

Diversion & Deviation:
The Importance and Necessity of Cinematic Jane Austen
Adaptations in the Creation of Austenian Expectational Texts

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In the 200 years between her first publication and today, Jane Austen's body of works were mostly associated with a more scholarly tradition. But as the 20th century drew to its close, a sudden outpouring of Austenian film and television adaptations created a still thriving cinematic Jane Austen tradition. This new means of representation created a new Austenian audience comprised of a complicated combination of Austen's earlier, literary audience in combination and a new cinematic audience. Their divergent opinions combined to form expectational texts seemingly based on the novels. However, in the case of *Sense and Sensibility* the 1995 and 2008 film adaptations exemplify how it is not Austen's original texts but instead prior adaptations that are upheld as the criterion for Austen adaptation.

- I'm not hung up about Darcy. I do not sit at home with the pause button on Colin Firth in clingy pants, okay? I love the love story. I love Elizabeth. I love the manners and language and the courtesy. It's become part of who I am and what I want. I'm saying that I have standards.
- Oh, you have standards, pet. I hope they help you on with your coat when you're seventy.

Amanda Price and Frankie Price, *Lost in Austen* (2008)

INTRODUCTION: STAYING TRUE TO THE “REAL” JANE AUSTEN

For an author dead nearly 200 years, Jane Austen has a great legacy. Her six novels are well regarded in both the scholarly community and are as highly popular with a general recreational audience. Her talent for satire and social critique has permanently embedded her works in the so-called literary canon, an honor she has held for longer than most female authors. Simultaneously, those particularly avid readers, who continue to call themselves by the moniker of “Janeites,” said by Austen biographer Claire Harman to have been first coined by George Saintsbury, revere her work for its humor, its plots, and its characters (Harman 128). The past fifteen years has seen twelve adaptations for film and television of Austen novels set in the period in which they were written, along with many modernized or alternately set adaptations and other Austen related films, all of which are changing the public perception of Austen.

This fifteen-year trend, which started in the mid 1990s, was one of romanticizing Austen adaptation. This represents a significant alteration in the previous trend of what Rachel M. Brownstein calls those “adaptations between 1952 and the late 1980s [that] show earnest, increasing regard for both women’s domestic lives and Great Literature...[which] might be used as substitutes for reading” (Brownstein, “Out of the Drawing Room” 15). This change in the art of Austen adaptation from sober retellings to romantic dramas represents a shift, as Paula Demory notes, from scholars and readers of both sexes towards a predominately female audience for Austen:

The shift in the gender balance among both scholars and fans...and the corresponding shift in critical attention towards feminist scholarship is also now (somewhat belatedly) reflected in the adaptations, which from 1995 on are much more clearly geared towards a female audience. (Demory 130-131)

Along with this surge of adaptations came the increasing tendency for adaptations to adjust and supplement their original source material. According to John Wiltshire, Austen adaptations are perhaps a “special case” owing to an idea that Erica Sheen proposes of a preoccupation with fidelity “as a rhetoric of possession” (Wiltshire, “On Fidelity” 160). Specifically, Wiltshire cites this in the context of the importance of gaining the support of this group of viewers who have read the source novels of Austen:

The audience for an Austen film may never have read an Austen novel, but there is a segment of that audience familiar with the books, and upon this segment the film’s commercial and possibly critical success can depend. (Wiltshire, “On Fidelity” 160)

For those readers who belong to that segment of readers, these films were problematic because of how they altered the readers’ favorite novels by adding entirely new material in order to sustain the surge of popularity for her works.

Thus an array of “expectational texts” grew from this disagreement almost as a way to provide the correct model for adapting the novels; this phrase coined by Barbara Hodgdon and used by Elsie Walker in her discussion of Shakespearian adaptation, means “private notions about the play and about performed Shakespeare, notions...not even recognize[d] until I find them denied” (Hodgdon 143). Like Shakespeare, Austenian texts also have their own set of “expectational texts,” an array of ideas synonymous with the author’s name that call up a set of cultural associations. In order to best express the expectational texts for Austen, they can be gathered together into three major veins of thought: the sense of a plot structured meticulously on a small but elegant scale; a paradoxical nostalgia for a simpler, long lost past combined with a desire to

find elements of this past in modern times; and lastly the inclusion of a true gentleman as hero, who is rendered with superior qualities of masculinity and a sincere respect in his treatment of the heroines.

PRECISE DEPICTION OF NARRATIVE IN A SMALL SETTING

One expectational text about Jane Austen's work that seems unshakable is that of the author's famous, deliberate construction of prose in order to create a precisely constructed narrative set neatly on a small stage. Austen described her image of the ideal plot setting in a letter of critique to one of nieces, Anna Austen, who also was an aspiring writer: "You are now collecting your People delightfully, getting them exactly into such a spot as is the delight of my life;—3 or 4 Families in a Country Village is the very thing to work on" (Le Faye 275). Something so seemingly limited and specific to a singular setting is instead universal, highly applicable to what author J. B. Priestly calls "her version for the perpetual human comedy, in which we all have to play our part" (Priestly 99). It is exactly Austen's small scale that enables the perception of her work as precise and unified.

Austen famously described her work to her nephew as "the little bit (two Inches wide) of Ivory on which I work with so fine a Brush, as produces little effect after much labour" (Le Faye 323). The phrase, said in the context of complimenting a child's early attempts at writing, has become the foundation of the popular perception of the Austenian narrative, described by writer Eudora Welty as "a marvel of designing and workmanship, capable of spontaneous motion at the lightest touch and of travel at delicately controlled but rapid speed toward its precise destination" (Welty 11). That destination, which closes seemingly every Austenian narrative, is a marriage for each heroine. The destination is what scholar Claire Tuite calls the finishing touch that makes up Austen's typical plot structure, marking "[her] fictions as forms of courtship or female *bildungsroman*" (Tuite 27).

As evidenced by the long history of the novel, both the typical courtship plot and the female *bildungsroman* are not uncommon narrative forms. Additionally, Austen's choice to depict these narrative forms in the setting of that "Country Village" with "3 or 4" small families could be considered too limiting, something that can be gleaned from the author's own reference to that "bit of Ivory," perhaps indicating her anticipation of "the criticism most often leveled at her in later years that she was too small scale" (Harman 114). Instead, this small scale has been construed as "evoking miniature painting, dedication to craftsmanship, doggedness, and painstaking expertise" (Harman 113-114). This precision in Austen's depiction of this small scale narrative is now the most prominent feature of plot structures of her stories: "She created for her own use, as we have seen, a tiny world of her own, but no novelist before or since has succeeded better than she did in bringing close to perfection what she set out to do" (Priestly 99).

Austen's association with this small, limited scale is the element that pervades her work and its many adaptations. This association arguably enables extensive adaptation of Austen's novels, further defining not only the construction of her narratives but also their subjects and characters as precisely depicted and therefore widely communicable to a modern audience. Scholar David Monaghan discusses this idea in depth, making a claim for the universality of a small-scale narrative:

When critics have considered the relationship between Austen's novels and the films based on them, they have often addressed the...issue of her adaptability...There seems to be a fairly widespread agreement that Austen lends herself to both film and television adaptation because her plots are well constructed, her casts of characters and settings are relatively limited, and her subject matter is archetypal or romantic. (Monaghan 12)

Douglas McGrath, the screenwriter for the Miramax *Emma* of 1996, described Austen's accessibility for his audience: "I thought Jane Austen would be a good collaborator...because she writes, you know, superb dialogue, she creates memorable characters, [and] she has an extremely clever skill for plotting" (Parill 3).

What Monaghan calls “the archetypal or universal nature of [Austen’s] basic plot” is also responsible for creating characters and their motivations that also fit into an ideal storyline for adaptation (Monaghan 15). The reliability of the precise Austenian narrative is easily drawn upon to create films “with interesting characters, strong motivation, and plausible endings” (Parill 3). More precisely, this Austenian narrative structure relies upon to create those “simple love stories which are still appealing” to modern audiences through claiming the inevitable drive of the precise Austen narrative as that of a romance (Parill 3). The composition of the Austenian narrative, what paces the plot progression, is then construed as romantic motivation:

We have our own charts of the mind and diagnoses of the heart, but they are still in the same dangerous territories Jane Austen knew...How familiar, after all, and how inevitable is the motivation of man. His deeds by now may be numberless, but this is in contrast to the very small range of feelings that drive him. (Welty 16)

Despite Austen’s own insistence that she “could not sit seriously down to write a serious Romance under any other motive than to save [her] Life,” her novels have come to represent matchless examples of the expectational text of the precisely structured and gradually plotted courtship novel (Le Faye 312).

PARADOXICAL NOSTALGIA FOR A RELATEABLE LOST PAST

One of the most perplexing and alluring Austenian expectational texts is that of the postmodern nostalgia of the relatable past. In her discussion of Emma Thompson’s *Sense and Sensibility* and Nick Dear’s *Persuasion*, scholar Amanda Collins defines this relatable past as false, a creation of something meant to appear as a re-creation, not something that is real, but an entirely distinct form of reality that she calls “hypereal” (Collins 80). In order to appeal to a late 20th century and early 21st century moviegoing audience, Austenian adaptations represent an era that is modified to suit the postmodern perception of a lost past.

The depiction of the period in which Austen wrote is often broken down into the smallest niceties of period appropriate details. The author's texts avoid mentioning visual cues and current events are ignored in the expectations of remaining faithful to the period in which she wrote, that of turn of the 19th century. The smallest deviations from what is perceived as period appropriate are the items that call forth the most criticism:

Fidelity to the story, the characters, the ideas, and the language is [the] main criterion... [Audiences] may object to new dialogue that the screenwriter has concocted, or to the moving of a drawing room scene outdoors, or to the possibility that Elizabeth Bennet seems to not be wearing underwear. (Parill 7)

Objections arise from instances where adaptations alter or cut dialogue, interject new material or scenes, change character traits, and visibly ignore those societal strictures that the audience associates with the period in which Austen wrote and in which her stories take place. This preoccupation with fidelity points to a desire for a lost period of a history more simple than our own: "Jane Austen is the focal point of nostalgia...not only of Heritage England...but also a world that seemed more comprehensible and coherent" (Brownstein, *Why Jane Austen?* 250-251).

It is Austen's association with this lost past that makes her works retain their popularity in today's postmodern, chaotic world. As mentioned by Austen biographer Claire Harman, although Austen's original intent was to create stories separated from the era in which they were written through the omission of these period appropriate details and time specificity, the inclusion of these details is ironically what characterizes adaptation of her work today:

[Austen] knew that paring down detail would give her narratives more imaginative flexibility...She also knew that pinning her works to a particular time would date them...The irony is that she has come to represent her period. 'Jane Austen's Regency World' could have an equals sign instead of an apostrophe. She stopped the clock and now *is* her time. (Harman 224)

Austen's attempt at creating a sense of timelessness, as in being "unaffected by the passage of time or changes in fashion," has instead been thwarted by the preservation of her works as distinctly representative of a past era (OED). In this respect, Austen adaptations lack what Walker calls "the safely distant evocations of a bygone era and the revered, 'timeless' text [as] an antidote for the anxieties and disruptions of the present" (Walker 10).

But despite lacking a sense of "timelessness," in recent adaptations this distant past is instead set beside our postmodern world, in effect promoting the idea of Austen's past world as being of our time: "That sense of Austen being of our time is one of her most appealing attributes... 'She is almost eerily contemporary'" (Harman 221). Instead of remaining as relics of the past, Austen's works have the generally positive connotation of showcasing "fundamental forms of human relations, individual, and collective action" (Walker 19). This perception can be traced back to Austen's original works as evidenced by her use of free indirect discourse, which as evidenced by its blurring of the lines between her sections of narrative and dialogue, creates characters that feel genuine and real to a modern day reader: "Austen's free indirect discourse...[advertises] an individuated, fully psychologized human subjectivity, in truly 'lifelike' characters" (Wood 366). Today, Austen is frequently called a "keen and hilarious an observer of human nature," and it is this human nature that seems to belong to her time as well as our own (Harman 221).

Thus a sense of past as being of the present requires Austen adaptations to depict this long lost past as relatable to modern day: The appeal of Austen adaptations rests in "a desire to learn about the past as it relates to the present... The films are judged not on the basis of their historical realism but on their ability to mold history into a form which is reminiscent of the present" (Collins 88). Austen adaptations depict this hypereal world that enables retreating into a past that feels familiar, as Amanda Price does in the miniseries *Lost in Austen*: "It is a truth generally acknowledged that we are all longing to escape" (*Lost in Austen*). Since this escape requires a the depiction of a world that is distinctly in the past, all while ensuring that the depiction contains elements that a

modern viewer finds relatable, Austen's texts have to be modified in their adaptations: "These films have appropriated the work of Jane Austen for the purposes of fulfilling a societal need for nostalgia" (Collins 81). By creating this expectational text of the combination of a distinctly past period and characters who depict the timelessness of human nature in Austen adaptations, the Austen audience also created an atmosphere where the author's original writings could also be redefined: "For the twenty-first century reader and filmgoer, then, even Austen's text is no longer *only* Austen's text" (Demory 122).

IDOLIZED GENTLEMAN AS IDEAL HERO

Another Austenian expectational text is to see each of her leading characters as compelling, noble, and appealing heroes who deserve their heroines. Scholar Michael Kramp describes Austen's body of work as one that "portrays men who have become cultural icons of masculinity" (Kramp 6). This iconic status is executed through men who are characterized by an array of different types of masculinity: "The men of Austen's corpus, rather than attempting to imitate a single and stable paragon of masculinity, must negotiate numerous intertwined and contradictory standards for proper maleness" (Kramp 5).

To illustrate this idea in a popular context, *PBS Masterpiece Theater's* website devoted to those Jane Austen adaptations that they have aired has a page devoted to meeting the "Men of Austen." This page lists every unwedded male in all six novels who is presented as a possible love interest for the heroine, offering the website user an opportunity to read about Austen's male characters in the easily accessible form of online dating profiles ("Masterpiece | Jane Austen | PBS"). Inevitably, the characteristic that all these ideal men share is that of being "lovers for the heroines [and] who promise to be helpmates rather than dominators" (Harman 201-202).

Given that Austen's original narratives are structured around the lives of women, Austen's male characters must be able to function as the ideal Austen hero with a limited degree of speech

and instead are characterized almost exclusively by action; while their pursuits of their heroines are necessary to reach the final conclusion of matrimony, they still operate at a secondary level to the main narrative: Austen's men "function as a counterpoint to the dominant strand of the narrative featuring the consciousness and feelings of the heroine" (Clery 335). Not only are their places in the novels' narratives of lesser importance compared to that of the heroines, but these men also serve as objects that serve to empower the heroines through their eventual, and courtship plot demanded, conquest of their husbands-to-be.

This aspect, that of female control over a dominant male figure, is perhaps the most significant aspect of the expectational text and is further modified by the addition of repressed male sexuality, creating audience support for the perception of what is almost a complete idolization of the impossibly ideal Austen hero, a man of both action and restraint:

In a permissive age, the restraint and decorousness of [Austen's] love scenes seem in themselves erotic, and the idea of the heroines attracting so much male attention by making so few sexual concessions becomes...unattainable fantasy of female empowerment" (Harman 201).

This specific adaptation trend depicting emotional repression also further complicates the expectational text of the ideal Austen man. Combining this sense of emotional repression with a physical demonstration emotional repression also creates an aspect of sexual and physical appeal expectational text of the ideal Austen man: "The updates of Austen's narratives showed attractive men who lived with women in endearing relationships" (Kramp 148). Additionally, the characterization of the hero has become narrower by leaving out those personality traits that are perceived as less attractive. Andrew Davies, a popular Austen screenwriter who has adapted four of the six novels, describes this idealized perception of masculinity: "Jane Austen's male characters, the best of them, are splendidly manly, and very, very different from women." (Davies, "Longing, Betrayal, and Redemption").

Because Austen's original texts "[deny] direct access to the unspoken thoughts and views of her heroes," film and television adaptations have provided that further component of the idolized and ideal Austen hero. By showing scenes with only men present, something Jane Austen never wrote, these adaptations attempt to expand the characterization of her men:

Told by a third-person narrator intimate with the consciousness of the female characters and usually at a distance from the mental lives and daily activities of men, Austen's novels, so the films suggest, underrepresent men. The films redress that imbalance by amplifying and glamorizing Austen's heroes. (Kaplan 180)

Creating these background elements for the male characters of Austen has changed the general expectations about what these ideal Austen men are like as a whole. The idealized male Austen hero has to be emotionally expressive while remaining steadfast and almost silent: "[Austen's men] are reserved, strong, they tend not to talk very much, but when they do talk, it is decisive and sometimes absolutely thrilling when at last they pour their hearts out" (Davies, "Longing, Betrayal, and Redemption").

With this contradictory expectation for the Austen hero, scholar Cheryl L. Nixon explains how an audience desired need for masculine emotional expression is achieved through action to show both his strength of character and depth of feeling while still remaining essentially masculine: "Each hero displays his struggle to achieve the emotional expression which will bring him into balance; each demonstrates this struggle by physically displaying the emotions he cannot speak...[as a] balanced form of masculinity on display" (Nixon 27-28). Adaptations must aid in part to create a full characterization of the ideal Austen man, the character needs to present all aspects of his personality and his experience over the course of the novel, so as to satisfy the expectational text.

By including extra scenes or extra screen time for Austen's male characters, the Austen adaptations tangibly demonstrate a wider range of feeling in her male characters than is ever disclosed in her writings: "The films use a visual, indeed a bodily, vocabulary to express what is

essentially an emotional redefinition of each character” (Nixon 24). This tendency to redefine each male hero as both emotional and reserved creates what Deborah Kaplan calls a “harlequinized” version of Austen’s heroes (Kaplan 178). By allowing the male characters to be “shaped by the powerful generic conventions of romance,” these male characters become more uniformly desirable but also lose “the nuances of Austen’s male characters” (Kaplan 180). Despite Austen’s famous claim that “pictures of perfection as you know make me sick & wicked,” her heroes have been shaped by their expectational text into idols of manhood (Le Faye 335)

THE EXPECTED ELEMENTS OF THE AUSTENIAN ADAPTATION

Upon their solidification as expectational texts, the three aspects of relatable nostalgia, ideal heroes, and precise plot became indelible parts of that which is quintessentially Austenian. Adaptations too must exhibit elements of these expectational texts in order to comply with the “preconception of what ‘should’ be done” to make an Austen adaptation authentic (Walker 8). All the while, an Austen adaptation must also resolve the issues involved with directly transposing an Austen novel and make alterations in order to create a successful film or television adaptation. Looking at Austen’s novel, *Sense and Sensibility*, as well as the 1995 film and the 2008 miniseries adaptations of the work, a balancing act between two issues is demonstrated. By both seeking to satisfy Austenian expectational texts and compensating for the limitations of the novels, Austen adaptations have come to establish their own array of expected elements: preserving the structure, setting, and style of Austen’s text to create a faithful simulation of Austenian work; remaining true to the vague idea of the “essence of Jane Austen” by evoking the qualities of her texts rather than their content; and creating male characters into suitors that are equal to their female counterparts through exploring their characterizations through physical exhibition and repression.

INTRODUCING THE TEXTS

THE NOVEL: FROM *ELINOR AND MARIANNE* TO *SENSE & SENSIBILITY*

Jane Austen's novel, entitled *Sense and Sensibility*, was her first published work, printed anonymously in 1811. First written as early as 1795 as a collection of letters between the characters Elinor and Marianne, it took sixteen years to become the full length novel. Austen always considered *Sense and Sensibility* as an infant work: "I am never too busy to think of S&S. I can no more forget it, than a mother can forget her suckling child" (Le Faye 182). The novel seems to be making the argument for the importance of both qualities, sense, as represented by the elder daughter, Elinor, and sensibility, as represented by the younger daughter, Marianne, even if the gesture was performed unconsciously: "Sensibility need not be weakness or self-indulgence, but rather a genuine ability to feel for others. Sense need not be cunning or narrow pragmatism but rather an enlightened use of one's mind. In Austen's world, any *human* needs both" (Auerbach 117). Despite its many technical flaws, Austen's first novel still manages to set up that parallel for which she is known today—the tension between what is real and what is romantic. The dichotomy has in turn become the typical qualities we associate with Austen—our own expectations: "women attempting to marry the men that they love, defying the social, personal, or economic barriers which would prevent them" (Parill 16).

THE ADAPTATIONS: *SENSE & SENSIBILITY* (1995) and *SENSE & SENSIBILITY* (2008)

The award winning 1995 *Sense and Sensibility* adaptation, a 133-minute long film, premiered in December of 1995 as the first film length Austen adaptation to be released in theaters in 45 years (AFI). Columbia Pictures's Mirage Productions brought this production into being by gathering a talented group of well-known individuals, including Ang Lee, Hugh Grant, Emma Thompson, Alan Rickman, and others. By creating visual expectations for Austen adaptations, this *Sense and Sensibility* plays a major role in defining an air of Austenian essence that is now a requirement for any 21st century adaptation. "Although one may find some adaptations of Austen's novels unsatisfactory

when compared to the experience of reading the novels, Ang Lee and Emma Thompson have managed to create cinematic art from one of Austen's least successful novels" (Parill 44). Feeling becomes more important to detail, and that is what creates a general Austenian audience.

Sense and Sensibility as a Regency period set adaptation was left unattempted for over twelve years until the BBC released a three part miniseries in 2008, directed by John Alexander and with a screenplay by Andrew Davies, the writer famous for his screenplay for the 1995 *Pride and Prejudice*. Setting both the film and miniseries as comparable but not in competition meant that the newer adaptation had the ability to both fulfill viewer expectations without having its elements negate or challenge those adaptation aspects of the earlier film. Davies made clear his intention to create a wholly different work: "It's all going to look very different from the film which we're pleased with because we wouldn't to come out looking like a rather longer version of the same thing (Davies, "Interview Featurette").

EXPECTATIONAL TEXTS SHOWN THROUGH ADAPTATION ELEMENTS

FABRICATING STRUCTURE, SETTING, AND STYLE FOR FAITHFUL SIMULATION

Jane Austen took pride in her status as a novelist, creating beloved characters and settings in language she so carefully "lopd & cropd" to convey their stories precisely as she wished (Le Faye 202). For Janeites, Austen's original words and their delineation in novel are prized above all other alternate adaptations and versions, even at the level of the prominent nonprofit Jane Austen Society of North America: "It is a truth universally acknowledged that the book is always better than the movie" (JASNA). For these people, preserving every possible detail of the original text is vital to their approval: "Fidelity to the story, the characters, the ideas, and the language is their main criterion" (Parill 7). The need to protect the words of Austen, of what Katherine Mansfield dubbed their "secret friend," becomes an integral part of the expectations of an Austen adaptation (Brownstein, *Why Jane Austen?* 24).

This preoccupation with preserving Austen's literary identity in adaptations, defined by "literary work [as] 'composition' and "the importance of 'the best chosen language,'" places high priority on demands for remaining faithful to her original work (Brownstein, *Why Jane Austen?* 54).

This definition of fidelity for the Austen reader is best summed up by scholar Paula Demory:

What people seem to mean by [fidelity] is a film that is set in a historically 'accurate' time and place, that follows the novel's plots and subplots without deviating from Austen's narrative ordering, employs Austen's dialogue precisely, and refrains from cutting scenes and minor characters. (Demory 128)

According to Elsa Solender, this standard is deemed unrealistic by filmmakers, who consider "Janeites and Jane Austen societies as purists, prudes, fanatics, and fools" (Solender 105).

But the two sides are not entirely diametrically opposed. Whether or not devoted readers find any adaptation automatically inferior, they still make up a large part of those who seek out Austen adaptations, even as a guilty pleasure: "Readers, even if they are 'book people,' seem to desire the cinematic experience—a visceral engagement with Austen's world that the books, being on the page, cannot offer" (Demory 128). In turn, filmmakers understand the importance of appealing to the book readers, both for commercial and critical success: "The filmmakers, like this audience, know their source novel well, and their decisions in making the film are very often guided by conscious reference to this source text" (Wiltshire, "On Fidelity" 160). So long as there is a clear depiction of details that are accurate for the author's "Country Villages," a sense of what Amanda Price calls "manners and language and the courtesy," this difficult expectation of textual fidelity can be fulfilled to a reasonable extent (*Lost in Austen*).

In its aim to create an adaptation that complies with this expectation of fidelity to Austen's original in combination with Austenian expectational texts, the 1995 film adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility* includes moments that are drawn directly from the text and left virtually intact. Maintaining a direct association to Austen requires replication of her language and characters as they

are originally rendered in her novel in order to remain faithful to the source text. By transposing scenes of dialogue from the novel, the 1995 film adaptation aims to prove its dedication to satisfying that Austenian expectational text of a painstakingly crafted plot, which is comprised of small details of dialogue, characters, and structures of her original novels.

Following the same narrative as in the novel, the 1995 film adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility* begins with the death of Henry Dashwood, the father of protagonists Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, who with his last words asks his heir, John Dashwood, the half-brother of the heroines, to provide the financial support for his second wife and their daughters that he cannot legally grant. Following the exact text of the novel, the film adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility* portrays a dialogue between John and his wife Fanny, who discuss the late father's request:



"I am convinced within myself that your father had no idea of giving them money." – The persuasive Fanny creating a new narrative

A small sequence of scenes portrays this conversation, showing Fanny persuading her highly malleable husband into reconsidering his father's dying suggestion. In little more than one minute, the dialogue between the two characters follows their journey through four short moments spread out over the course of the husband and wife's journey, with brief moments in their London home, in a carriage exiting London, at a moment of rest in a small country town, and once more in their carriage. The camera utilizes mirrors, framing, and John's gaze and attitude to mark Fanny as the central power as she brings down her husband's original proposition of 3,000 pounds to nothing but occasional gifts and small sums on an irregular basis. The screenplay of the adaptation follows the small section of dialogue of the novel exactly, resulting in the same outcome: a moment of Austen

narrative craftsmanship that creates a means to withdraw any tangible support for the newly widowed Mrs. Dashwood and her three daughters and in effect controls their way of living and the relationships they create with others.

However, it is the method of depicting this conversation aligns with the expectational text of those light and precise touches that make up Austenian narrative construction. The way in which the film depicts the conversation serves to place all of its orchestration on a single character's persuasive abilities. While the novel's sequence does show Fanny as the instigator of the conversation, John encourages it and aids in leading to the final monetary decision, making it a cooperative dialogue, a conversation that "gave to his intentions whatever decision was wanting before" (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 12). The adaptation depicts Fanny as the sole source of power and her husband as a man who, as is written in the screenplay, "gets nervous" if he displeases his wife (E. Thompson, *Screenplay and Diaries* 31). Attributing this conversation to Fanny alone enforces the subtlety of Austenian narrative gestures as created through her characters. If delivered in the exact manner as it is shown in the novel, this scene would appear in the film's structure as an artificial device, a transparent means to remove the heroines from one location in order to place them in a new area to form new acquaintances. Although the scene complies with a need to precisely recreate Austen's original dialogue, taking that dialogue from one condensed novel passage and spreading it over the course of a short journey and attributing the decision to a single character is what actually proves the validity of the Austenian expectational text of her carefully constructed plot.

Given the benefit of additional time, the BBC's 2008 miniseries adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility* allows for more scenes that faithfully reproduce moments and dialogues present in the novel. Scenes and characters that were cut from the earlier film adaptation are granted inclusion in this longer adaptation, making a still stronger case for fidelity to the original novel. The inclusion of these additional details is intended as a means to better convey that expectational text of Austen's

particular style of structure, that “tiny world of her own” that has become synonymous with her name (Priestly 99). The 2008 adaptation particularly aimed to assert its strict adherence to Austen’s original, particularly through depicting moments and dialogues not represented in the 1995 adaptation.

Among these added scenes there was one that was considered crucial in the context of Austen’s text and yet entirely absent from the 1995 film adaptation: John Willoughby’s confession and appeal to Elinor during Marianne’s illness. Emma Thompson found that she could not include this scene in her screenplay for the 1995 film adaptation, where Willoughby, Marianne’s first love, tries to explain himself. Thompson called it “a wonderful scene in the novel which unfortunately interfered too much with the Brandon love story” (E. Thompson, *Screenplay and Diaries* 272). Andrew Davies’s screenplay included the scene, albeit in a condensed version that was still further cut down in the final film (Morahan, “Audio Commentary”). Even with major cuts from the pages of dialogue, the final filmed scene still details many of those words said by Willoughby and Elinor, through a careful transfer from the dialogue in the novel to the screen:



“Do you pity me, Miss Dashwood?” – Willoughby seeks forgiveness

Willoughby and Elinor conduct their high-tension conversation in an overwhelmingly large space for only two people. Despite the many cuts, each aspect of the novel’s original dialogue is touched upon: Willoughby’s initial desire only to play with Marianne’s feelings but that leads to genuine love, his intention to propose, his seduction of Brandon’s ward Eliza, and his harsh rebuff of Marianne in London with his letter which ended their relationship. His appeals ends in the same exact words

as appear in the novel, spoken more gently to Elinor than the rest of their conversation as they come face to face: “Now do you pity me, Miss Dashwood? Or have I said all this to no purpose?” (*Sense and Sensibility* 2008). Extracting herself from a close proximity to Willoughby, Elinor ends with the declaration about her sister Marianne: “She can never be more lost to you than she is now” (*Sense and Sensibility* 2008). Her closing statement gives the scene its finality, making it an integral part of the narrative by closing Willoughby’s narrative thread rather than letting his sudden desertion of Marianne go entirely unexplained.

In order to make this scene be an effective ending to Willoughby’s story, the actual outcome of the confession and appeal for forgiveness is entirely altered from the novel. Where the close of this scene in the novel has Willoughby and Elinor end their conversation amicably, with Elinor’s forgiveness, the film avoids any obvious declaration of forgiveness. In the adaptation, rather than the reassurance and forgiveness he receives in the novel, Elinor resolves to not grant him any pity in that moment, even when she stands within inches of his heartbroken expression that the viewer sees in a close up shot. If the adaptation were to directly mimic the text, it would be unable to deliver the true sense of resolution that is expected from Willoughby’s confession. In order to satisfy the expectational text of Austenian narrative precision and still remain faithful to the text, the adaptation is forced to preserve but also reorder the novel’s original dialogue. The screenplay terminates Willoughby’s physical presence in the narrative but still allows for a later, private forgiveness of his actions, managing to end Willoughby’s involvement on a positive note, while still refraining resolving his role on terms that could almost be deemed friendly, thus maintaining that expectational text of Austen’s meticulous plot structuring.

EVOKING THE ESSENCE OF AUSTENIAN ADDRESS

The adherence that “so-called fidelity to the text” is only one manner of faithfulness to Austen’s original novels (Harris 66). But there is an alternative fidelity—a fidelity to the nature or

feeling of an Austenian text. The user *escapingintoabook*, member of the popular online message board community, *The Republic of Pemberley*, describes these two types of fidelity as essentially incompatible: “I’ve watched at least one adaptation for each book, and they always fail in one of two aspects: not having the feeling of the story, or not having the facts” (“Jane Austen | The Republic of Pemberley”). To satisfy the book-reading fans without the “facts” of Austen’s novels, screenwriters like Emma Thompson, who wrote the Oscar-winning screenplay for the *Sense and Sensibility* film released in 1995, instead seek to replicate the “feeling” that a text exhibits to the reader. The goal of her screenplay is described as such: “Our fondest hope is that people who love Jane Austen will find the film to be faithful to the humour and wisdom of the original novel” (Thompson 16).

This aspect of fidelity to the spirit or feeling of an Austen novel through adaptation must also be adjusted to a general commercial audience in addition to this book reading audience, made up of both casual Janeite readers and scholarly critic readers of her work:

Because...filmmakers must appeal to their audience...[and] anticipate that a large portion of the audience will be Austen fans, [Austen] adaptations of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries are marked by their attempts to be faithful to the ‘spirit’ of Jane Austen—a desire that, if it does anything, speaks to a need to satisfy both scholars and fans of her work. (Demory 125).

That spirit of Jane Austen consists mostly of the perception of her style, which is experienced through her use of “one delicate but sure stroke after another” (Priestly 99). Adaptations of Austen too are expected to have this light touch, especially in comparison with harsher novels by authors like Charles Dickens, written within the context of the Industrial Revolution.

That spirit of Austen is also applied to the content of the novel, not in individual “facts” of characters and settings, but in the way she treats the forces that influence the lives of her characters: Austen’s novels are about the ordinary issues of “domestic lives concerned with the making of

families, communities, profit, and love” (Brownstein, *Why Jane Austen?* 19). For those unfamiliar with the novels themselves, these issues of “families, communities, profit, and love,” make up their perception of spirit of Jane Austen, and inform their own preferences for expected elements in an Austen adaptation: “The screenplay seems to...promote not only the adaptations that must occur in the transition from page to screen, but also the ‘re-writing’ of Austen to fit audience preferences” (Collins 82).

To fulfill audience expectations, an adaptation must therefore copy Austen’s content in its basics but still apply what is perceived as the spirit of Austen, making her world clear to the viewer and therefore separated from the adaptation’s modern audience:

The most successful cinematic versions...copy the essence of the text but at a distance.

They highlight difference rather than sameness between the two texts, they comment on Jane Austen’s pastness, acknowledge shifts in our thinking about the world, or satirize modern times. (Harris 44)

These adaptations must then embody and alter specifics to capture the spirit of Austen as distinguished from our own era in order to appeal to our modern day film and television audiences: By doing so, they “attempt to make some sense of the cultural climate in which these adaptations are flourishing” (Collins 81).

When adapting an Austen novel, the alternative form of replicating the expectational text of a paradoxical, relatable nostalgia is to follow some perceived “essence” or “feeling” that the novel being adapted seems to convey. Using this Austenian essence as justification, the film adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility* creates scenes and circumstances not directly present in Austen’s novel. So long as such insertions are conveyed as believable in the context of the narrative, the adaptation still can satisfy an expectational text. By evoking the idea of an Austenian essence, adaptations of Austen’s novels are able to tie together the two paradoxical aspects of this expectational text, creating a sense

of nostalgia that indicates a specific potential to depict relatable characters, relationships, and situations that are surrounded by an aura of “pastness.”

The 1995 film adaptation includes an added in modification to a scene in the novel, that serves as a way to explore Elinor’s position as a character placed in a situation that is transferable to modern day situations and circumstances, while still keeping the moment locked in a seemingly simplified past. Following Willoughby’s sudden unexplained departure from Devonshire, the heartbroken Marianne soon retreats in tears to her room. After Elinor expresses suspicions about Willoughby, her mother follows Marianne’s actions by retreating into her own room. The youngest sister, Margaret, follows suit after Marianne refuses to open her door for the cup of tea that Margaret has brought up for her. Elinor is thus left alone on the landing:



Elinor sits on the landing of Barton Cottage shut out from the tears of her mother, Marianne, and Margaret.

Surrounded by the weeping of every other member of her family, Elinor simply takes the tea Margaret forces into her hands and sits on a step, soon followed by drinking the tea. The image created shows Elinor entirely separated from her family, creating a depiction of their fundamental family dynamic, where Elinor consistently favors reasoned control over the emotional expression so frequently exhibited by the rest of her family.

This scene, created for the film, forces the viewer to consider the viewpoint of Elinor alone, without any other figure to interfere. In this manner, Elinor automatically becomes relatable to a modern audience. The idea of feeling alone, characterized in the screenplay as being “helpless”

when surrounded by the familiar, is an experience that many viewers can easily find applicable to their own lives and situations with friends and family (E. Thompson, *Screenplay and Diaries* 121). Still, the moment is distinctly characterized by the period setting, with Elinor wearing her bonnet and drinking the seemingly obligatory English “period drama” tea, having no alternative activity available to her at the moment, while her sisters and mother retreat into their own rooms to express their feelings as is socially appropriate.

While this scene fits well with the narrative of the film adaptation, utilizing visual imagery and sound without visuals to directly engage with the “feeling” of Austenian adaptations, the actual circumstances of the situation would not fit in the original novel. The expectational text of relatable nostalgia asserts itself by enhancing the polarization between Elinor and the rest of her family to a theatrical point. Mrs. Dashwood and Margaret joining with Marianne in tears each behind their own individual closed doors is exaggerated, not only serving as a way to enforce the idea of Elinor as separate in her preference for sense, but also seems more relevant to a modern tendency to give in to emotion. Even as the viewer automatically relates to the solitary Elinor, that viewer does not automatically associate her approach as superior to that of the rest of her family. Austen’s novel tends to express approval in general for Elinor’s controlled feeling, but the expectational text of relation to this distant yet familiar past requires a portrayal that both sense and sensibility are acceptable, making this example of a scene that in fact undermines the actual intention of *Sense and Sensibility*’s supposed essence, which aims to support Elinor’s sense over her family’s sensibilities.

The 2008 miniseries adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility* also seeks ways in which to better invoke those expectational texts about the now familiar idea of paradoxical nostalgia through added moments that follow the accepted ideas of Austenian essence. The majority of these moments have precursors in the film adaptation, which in turn redoubles their legitimacy as moments of Austenian essence, building up to a mass Austen intertext: “A source novel and film can echo back and forth in a satisfying way, their intertextual relationship reminding us of virtues in each medium that might

remain unnoticed otherwise. (G. Macdonald and A. Macdonald 7). Extending these moments better enables the adaptation to comply with those expectational texts already encouraged in the film adaptation.

The 1995 film adaptation first brought out a connection between Colonel Brandon, a middle aged new neighbor, and Marianne, the heroine whom he eventually marries, through a shared appreciation of music and portrays Brandon's particular admiration of Marianne's piano performances as a characteristic of their relationship. The miniseries adaptation expands on the earlier adaptation's suggestion to a much greater extent. After hearing Marianne perform at Barton Park, Brandon goes out of his way to bring Marianne a particular piece of music to the home of the Dashwood women, Barton Cottage. Marianne fears that the piece is too challenging for her, but after Brandon's insistence that it is not, she accepts the sheet music. There is a carefully and artistically merged sequence of moments revolving around this piece of music, beginning with Marianne's initial practice and progressing to a perfected performance at Barton Park:



Colonel Brandon gives Marianne a song that she learns to play, later performing it for him and the residents of Barton Park

This newly added sequence revolving around Marianne's piano performances, while not having any parallel moment in the source novel, is still in keeping with that perception of an Austenian essence that runs through the original text. The adaptation aims to portray a sense of Austenian essence and the characters of the original text, and also supports that expectational text that hinges on familiarity set in a different time. The simplicity of Brandon's music sharing gesture,

Marianne's diligent practice, and the moment they share at the piano together create that sense of a lost past that is expected in Austen adaptations, showing a Marianne and Brandon interaction: "[Marianne] looks up at him because she's so pleased she's got it right and he looks down at her full of love" (Davies, Interview Featurette). This shared music sequence grants Brandon a touch of romantic sensibility and Marianne a sample of moderation and maturity, establishing compatibility and a potential way for a modern viewer can relate to their relationship.

Yet in order to enable the viewer to relate to elements at play within the expectational text of paradoxical nostalgia, the adaptation has to actually defy the supposed Austenian essence that is at work in *Sense and Sensibility*. The only textual basis for this music connection is the first time Brandon listens to Marianne play and pays her "only the compliment of attention" while Marianne concludes that he has "outlived acuteness of feeling" (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 37). The sequence adds a romantic aspect to Brandon's character and alters his stoic characterization in the novel, while making him more relatable to a modern audience. The same filmed sequence also prematurely lends Marianne a maturity, making an interest in Brandon believable and their eventual marriage a satisfying one rather than a marriage with Marianne as a "reward" of gratitude (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 351). In order to create this expectational text, this small sequence needs to show the viewer two characters that feel real and still display the desired Regency era courtship, or as Amanda Price says, "lovemaking, as you call it," in a conversation with Mr. Bingley (*Lost in Austen*). Without alterations like this sequence, Marianne and Brandon's marriage becomes one based on circumstance and not affection, a concept too distant from seeing familiar situations in a lost past to satisfy the Austenian expectational text.

MAKING MEN INTO SUITABLE SUITORS

One increasingly important expectation for an Austen adaptation is in fact the sum of many other expectations: those standards for a Jane Austen hero. A commonly noted aspect of Austen's

original novels is the lack of male presence for those figures that inevitably end the story by marrying the heroines. But the viewer of an Austen adaptation needs to have a sense of the male characters to complete their experience, even if that means adding content to Austen's original narrative: "The audience should approve of and be engaged with the characters, and sometimes that approval involves rewriting the fiction of the past to suit the needs of the present" (Collins 83).

In this case, the fiction of the past must be rewritten to give the audience a greater sense of the characterizations of the underrepresented characters, which are almost exclusively men. Austen's men are mostly absent or quiet in her novels, but the adaptations are expected to show these men on a par with Austen's female characters: "A 'more alive' and 'more active' version of Austen's heroes resonates with today's moviegoers" (Nixon 23). Screenwriter Andrew Davies achieves expansion of character through more men-only scenes: "I add...generally scenes for the men doing manly things—going hunting, going shooting, going swimming, [and] riding their horses" (Davies, "Longing, Betrayal, and Redemption"). This satisfies the expectations of the modern day audience by making men physically present: "Recent film adaptations of Austen are successful because they, quite literally, 'flesh out' her male characters" (Nixon 23).

These added scenes that focus on the physical presence of men, while defying Austen's original novels, still are expected by modern viewers who want to revise these men in order to expose their emotions and thoughts through physicality: "Added scenes uncover our desire for a specific revision of Austen's heroes. We want masculine emotional display that encourages our interpretation" (Nixon 24). Not only that, but additionally the audience wants to see, not hear, these emotions and thoughts, making their presence known through the resistance to societal norms: "Socially-dictated emotional restraint heightens the suspense of masculine development and the suspense of courtship ordering" (Nixon 26-27)

This expectation of extensively characterized male figures is dependent on their attempts to repress their own desires and personalities. Beyond just the expression of emotion, this repression

hinges on repressed sexuality. The men's repression is thus used as a vehicle to not only explore male characterization, but also to appeal to the audience: "We watch the repression take place, note its lineaments, the fierce looks, trembling mouths, shuddering eyelids...The longer [repression] is sustained, the more gratified we are by its being overcome" (Blum 164). Then this physical repression expresses not only character depth, but also brings out sexual expression without the act of sex, which Davies claims as simply bringing "out the sex that's already implicit in the story" (Davies, "Longing, Betrayal, and Redemption").

Davies shows a strong example of this through his addition of a scene of Colin Firth's Fitzwilliam Darcy taking a swim in a lake, considered to be "probably the most influential—and most controversial—extra-textual element of the 1995 BBC *Pride and Prejudice*" (Demory 139). Water has made appearances in the majority of the adaptations, whether through swimming, bathing, or raining, after Davies's *Pride and Prejudice* in a similar context: "In [Austen adaptations]... water seems mostly to have to do with sex...The images of dripping faces and wet clothes correlate with narrative moment of heightened sexual tension" (Demory 140).

The legacy of Davies's 1995 *Pride and Prejudice* has done much more than just add wet shirt scenes to later Austen adaptations. It also has brought in a degree of sexuality that also includes women, like Felicity Jones's Catherine Morland whose dreams are shown as resulting from the sexually explicit Gothic fiction she reads (*Northanger Abbey*). Now the point is not only to exhibit male sexuality for the female gaze, but to show the capacity for both sexes to experience this repression: "The twenty-first-century filmmakers seem less interested in reversing male/female stereotypes; their female protagonists seem more at ease in the world and more confident in their sexuality" (Demory 141).

Like every other Austen novel, *Sense and Sensibility* is capable of being stripped down to a simple heterosexual courtship plot. A narrative of this type is already a highly relatable one, and set in the context of an Austen novel in her practiced application of the simple structure, the Austenian

expectational texts related to plot and relatable nostalgia are readily available for adaptation. But both aspects require a particular modification: a present male figure to court the female protagonist and bring about the narrative's satisfying ending in their marriage. The lack of detail about Austen's male characters makes the enactment of this expectation a significant responsibility for Austen adaptations. Although the novel includes three male characters as suitors for the two female protagonists, those two who actually marry the heroines, Edward Ferrars and Colonel Brandon, lack the presence and development of character that an earlier suitor, John Willoughby, sustains for part of the narrative. Therefore, adaptations of the novel must provide Edward and Brandon with additional screen time in order to more clearly fulfill the expectational text of being ideal Austen heroes.

In its effort to expand the characterization of Colonel Brandon, the 1995 film adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility* includes an array of added moments that characterize his position in the narrative. But more importantly, the film includes moments of action and speech that grant the viewer an idea of Brandon's internal perspective that is denied in the novel. One such moment utilized in the internal exploration of Brandon's character is a short display of masculine emotion to express the character's anxiety over an increasingly ill Marianne. The scene shows him briefly alone, highlighting how the character nearly staggers around the room and holding on to the paneling for physical and perhaps emotional support. His expression translates into a character consumed with anxiety:



“Give me an occupation Miss Dashwood, or I shall run mad.” – The physically emotional Colonel Brandon

After this brief moment alone, Brandon’s acute agitation is witnessed by Elinor, to whom he turns immediately upon her exiting Marianne’s sick chamber in order to ask for something to do. Her initial kind dismissal of the offer is soon after silenced when Brandon begs “Give me an occupation, Miss Dashwood, or I shall run mad” (E. Thompson, *Screenplay and Diaries* 181). Brandon aims to disguise and subdue his acute emotion by seeking some action that would allow him to repress the increasingly apparent anxiety for Marianne’s safety, which is particularly noted by Elinor. His attire also manifests this emotional state through disheveled clothing and a loosened cravat, elements that also indicate Brandon’s suppressed sexuality and the role that plays in his emotional status.

But Brandon’s increased presence and characterization this scene is not simply an expansion of his character through the demonstration of internal thoughts and feelings in a physical form. More importantly, this scene specifically illustrates not only enhanced exposures, but also full alterations of Brandon’s characteristics as they are defined in the novel. The same task of fetching Mrs. Dashwood is put to Brandon in both the novel and the film, but the way in which Brandon reacts to such a situation and task are almost entirely opposite in the novel and in the film. In the novel, Brandon reacts to Elinor’s request “with all the firmness of a collected mind” regardless of whatever kind of emotion he could be focusing on (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 291). When this same task is adapted into the film, Brandon appears withdrawn, seeming on the verge of a nervous breakdown, or as Thompson’s screenplay describes him, “dangerously quiet” (E. Thompson, *Screenplay and Diaries* 181). In this manner, the adaptation’s Brandon becomes a wholly new character, motivated his own emotions and the concern for Marianne that creates them, thus creating a wholly new character meant to fulfill the expectational text of the ideal Austen hero. Despite the film’s efforts to truthfully expand on Brandon’s characterization to reveal his emotional state, the adaptation is only able to fulfill the expectational text of the ideal Austen heroes by

elevating the importance of Brandon's emotional turmoil as both an essential part of his character and as his motivation for action.

In order to comply with the established expectational text of depicting rounded, well developed male characters, the 2008 miniseries adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility* distinguishes itself from the approach of the 1995 film adaptation. Rather than explore male characterization chiefly through male characters' reactions with the female protagonists, the miniseries adaptation adds in multiple examples of the male characters working through their own feelings in privacy or exploring their interactions with other male characters that may or may not be implied in the novel.

In this miniseries adaptation, each moment where Edward appears in the original novel is also included as a scene in the adaptation, including his visit to the Dashwood women at Barton Cottage. For the entirety of his short stay, Edward seems agitated by something, his words and actions inhibited by anxiety and a sense of distance. This mental preoccupation is later augmented by a moment in which he chooses to do a servant's task: chopping firewood:



"I enjoy this work. A man can relieve his feelings." – Edward seeks an outlet for expressing his unspoken feelings for Elinor

This completely fabricated scene is added in to provide a wordless outlet for Edward to seek a release. Through this scene, this miniseries adaptation gives this uncommunicative character a way to communicate—through his body. Elinor finds him outside, chopping wood with his shirt entirely soaked through, entirely confused by his behavior. When their short conversation leads to Elinor's indirect mention of her family's financial circumstances, Edward begins to reply, almost

involuntarily, with “Yes, but if only—” before his tone wavers with emotion and he ends his own statement (*Sense and Sensibility* 2008). Edward’s vacant personality becomes charged and complex by adding in both physicality and emotion through wordless action, creating the idea of his vacant demeanor being instead a mask for dealing with this internal anguish and regret.

Just as with Brandon’s increased presence and characterization in the 1995 film adaptation, the 2008 Edward is not only given more characterization and exposure to his feelings and thoughts through physicality but is also altered in essentials to comply with the expectational text that constructs the image of the ideal Austen hero. As he is the man whom Elinor loves and marries, the viewing audience expects Edward to fill the role of the typical Austen hero as a man of action. In an attempt to both comply with the adaptational expectations of expanding the characterization of the male figures and additionally fulfill the expectational text of depicting an ideal Austen hero, the wood-chopping scene of the 2008 adaptation attempts to associate the highly masculine activity with Edward’s own particular style of emotional repression. The novel’s Edward is repeatedly described as shy, poorly spoken, and diffident. Due to his highly infrequent presence in the novel, Edward at times seems to be nearly a nonentity. The wood-chopping scene provides a physically assertive way for Edward to display his emotional repression without requiring his unassertive character to take risks. When Elinor attempts to figure out what is troubling him, he responds almost angrily by stating “Nothing. Nothing I can speak of” (*Sense and Sensibility* 2008). Additionally, shooting this scene in the rain adds in the element of repressed sexuality associated with water in Austen adaptations, depicting Edward in a soaked white shirt precisely reminiscent of the famous Darcy lake dive of 1995. By creating this purely visual, extra-textual connection between Edward and Darcy, the adaptation automatically associates the two heroes, making the connection between the less than ideal Austen hero, Edward, into Darcy, who is arguably most famous representative of Austen’s ideal heroes in popular culture. Even as this scene aims to utilize physicality and expression of emotion as a way to bring out the nuances of Edward, the physical activity of wood-chopping in

another wet shirt represents a conscious alteration made in order to fulfill the expectational text of the ideal Austen hero.

CONCLUSION: ADAPTIVE ALTERATIONS FREEING “JANE AUSTEN”

Inevitably, creating adaptations that stay true to the “real” Jane Austen is an impossible goal. This exploration of Austenian expectational texts is a fair illustration of the phenomenon: upon review of the novels, films, and miniseries that all claim as their source Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility*, even though the work is claimed as an originator of expectational texts, in fact we see that there must be a deviation from the original work in order to fulfill those expectations of precision of structure, familiarity of nostalgia, and idealness of heroes. In order to perform their task of fulfilling those expectational texts, paradoxically, Austen adaptations are forced to change the novels that they must inherently claim as their sources.

Perhaps the most immediate reaction to that result would be to blame Jane-o-mania, a term used by Rachel M. Brownstein and others to describe the mass production and cultural commodification of Austen since the late 20th century adaptation surge (Brownstein, *Why Jane Austen?* 6). As Ariane Hudelet notes, there is a sense that this popularity is causing a the loss of what could easily be called a “real” Jane Austen: “‘Jane Austen’ as a cultural mix of literature, film, and individual imagination, can sometimes be felt to eclipse the original texts, and the ‘real’ nature of the historical author and her intentions” (Hudelet 159).

But if the “real” Jane Austen is confined to items she wrote during her lifetime, the collection remaining is six novels, a few minor works, and a collection of childhood writings. Confining manifestations of Austen to such a small oeuvre would be a swift and easy means to watch her words fade into obscurity. As Elsie Walker states in her discussion of William Shakespeare’s expectational texts, there is a kind of “freedom that comes with realizing there is no ‘final’ text” for Shakespearian works (Walker 27). Rather than debate the particularities of what

being true to the “real” Jane Austen means, the reader should embrace the small paradoxes like the self-created expectational texts in Austen adaptations and these paradoxes should be encouraged in their irreverence. If we do this, Austen’s works could be free from the grasp of a “final text” and better able to explore a more important “real” Jane Austen—that which is “real” within her words.

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As there is no one answer
to what would be a true **Jane Austen** adaptation
there is only one conclusion to be made—

One half of the world
cannot understand
the pleasures of the other.

Emma Woodhouse

in

Emma
Jane Austen