy primarily stems from Austen's narrative style, with its perfected use of free indirect discourse. In *Emma*, arguably the most stylized and narratively elegant of Austen's novels, the eponymous heroine undergoes a large amount of character development (perhaps the most of all Austen's heroines). Through constant- and consistent- free indirect discourse, the reader is able to watch all the changes occur. Indeed, it could be argued that the reader is also participating in all aspects of Emma's life- and mind. One of the most famous, important and shocking (to the characters at least) scenes in *Emma* is Mr. Elton's declaration of love in the carriage. However, though that scene propels the plot and content of the story, it is the reaction of Emma after the fact, when she is alone and unfettered by social etiquette, which carries the more narrative and formal weight:

"But- that he should talk of encouragement, should consider her as aware of his views, accepting his attentions, meaning (in short), to marry him!- should suppose himself her equal in connexion or mind!- look down upon her friend, so well

¹⁵ O'Farrell, "Jane Austen's Friendship", 45.

understanding the gradations of rank below him, and be so blind to what rose above, as to fancy himself shewing no presumption in addressing her!- It was most provoking."¹⁶

The reader here sees Emma in true form- and true to her character, though the narration is in the third-person. She hides so many things from herself, including the meaning behind John Knightley's innuendo about Elton's true goals, that her frustration with herself and this predicament she finds herself in can only come through via an outside narrator. Through this private and honest lens, the reader sees Emma as Elton couldn't (or wouldn't); she cannot hide or put on a persona (whether on purpose or not) that leads others astray. This private Emma is a stark contrast to the one the reader has encountered up until this point, and Austen employs and combines both content (the proposal) and form (free indirect discourse) to expose the "real" Emma to the audience.

Austen, here and in all her novels, uses free indirect discourse as way of getting at the core of a character, as well as that character's relationship with other characters. By taking on first-person thoughts, free indirect discourse allows the reader to see inside a character. It is a more intimate experience than reading dialogue or having a third-person narrator act as an aloof middleman, because the reader is in the character's head. And while one could argue that a first-person narration would accomplish the same goal, the third-person style of free indirect discourse makes sure that a character isn't hiding anything from the reader as they would from another character. The reader shares in the errors and decisions of the character, because the reader watches them take shape in real time. Because each reader is allowed to get as close to a character as possible through this type of narration, the relationship between reader and text becomes extremely personal and intimate.

¹⁶ Jane Austen, *Emma* (New York: Pearson Education Inc., 2006), 104.

Third-person narration also allows for an intimate relationship with a text via a more public route. As the character is not presenting his or her own thoughts (whether that would have been through dialogue or first-person narration), the character is not aware that others will be privy to these thoughts. They are being exposed publicly and en masse. While the experience of seeing a character's innermost thoughts and feelings is incredibly personal, free indirect discourse, at the same time, breaks down the barriers of privacy. Austen, through exposing these thoughts through a third party (the narrator), instantly makes them available to any and every reader. As a reader would know by this point in the novel, Emma Woodhouse is a very proud individual who hates nothing more than being proven wrong. To have her personal disappointment be broadcasted to readers, in order that she might not hide her feelings or discoveries from the reader, is to allow those readers to understand her more fully as a character. Austen fosters not just intimacy, but publicity. Around each instance of free indirect discourse, itself so intent on exposition to an audience, is created a community of readers who know what is happening inside that character's private world. Austen's free indirect discourse can sustain a community of readers who have the fundamentals in common, but who all experience the intimacy that this narration gives them in different and personalized ways.

However, because this intimacy is only between one reader and the novel, other people are naturally and forcefully excluded from the exchange. A friendship with Jane Austen is then gifted with the ideals of any normal friendship: "the somatic exchanges and delights of private laughter, the protections of seclusion, the bonds of a self-conscious exclusivity."¹⁷ It is easy to see why so many generations of readers have then been drawn to create an imaginary link between themselves and Austen. The benefits of

¹⁷ O'Farrell, "Jane Austen's Friendship", 45.

being Austen's friend seem to far outweigh any consequences that a secluded intimacy could bring. Yet the "self-conscious exclusivity" that comes with any friendship is an area of contention. After all, it is not an exclusivity between any two people, but thousands of people vying for a bond with the same person. The exclusivity of a single bond gives the reader the impression that his or her friendship with Austen is more legitimate than that of others. And this friendship gives way to their own readings, their analyses, their theories, their cultural interactions, and their adaptations, and soon a reader can claim the authority to have read Jane Austen (more) correctly simply because he or she believes their relationship to the text to be the most intimate and personal, and therefore the most correct. O'Farrell acknowledges this as even affecting her own reading and approach to other Janeites, though she is studying them herself, knowing that: "in saying that Jane Austen is my friend, I might take possession of her (by friendship's deepest, sickest logic, since she is mine, implicitly she is not your friend)."¹⁸ She cannot help feeling this way, but she feels automatically alienated from other readers. O'Farrell's concept of "friendship" between Austen and her readers is particularly useful because it demonstrates the awareness each reader has of being separated from other readers. This intimacy with Austen means an exclusion of other readerships unlike a reader's own. In sacrificing oneself to Austen's intimate experience, a Janeite sacrifices a potential connection to other readerships.

The readings are disharmonious or in direct opposition as a result of sharing information to a large community that Austen achieves through free indirect discourse. However, another result of this is the formation of actual communities of readership. No matter what their position or relationship is, all readers of Austen still have at least one

¹⁸ Ibid, 58.

things in common- their love for her. Because they understand their own relationship with her so well, Janeites are able to understand and appreciate the workings of other readers, especially when those friendships with Austen are based on similar readings. They will not give up their intimacy or their belief that their reading is unique, but groups are able to be formed on mutually respected and understood individual relationships. Within each group is fostered an atmosphere of community, of being together alone, so that readers can share their experiences without sacrificing their personal connection. Only once this occurs can camps, such as those of the cultural and critical Janeites, be formed and then begin to develop animosities, now that they are fueled by a large number of common readerships. While Austen understood and encouraged different readings of and relationships to her works, this much contention has created a divide among readers, each fighting for authority over Austen, that is perpetuated by adaptations which only cater to a specific readership.

II.

In order to keep the love of Austen alive and healthy, without having to reconcile her readerships into a homogenous and stifling unity, there needs to be a space created where a Janeite can freely express his or her opinions without harassment, judgment or belittlement from fellow Janeites. As we have seen through critiques of movies and the harsh wordings of reader societies, the creation of such a space is a long and difficult process. But the comment section of a YouTube may be able to show that the space for adaptations have reached a crucial turning point. One of the advantages of a forum on a

public video is that it brings viewers with dissimilar perspectives and opinions into a space that allows them to express their ideas on a neutral and level field. And for Jane Austen's modern fans, this is a much-needed space.

A recent conversation on episode 13 of *Emma Approved* (Pemberley Digital's modern *Emma* adaptation) showed an efficient, productive and, most importantly, benevolent discussion among viewers. One user sarcastically remarked on how the series avoided "putting religion in the story by making Elton a senator instead of a minister". A second user then replied that, while she too noticed that, she think that the change "has less to do with erasing religion and more to do with translating meaning from a text written several hundred years ago into a modern adaptation, in a way that allows people NOW to see Elton in the same way as people who read *Emma* the very first time." As a cultural Janeite, the commenter goes on to explain the role of ministers in the Regency era and how they did not have the same power in America, ending with an opinion that Pemberley Digital "made Elton a senator because it matches closer to the spirit of the novel than a direct translation would."¹⁹ While this comment may not have an academic source behind it, there is the implication of a grasp (however casual) of how both societies work and how they may relate to one another. And not only does this defense boost viewers' confidence in the competency of Pemberley Digital in handling Austen's works across those societies, but it also shows that the webseries can be a space in which opinions can be shared safely, without fear of being judged or having to compromise their readership (or viewership).

¹⁹ "Tweetception- Emma Approved Ep: 13." YouTube video, posted by Pemberley Digital, November 18, 2013. <https://youtu.be/P4PPsFP-kno>

Anyone who has seen an internet comment section knows that this is not a common phenomenon. It is incredibly rare to find a place on the internet where a discussion can exist without any opposition or inner fighting among the audience (as was seen in the animosity of the Janeites over 1990s adaptations). Pemberley Digital has been able to create a bubble around itself, which keeps in the advantages of a public forum and which prevents the inclusion of its disadvantages. It is able to succeed where so many other attempts to form a benevolent (or even an ambivalent) section of the internet has failed because Austen's works seem to be made for the internet. While other adaptations can thematize her content, the internet provides a space in which her form can be thematized as well. Austen's free indirect discourse (i.e. her form) creates an experience for each reader that can be personalized and interpreted in different ways. These then turn into large communities that can group around the same text. That's not that different from the experience created by the internet and especially on YouTube. Each viewer can connect to the videos in a personal way, and then continue to interact with others. The experience is only enhanced by the immediacy and universality of the comment section. A Janeite no longer has to across mediums or wait patiently to find another Janeite of a like mind to discuss experiences with. They do not have to depend upon movies or essays to express their opinions for them. Through the platform of the internet, Janeites can express their different opinions in an unlimited space without sacrificing their relationship to Austen. YouTube and Pemberley Digital have therefore created a community of Janeites wishing to foster their intimate Austen experience, a community that surrounds and grows with the ones that Austen's works have already generated.

Rather than destroying the community of readership, as adaptations of her work have the tendency to do, the internet and its users sustain it.

Where prior modern adaptations have unsuccessfully tried to create a neutral space for the coexistence of Janeites, the digital production company Pemberley Digital offers a different approach and possible solution. Its claim to be “an innovative web video production company that specializes in the adaptation of classic works onto a new media format” displays an awareness of the sheer new-ness of the internet and its relationship with the literary canon (and high culture in general).²⁰ Their video webseries, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, *Welcome to Sanditon* and *Emma Approved*, take full advantage of that fact in order to generate an adaptation where no Janeite’s relationship with Austen is challenged.²¹ Pemberley Digital’s videos allow each viewer-cum-reader-cum-Janeite to continue to experience Jane Austen in his or her own way. The key to this success is the equalizing factor of social media and the internet. Every detail of the characters and their inner lives is laid bare, so that no reader can claim that they know more about an aspect of Austen’s work than another. Nor can they use a better understanding of a hidden detail to claim that their personal relationship to the works holds more weight/authority than any one else’s. This level playing field means also that no one’s opinion is invalid or “wrong”; this adaptation becomes a space where all Janeites can coexist without being forced to compromise their personal readings. Pemberley Digital is a vehicle for all types of intimacy and community, which were previously responsible for readership fracturing.

²⁰ “About”, *Pemberley Digital*, accessed December 2, 2014. <http://www.pemberleydigital.com/about/>

²¹ Based on Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, posthumously published and unfinished *Sanditon*, and *Emma*, respectively.

The main videos also tackle a modern social concern. As we saw earlier in the passage from *Northanger Abbey*, Austen wants to bring all types of readers into an in-group because she recognized the existence of their differences. In *Clueless*, the arrival of a student of a lower class and the revelation of the homosexuality of Frank Churchill are used as revelatory plot points. *Clueless* uses this diversity for the characters themselves, without recognizing that Austen was concerned with the issue of audience and without recognizing the audience's diversity. It therefore, by only accounting for a modernized and niched subculture plot and not a universal viewership, chooses a narrow audience from the outset. Pemberley Digital takes up the issue of connecting audience back to the actual text. Where *Clueless* addresses and changes modern concerns within the thematization of content, Pemberley Digital places this problem back within the realm of form, where Austen had originally kept it.

Through the assumption of characters of diverse sexualities, races and social backgrounds, the webseries continue to foster a theme of inclusivity. Pemberley Digital then, through the fundamental nature of the internet, is able to extend this theme of inclusivity through diversity beyond the videos themselves. Just as it is no longer reasonable or realistic to have an all-white or heterosexual cast of characters, it is even less acceptable to assume that an audience would be homogenous. Austen understood that her audience was not, and the dual nature of free indirect discourse (both intimate and communal) excluded no one. Through the purpose of the internet to form communities, Pemberley Digital attempts the same goal, and their audiences are growing bigger and attracting people of all different backgrounds. Therefore, any sort of space on the internet that wants to foster a sense of community while also promising to create an

individualized and personal experience needs to bear the myriad characteristics of their audience in mind.

In the videos of Pemberley Digital, the cast is no longer exclusively ethnically white or heterosexual, and identity dynamics are updated to reflect the modern world. The characters Bing Lee and his sister Caroline, Fitz (the former Colonel Fitzwilliam), Charlotte Lu[cas], Emma Woodhouse, Frank Churchill, Jane Fairfax, Miss Bates and Mrs. Bates, are all people of color. Fitz is also gay, mentioned only (and briefly) when Lizzie mentions that a specific video has to be shorter than usual because she is meeting Fitz and his boyfriend for lunch. There is no great epiphany accompanying this moment, nor does the story's modernization and/or plot hinge on these updated changes. In order to bring Austen's works truly into the modern day, where an all-white cast/community is no longer realistic, these changes are necessary. Similarly, the financial situations of the characters, most obviously and importantly in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, have been updated. While the classes in Austen's novels are marked, there is not often a great range of characters from each, nor, in accordance with societal rules of the time, does a character belonging to one often have the opportunity to interact with characters from others. Pemberley Digital recognizes this as a historical phenomenon, and adjusts the spectrum of socioeconomic representation to reflect that of contemporary society. In order for viewers to connect with this world with socio-economic structures so like their own, Pemberley Digital has created a Bennet family that needs to move to a smaller house because of Lizzie's student debts, a Woodhouse business that is not used to financial troubles, a Georgiana Darcy who does not want to be dependent upon her inheritance, and a struggling yet entrepreneurial Miss Bates. Representation is not always

about physical identity, and Pemberley Digital makes sure to foster a space for viewers of differing financial situations.

Within Pemberley Digital's videos, viewers of varying backgrounds and identities can see themselves within the characters and their social situations. The Janeite's intimacy with Austen is no longer contained within a single channel, one which made the reader choose something to identify with from a range of limited options within a text. In order to have that personal friendship with Austen, a reader was forced to find some part of him or herself within a rigid structure. Pemberley Digital allows this to become a two-way street. They allow Austen's work to now cater to the reader/viewer, by enhancing characters and situations in order for every type of viewer to connect on an even more personal level. The experience of interacting with Austen becomes fluid and equitable. It also raises and expands the level of community among Janeites, as they discover new, different and constructive ways in which they connect with one another.

Gossip also serves as a conduit for connection. In Austen novels, which are often texts fundamentally about the inner workings of a small village's society or of a family's drama, gossip always has a large role to play, and the reader is always privy to it. By exposing a character's innermost thoughts to an unexpected (and unsuspecting) audience, Austen creates her own type of gossip, which runs parallel to that of the book. Through the use of free indirect discourse, Austen is able to take the telling of gossip to the reader one step further, and bring the reader into the gossip- rather than simply relating it. The style of third-person narration starts this, as already one other (the narrator) besides the character knows the thoughts inside his or her head. The gossip begins because of the

narrator, who passes on these private thoughts to a public audience. The readers, no matter what they do with the gossip given to them by the narrator, are now a part of it.

This finds an equivalent in the social media that accompanies each of Pemberley Digital's webseries. Social media, at its most fundamental level, serves to bring pieces of information (whether personal or not) to a large audience. And when this information involves the same small set of known people (here, characters), it is just as hard to rein in the expanse of social media as it is to control the reach of small-town gossip. Cryptic conversations and ambiguous photos that are meant to be privately shared instead spread, and speculation abounds. What are these two people doing together, and what do I think of them? Social media imitates gossip because it allows people outside the origin source to perpetuate information, as well as to add their own spin to it. Bystanders become participants, in a very similar way to how Austen allows her readers to become a part of a web of gossip within a novel.

Therefore, through a large social media presence across multiple platforms, Pemberley Digital is able to create a previously unseen level of interactivity and of expansion of an Austen world. By letting the audience is able to track the decisions and moves of each character, Pemberley Digital fosters a sense of intimacy, while the scope and public presentation of such details gives a community of viewers ground to stand on. Such an approach clearly imitates that of Jane Austen and her understanding of how readerships function and interact, as well as what they expect to gain from a text. Pemberley Digital's social media allows an in-depth look and exploration of characters that few other adaptations can provide. In part to account for the scenes and inner thoughts of characters that the audience will not have visual access to (due to the single-

camera single-room vlog style, the characters' knowledge that what they say is going onto a public site, and the absence of Austen's omniscient narrator and free indirect discourse), each series set up and maintained a large social media presence. This allows the series to continue to faithfully follow and include plot points that take place outside of the usual filming space (e.g. the infamous Pemberley visit, or the "badly done, Emma" Box Hill picnic), without sacrificing the integrity of their original formatting. It also allows the series to expand on the relationships of characters who show up less often in the videos than the few main characters, but upon whom many of the plot points hinge.

The Lizzie Bennet Diaries, as with its predecessor *Pride and Prejudice*, contains a myriad of these minor character relationships. In order to expose, in more depth, the inner workings of the characters and their roles within the large plot, the webseries turns to social media. *LBD* employs only the basic platforms, despite it being Pemberley Digital's largest series in terms of length and popularity. This is presumably to test out the waters for their future adaptations, but it also fits in with their protagonist's laid-back but professional, minimalist, graduate-student lifestyle. Through 35 character accounts on Twitter, Facebook, and Tumblr, viewers are able to see the characters' lives and interactions with one another (with pictures and captions), all modernized from the original text without additions or subtractions. They were also privy to "behind the scenes" conversations (occurring on these social media accounts) between minor characters. These are dialogues often alluded to in the videos but never expressed due to the absence of the major characters at these points or the lack of an obvious relationship between the two parties.

This approach achieves simultaneously an expansion of the intimacy available to viewers and an expansion of the community surrounding the videos. The personal relationship between a Janeite and Austen is only enhanced through these social media tactics. By allowing viewers to see a more detailed outline of each character, and to interact with them to see how they would react to “others”, Pemberley Digital strengthens the bonds of friendship with the works. It is important to do so because these are often characters that Austen created for readers to find parts of themselves in. Displaying the inner workings of each means that the Janeite is able to better connect to a character and to better understand the details of Austen’s texts. To point to an instance in which Pemberley Digital allows a closer look into Austen’s text and minor characters, one could turn to the announcement of Charlotte Lucas’ betrothal (in the videos, it is an accepted job offer). In the original *Pride and Prejudice*, the reader is closed off from Charlotte Lucas during her fight with Elizabeth Bennet over her decision to marry Mr. Collins. She leaves the narrative, and Austen remains focused solely on Lizzie’s reaction to this shock. Within the novel, there is a one-sidedness due to free indirect discourse, the plot, and the presence of a single heroine:

*“It was a long time before she became at all reconciled to the idea of so unsuitable a match... she could not have supposed it possible that, when called into action, she would have sacrificed every better feeling to worldly advantage. Charlotte, the wife of Mr. Collins, was a most humiliating picture! And to the pang of a friend disgracing herself, and sunk in her esteem, was added the distressing conviction that it was impossible for that friend to be tolerably happy in the lot she had chosen.”*²²

Though Lizzie, in the interaction with Charlotte that comes just before this excerpt, puts on a brave face and manages a relatively polite conversation, the narrator is quick to expose her real thoughts to the reader. The one-sidedness here has many layers.

²² Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 96-7.

The first is that Lizzie does not truly stop to think about what Charlotte wants out of this accepted proposal, instead choosing to linger on her own impressions of Mr. Collins and imposing her opinions onto the choices Charlotte has made. The second is that the narrator does not stop this rather selfish approach, nor counter (or temper) it with Charlotte's own thoughts on her new situation. The reader is left only to imagine how Charlotte is handling the fight, without any clues from the narrator. Yet, the narrator cannot truly be blamed. Free indirect discourse necessitates the exclusion of in-depth analysis of multiple characters during a single plot point. It can only expose one character's thoughts at a time, and that character is often the heroine- who goes through the most change along the course of the novel, and so must be the one who is watched the most closely.

Due to Pemberley Digital's detailed format and goal of exposing as much Austen to the audience as possible, however, that reader is now privy to the thoughts of those other characters. Pemberley Digital does respect the original boundaries placed around Charlotte by Austen by not showing her reactions in the main series. Instead, they work around these limitations through the use of social media and a secondary miniseries. Using the parallel timeline of the shoot-off series *Maria of the Lu* and Charlotte's presence within it, Pemberley Digital is able to get the reader inside Charlotte Lucas' mind and expose her thoughts in a similar way to how Austen's free indirect discourse would. Pemberley Digital therefore thematizes Austen's form and narration, and thus expands it to more characters through multiple and diversified internet platforms.

For *Emma Approved*, on the other hand, Pemberley Digital expands less into other characters' lives. Instead, it chooses a social media approach that will be more focused on

replicating the intense free indirect discourse placed upon the eponymous heroine. Essentially, this approach is tailored to the job and lifestyle of its reimagined Emma Woodhouse. While also covering the same ones that *LBD* began with, *Emma Approved* adds the more stylistic –and stylized– platforms: Pinterest, Instagram, and Google+ (for connecting with new “clients”). And as a life coach and self-proclaimed fashion icon, it seems a logical next step to give, as Pemberley Digital does, Emma her own blogs- one for “real lifestyle” advice and the other for fashion. True to the original character, Emma’s advice columns are not necessarily sound, though they eventually display a development and maturing of character. As this mirrors the character development of the Emma of the original text, it allows for even more intimacy between the Janeite/viewer and Austen’s works. Integrating themselves even further within their relationship with Austen, the viewers take the place of her omniscient narrator, who cannot interfere with the plot, but who is still able to identify and comment on changes with the characters and the social situations. While the lifestyle blog focused on bringing the viewers closer to the characters, the fashion blog actually extends outside Pemberley Digital’s internet and social media realm. As the only one of Pemberley Digital’s heroines to have an office job, Emma’s fashion blog transforms from a way to keep track of cute outfits on the show into a real-life and useful guide on how to dress professionally for young women in the workforce.

With the success of its earlier social-media projects, Pemberley Digital’s approach to *Welcome to Sanditon* becomes even more experimental. It reduces the number of platforms, leaving only Twitter, YouTube and a separate website designed solely for this project. *Welcome to Sanditon* transcends the boundaries of traditional

media to incorporate its own audience into its videos.²³ And while these “interactive” videos only account for 6 out of the total 27 episodes, they –for the first time- allow Janeites to enter Austen’s created world.²⁴ This began in the very first episode, in which the character Clara Breton reaches out to the audience and starts a dialogue on Twitter using “#sanditon”, one which combines the Pemberley Digital universe and the real one. Then, going beyond the limits of normal social media, Pemberley Digital allowed any of its viewers to submit short videos showing them as one of Sanditon’s residents responding to a certain problem that was introduced in a previous video.²⁵ These user-submitted videos are then compiled into a short montage that was placed inside an actual *Sanditon* episode.

Janeites’ experience within *Sanditon* did not end simply with them appearing in a video. Viewers were encouraged to create entire personas, complete with photos, blog posts and social media. Eventually, as is evidenced most through Twitter exchanges, there were not just fake personas, but also fake Sanditon businesses that participated on online debates about the fate of their town. For example, a fictitious internet café, “The Ground Pound”, believes that “the mayor has a good vision, but he’s going about it all wrong”, while the “Howdy Tacos” food truck decides to join the protestors at Sanditon’s City Hall.²⁶ This type of interaction gives viewers a chance to become part of the modernization of Austen’s works. They take up and maintain the introduction of

²³ This concept works best with the story of *Sanditon* (rather than the more popular *LBD*) because of the premise of the original story, in which the town of Sanditon is completely built on projections, instead of defined facts, opinions and characters.

²⁴ Episodes 4, 8, 12, 16, 20, 24.

²⁵ This was achieved through a separate “Domino Beta” website, which existed solely for the purpose of allowing viewers to submit videos and be a part of the *Sanditon* experience.

²⁶ The Ground Pound, Twitter post, May 20 2013 3:13p.m., <https://twitter.com/GroundPoundSand>; Howdy Tacos, Twitter post, May 23 2013 6:24p.m., <https://twitter.com/HowdyTacos>.
<https://twitter.com/HowdyTacos/status/337740897112428544>

contemporary aspects that was started for them by Pemberley Digital, and therefore become integrated within the adaptation. This viral Sanditon community, as well as the other webseries's social media platforms, is a positive space that does not require constant revitalization by an adaptation; instead the space takes its cue from that adaptation and creates itself out of the adaptation's separate aspects.

This interactivity, though on the surface only seeming to push towards the goal of a large and limitless community, also fosters a positive, personal exclusivity. Viewers can raise the level of intimacy within their relationship to Austen through *Welcome to Sanditon's* interactivity, which encourages fluidity between a Janeite's friendship with Austen and their relationship(s) with other aspects of their personal lives. This is achieved when a Janeite, encouraged by Pemberley Digital, creates a character or business (with the accompanying social media accounts) based on their interests. But these interests can be ones that exist inside and/or outside of their relationship with Austen. If a viewer is someone who loves to bake, for example, they may represent this interest within the Pemberley Digital space by taking on the persona of a Sanditon baker/bakery. Pemberley Digital allows Janeites to bring other aspects of their lives to their Austen experience, aspects that they may not have realized could be connected to their Janeitism. The combination of bringing personal interests to the experience Austen and of bringing Austen outwards into personal life is just another way of expressing the dual purpose of fostering both intimacy and community of Austen's works. On these platforms, the intimacy of introducing a piece of yourself into a personal experience pairs well and practically seamlessly with the inclusivity of allowing that piece to become part of a larger, more communal experience.

Pemberley Digital further expands their Austen world laterally through spin-off series. As we have seen previously, these miniseries act as a conduit for an expansion and application of Austen's free indirect discourse to characters not subject to it in her original novels. More of the Pemberley Digital culture, setting and society can be explored while parallel plot lines and minor characters' lives get a more in-depth treatment, via adding to an already unheard-of total screen time from each main series. The first introduced miniseries is *The Lydia Bennet*, in which Lydia Bennet's relationships with George Wickham and Mary Bennet- now a cousin- are explored parallel to the main storyline of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*.²⁷ The second is *Domino: Gigi Darcy*, which parallels Lizzie Bennet's time at Pemberley Digital, chronicles the continued aftermath of Gigi's relationship with Wickham, and serves as a transition from *LBD* to *Welcome to Sanditon*, thereby linking the two series and confirming that all Pemberley Digital characters and videos inhabit the same universe.²⁸ This connection allows for the communities of viewers surrounding both webseries to interact on a level not simply commanded by loyalty to Austen herself. The audience of one webseries is in a space in which their readings (and viewings) are valid and constructive to the readings (and viewings) of the audience of the other webseries.

All of these approaches show a space has been created in which Janeites can express and foster their personal connections and readerships, as well as become part of a larger community of readers. But this internet platform also displays a space that has

²⁷ There was also a Q&A segment, and two more miniseries: *Maria of the Lu*, already mentioned on page 22, and *Better Living with Collins and Collin*, a satirical DIY series that uses a tactic similar to the parodying nature of Austen's faux-Gothic *Northanger Abbey*. And while *Emma Approved* also contained two miniseries (*Frank & Jane* and *Harriet's Music Club*), as well as a Q&A segment, their functions are similar to those of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, and would be repetitive to mention here.

²⁸ The production company Pemberley Digital takes its name from their own fictional Pemberley Digital, the Darcy's technology empire that serves as the modernized family estate from the original text.

been created in order to pay homage to and build off of the legacy of readers that have come before. In creating adaptations that have moved past the singular focus on content thematization favored by previous adaptations and that now encompass a modernization of form, Pemberley Digital acknowledges and recreates the aspects of Austen that have captivated her readers from the start.

III.

Jane Austen utilizes both the content and the narrative form of her novels to create an experience for the reader that is simultaneously intimate and communal. It is therefore the purpose of an adaptation of her work to capture that duality. Yet, a typical adaptation is usually self-contained within its two hours of film, and it is then left to the Janeite viewership to expand its content and themes (or general world portrayal) outside its cinematic boundaries. In order to make an adaptation do more work and provide more services for its audience, Pemberley Digital uses the platform of the internet to create an unbounded space in lieu of a traditional adaptation, of which each webseries is only a single part.

This limitless space is also one of inclusion. On the textual level, Austen took care to include different kinds of people, of all different backgrounds and (as seen in *Northanger Abbey*) readerships. These necessarily indicate fractious relationships between readers, who find that the textual inclusion transforms into an exclusivity felt by the individual reader. The reader also feels included within Austen's novels, but this manifests at first as very personal and individualized bond. This exclusivity therefore is forged from a style that encouraged a reader to find parts of themselves within the text

and therefore create an intimate bond with the novel. This form of free indirect discourse also allowed readers to join a community of other readers who were led to that personal relationship with the novel by the same formal route, thereby bringing the reader full circle back to Austen's original inclusivity of audience within the text.

Pemberley Digital perpetuates this feeling of community without jealousy or malevolence through social media campaigns and miniseries. Through a thematization of Austen's form, as well as of her content, Pemberley Digital is able to allow each Janeite to pursue their bond on their own terms. Janeites of different readerships can share their opinions without feeling pressured to adopt a new reading or to compromise their own with someone else's. This space lets the audience take control of the experience and leaves it up to them to decide how much they want to interact or what they want to get out of the series. It is therefore better for Janeites to have a space like this rather than an adaptation that would force an unwanted combination or reconciliation of readerships and friendships. Austen understood that readings would always be contentious, and to honor that, Pemberley Digital's space allows readerships to express their different views.

Pemberley Digital's approach to adapting Austen is perhaps most useful, after all, as a model for future adaptations. In order to preserve the dual and simultaneous sense of community and intimacy that the original novels provide, adaptations can no longer have a single film constitute their entire effort to give Janeites a piece of Austen. Pemberley Digital has shown that the readership that was so important and so understood by Austen demands the same respect and treatment from an adaptation. Pemberley Digital puts the Janeite, and their relationship with Austen, first, and so sets the standard for future adaptations.

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