

# Grappling with Jane Austen in Context, in Translation, and in Revision

By Iman Gareeboo

## **Part 1: In Context**

1. **English Literature in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century:** What Came Before and After Austen
2. **What did Jane Austen read?**
  - Gothic and Pulp fiction
    - Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764)
    - Radcliffe *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), *The Italian* (1797)
    - Clara Reeve's *The Old English Baron* (1778)
  - Novelists and the Trend of Epistolary Novels
    - Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740), *Clarissa* (1748), *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* (1753)
    - Henry Fielding's *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (1749)
3. **Austen's Female Contemporaries and Why She Outstrips Them in Popular Literature**
  - Mary Wollstonecraft's
    - *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792)
    - *An Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution* (1794)
  - Frances Burney
    - The Challenge of Reading *Evelina* (1778) Today
    - *Cecilia* (1782)
    - *Camilla* (1796)
  - Maria Edgeworth
    - *Castle Rackrent* (1800)
    - *Belinda* (Austen would notably have read the 1801/1802 edition first, not the 1810 edition, censored after uproar over the mixed relationships)
4. **Austen's Male Contemporaries and Why We Should Study Them**
  - William Godwin
    - *Things as They Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794)
    - *Memoires of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798)
  - Walter Scott's *Marmion: A Tale of Flodden Field*
  - William Cowper's *The Task*
  - Matthew Lewis (born same year as Austen, died year after Austen) *The Monk* (1796)
  - Edmund Burke's *Reflection on the Revolution*
5. **Could Austen Write About Anything?:** Publishing and Censorship at the Turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century
  - English culture and society during the American Revolution (1765/1775-1783)
  - English culture and society during the French Revolution (1789-1799) and the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815)

## **Part 2: In Translation**

### **6. Jane Austen in French**

- Austen's Competition: French literature of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century
- The First Translations of Austen's novels: The "Translations," or Adaptations, of Swiss novelist Isabelle de Montolieu
- Austen's Reception: The Opinions of French Critics Then and Now
- Austen in the Francophone world: Before, During, and After Colonialism \* (separate sub-section?)

### **7. Jane Austen during the British Empire**

- Austen is identified so closely with English culture that her novels can evoke nostalgia for 'the homeland.' How did officers of the British Empire abroad see her novels?
- Was *Mansfield Park* commented on by civil servants of the Empire? Especially considering that critical reviews of the novel were glaringly absent in comparison to her novels published before and after it?
- **Possible pairings with *Mansfield Park***- Contemporary Novel: *The Woman of Colour: A Tale* by Anonymous, edited by Lyndon J. Dominique; Modern Novel: Marlon James' *The Book of Night Women*
- Were her novels initially used to educate the colonies in English culture/civilization?

### **8. Jane Austen and the Fall of the British Empire**

- What role does the Cambridge IGCSE/A-level system have on Austen's reach?
- What does her position as a writer of "classic" novels mean in how students outside of England interpret her writing, her place in the canon, and her use as a tool of English colonial legacy?
- How accessible are postcolonial critiques/opinions/rewritings of her work to students studying Austen pre-higher education?

### **9. Jane Austen in South Asia and the South Asian Diaspora**

- Is Austen for the masses or for the English-fluent elites?
- There are at least three rewritten *Pride and Prejudice*'s from the perspective of the South Asian diaspora, and three South Asian films based on her novels. Are there resonances between English attitudes toward male/female relationships during the late 18<sup>th</sup> CE and South Asian/Diaspora attitudes today?
- Is Austen's description of the challenge in dealing with society's hierarchies analogous to various diaspora's challenge in assimilation vs maintaining cultural traditions?

### **Part 3: In Revision – Books, Films, Series’**

#### **10. Is Jane Austen the Mother of “Chick-Lit”?**

- How did mass-market paperback visuals/editions, as explored by Barchas’ *The Lost Books of Jane Austen* inform readers on how to process her novels?

#### **11. The Market for Austen Re-Writes and Adaptations in the Anglophone World**

#### **12. Austen and Genre Shifts: Writing for Romance, Sci-Fi, Horror, Mystery, and YA**

- Austen and Romance
  - Helen Fielding *Bridget Jones’ Diary* (1996), *The Edge of Reason* (1999), *Bridget Jones: Mad About the Boy* (2013), *Bridget Jones’ Baby: the Diaries* (2016), plus **3 films**
  - Jane Odiwe’s sequels
- Austen and Sci-Fi/Horror
  - Seth Graham-Greene’s *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (April 2009), **film** (January 2016)
  - Ben H. Winters’ *Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters* (September 2009)
  - Vera Nazarian’s *Mansfield Park and Mummies* (2009), *Northanger Abbey and Angels and Dragons* (2010), *Pride and Platypus* (2012)
  - Jessica Grey’s *Attempting Elizabeth* (2013)
  - Kathleen A. Flynn’s *The Jane Austen Project* (2017)
- Austen and Mystery
  - Carrie Bebris’ *Pride and Prescience* (February 2004)
  - Tirzah Price’s *Pride and Premeditation* (2021), *Sense and Second-Degree Murder* (upcoming publication)
- YA – compare to Austen’s *Teenage Writings* (ed. by Sutherland & Johnston, Oxford University Press, 2017)
  - Emma Mills’ *First & Then* (2015)
  - Kate Watson’s *Seeking Mansfield* (2017)
  - Ibi Zoboi’s *Pride* (September 2018)
  - Jennieke Cohen’s *Dangerous Alliance: An Austentacious Romance* (2019)
  - Blair Thornburgh’s *Ordinary Girls* (2020)
  - Jillian Cantor’s *The Code for Love and Heartbreak* (2020)
  - Sarah Dass’ *Where the Rhythm Takes You* (May 2021)
  - Tirzah Price’s *Pride and Premeditation* (2021), *Sense and Second-Degree Murder* (April 5<sup>th</sup> 2022)
  - Margot Wood’s *Fresh* (Aug. 2021)
  - Sayantani DasGupta’s *Debating Darcy* (March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022)
  - JC Peterson’s *Being Mary Bennet* (March 15<sup>th</sup> 2022)

#### **13. Austen Rewritten: Writing in Race, the Empire, and the Diaspora**

- *Bride and Prejudice* 2004 film by Gurinder Chadha,
- Arguably, the 1999 film *Mansfield Park*
- Anuja Chauhan’s *Those Pricey Thakur Girls* (2013)

- Uzma Jalalludin's *Ayesha at Last* (June 2018)
- Ibi Zoboi's *Pride* (September 2018)
- Soniah Kamal's *Unmarriageable* (January 2019)
- Sonali Dev's *Pride and Prejudice and Other Flavors* (May 2019), *Recipe for Persuasion* (May 2020), *Incense and Sensibility* (July 2021)

#### 14. Austen Rewritten: Weaving in Marginalized Perspectives

- Molly Greeley's *The Clergyman's Wife* (2019)
- Molly Greeley's *The Heiress* (2021)
- Jo Baker's *Longbourn* (2013)
- Margot Wood's *Fresh* (2021)?

#### 15. Jane Austen on Screen: Period Adaptations

On the many period adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* and their creators' selections:

- Why the huge success?
- When did Austen adaptations begin?
- How do creators/adaptors pick details to keep vs discard?
- How and why are clothing decisions made? For example, to wear lace (pointedly included in 1980 P&P series) or to not wear lace (not noticeably mentioned in '95 or '05) over the chest? Or the bizarre period shift in the Garson/Oliver adaptation?
- Did women wear caps on their heads/coiffeurs then? Did teasing out your hair and putting a cap on top (*Evelina*) die out at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> CE, before Austen's books are set?

\*\*\*Why the rush of 1995-1996 in Austen series' and films? A reaction to complicated world politics and the perceived simplicity of Austen's time? Non-copyrighted story? Rom-com affiliation? A desire for escapist fantasy as we become more self-centered/self-critical/selfish, and feel the increasing pressure to conform to trends on TikTok/Insta to feel socially valuable?

- *Pride and Prejudice* 1940, 1958, 1967, 1980, 1995, 2005
- *Emma* 1932 (pre-code!), 1996 (film (Paltrow) and series (Beckinsale)), 2009, 2020
- *Persuasion* 1971, 1995, 2008, 2022 (Netflix), 2022?(Searchlight Fixtures)
- *Sense and Sensibility* 1971, 1981, 1995, 2009
- *Lady Susan* 2016 (Named *Love and Friendship*)
- *Northanger Abbey* 1987, 2007
- *Mansfield Park* 1983, 1999, 2007
- *Sanditon* (2019)

#### 16. Jane Austen on Screen: Modern Adaptations

- Why the slew of adapted books and films coming out? Is it because of the greater focus on minority representation? Or have I just not yet found earlier literary adaptations yet? Perhaps the adaptations are consistent in appearance over time but,

different in form (ex.: films then plays or novels then tv series,' then back to films and series' then novels, etc...); like a revolving door of differently formatted iterations of the same material?

- *Ruby in Paradise* (1993) (homage to *Northanger Abbey*?)
- *Clueless* (1995) (American upper-class high school)
- *Kandukondain Kandukondain* (2000) (Indian-Tamil take on *Sense and Sensibility* with two brothers instead of two sisters)
- *Bridget Jones' Diary* (2001) and series (set in England)
- *Bride and Prejudice* (2004) (Indian/British/American take)
- *Aisha* (2010) (Indian take on *Emma/Clueless*)
- *Prada or Nada* (2011) (Latino/Californian-set take on *Sense and Sensibility*)
- Pemberly Digital's modern webseries' (*The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, *Welcome to Sanditon*, *Emma Approved*) (2012-2018)
- *From Mansfield with Love* (2014-2015) (webseries)
- Oh for Cute! Productions' *Northbound* (2015) (webseries on *Northanger Abbey*)
- *The Cate Morland Chronicles* (2016) (webseries)
- *Modern Persuasion* (2020) (rom-com type modern retelling set in New York)

## Other Resources:

### Creative Interpretations

Barbara Heller's curation of *Pride and Prejudice*

Whit Stillman's *Love and Friendship* (2016)

### Podcasts/Websites

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Flynn, Kathleen A. *The Jane Austen Project: A Novel*. <https://thejaneaustenproject.com/>

\*Sabor, Peter (Principal Investigator). *Reading with Austen*. <https://www.readingwithausten.com/>

### Critical Books:

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- Said, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1994.
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- Tuite, Clara. *Romantic Austen: Sexual Politics and the Literary Canon*. Cambridge University Press, 2008.

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<https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/etdarchive/385>
- Baker, Jennifer. "How Gaslighting in Fiction Can Reflect the Realities of Psychological Abuse." June 23<sup>rd</sup> 2021. <https://lithub.com/how-gaslighting-in-fiction-can-reflect-the-realities-of-psychological-abuse/>.
- Bennet, Ashly. "Shame and Sensibility: Jane Austen's Humiliated Heroines." *Studies in Romanticism*, vol. 54, no. 3, 2015, pp. 377–400., [www.jstor.org/stable/43973910](http://www.jstor.org/stable/43973910).
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