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## Visiting Jane: Jane Austen, Fan Culture, and Literary Tourism

Brianna Surratt

Director of Thesis: Anthony Jarrells

Second Reader: Catherine Keyser

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## Summary

People have been visiting sites associated with Jane Austen for two centuries now, and there have been fans of her work for even longer. Austen inspires unique devotion among her fans for an author about whose life we know very little. Furthermore, these fans have been fighting among themselves for as long as fans have existed over who loves her the right way – the academics or the amateurs? This work explores that unique fan culture in detail through the lens of literary tourism, going into detail about two sites in particular – Jane Austen’s House in Chawton, England, and the Jane Austen Centre in Bath. These sites will give insight into the narratives they create of Austen and her fans, provide an image of the Jane Austen brand, and illustrate the implications of marketing on literature.

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## Introduction

In 1902, sisters Constance and Ellen Hill travelled to “Austen Country” and opened their account of their experience with the following invitation: “We would now request our readers, in imagination, to put back the finger of Time for more than a hundred years and to step with us into Miss Austen’s presence” (Hill viii). This one sentence embodies the hopes of every admirer who embarks on an Austen pilgrimage – that even though Jane Austen has been dead for centuries, one needs but to lift one finger, to enter the right headspace, and they will encounter the beloved author firsthand. Never mind that “to put back the finger of Time” is an impossible feat, because generations of curators and tourists have worked together to create spaces where the impossible becomes almost visible, if not quite attainable.

As Nicola Watson found in writing the first substantial work on literary tourism, “It has proved impossible and even undesirable to be entirely clinical and cold-hearted about the fluctuating and inadmissible thrills of literary tourism” (17). One can somehow detach oneself from a work of fiction or a piece of art in order to think and write critically about it, but there is something deeply personal about the experience of inhabiting the physical space where our favorite authors once stood, where the words that have moved and shaped us were formed. Some even find the word “tourism” to be insufficient, instead calling the journey a “pilgrimage” as if it were a religious experience. In particular, there is something about Jane Austen that leads her readers to develop a closer bond with her than with any other writer. Deirdre Lynch asserts that “since the Victorian era many admirers of Jane Austen have insisted, their swelling numbers notwithstanding, that there is something private and personal in their admiration (“Cult of Jane Austen” 112). Maybe that “something private and personal” comes from the confidential and intimate voice and subject matter that Austen’s readers find over and over in her novels, but the

phenomenon seems to have grown far beyond her literary works themselves. Whatever the case may be, it is clear that there is something worth studying in the version of Austen that fans are looking for in their pursuit of the author, and what they find when they get there.

I admit that I am not an unbiased authority on this topic. Like Watson, I find it “impossible and even undesirable” to maintain a completely critical distance from such a personal subject as the Austen “pilgrimage.” Austen’s novels and their many adaptations have held a special place in my heart from a very young age, and I find that my love and admiration for her work has only grown as I have learned to look at it from an academic and analytical perspective. I do not wax poetic on this subject for no reason; instead, I wish to point out that no one approaches a tourist site with zero preconceived notions, and in order to study the image of Austen that the curators of these sites are trying to create, we have to understand the motivations and wishes of those to whom the curators are marketing their “brand.” It is advantageous in purely literary studies to maintain an emotional distance from the material (the fact that I personally dislike Hemingway’s style does not detract from the ideas he is trying to get across), but emotions are the primary currency in literary tourism. All of this is to say that I feel that my own reactions as an admirer of Austen to certain elements of the tourist sites I will be discussing constitute a valid piece of evidence in this endeavor to understand the image of Austen that those sites work to foster. I will, of course, attempt to approach such evidence as analytically as the rest.

Many experts have argued that tourist sites work with the visitor’s imagination to create a new “text” that is different for each individual. Watson calls this text “literary place,” arguing, “[L]iterary place is produced by writing mediated by acts of readerly tourism, and in that sense literary place is itself a ‘text.’ It is the internal workings of an author’s works, buttressed by a

particularized series of inter-texts, which produce place, not the other way around” (12). It is those inter-texts that I will be exploring in this argument. Some can be measured and quantified, such as the price of admission or the number of artifacts, and some cannot. Many are specific to each visitor and each experience – their background and knowledge of the author, the weather, the number of other guests, etc. A great many are manufactured by the curators, but others are out of their control. Emma Spooner has analyzed the text of literary place at length, coming to the conclusion that “Literary tourism exists in an imaginative space somewhere between fact and fiction, empirical data and romance” (44). Once again, we find it impossible to approach literary tourism from a strictly clinical perspective. However, we cannot only focus on the romance without acknowledging the cold and largely monetary motivations lurking behind each tourist site. In the end, the curators of the sites will be looking to exploit their visitors’ emotions in order to gain the maximum profit.

So where does this leave us, stuck between data and romance? In this paper, I will do my best to navigate between the two to find the answers to my questions. These are questions that I formed on my quest last spring, a quest that took me all the way from South Carolina to the south of England. My goal during that semester abroad was to do something that called to me and to learn all there was to learn about it in order to understand why it did so. I spent my weeks in the library at the University of Kent reading every book and paper I could find that mentioned literary tourism or Austen fanaticism, and I spent the weekends exploring what I could of literary England on a student budget, including the two sites I will be focusing on in this analysis. I admit that I didn’t know the questions I was asking when I started. Instead, I let the research take me where it would, and the gaps in between formed questions that solidified when I gathered my

findings. I would like to take you along on my journey of discovery and hopefully answer the following questions together:

- What are tourist sites seeking to accomplish? How is it different for each location? Are there discrepancies between the goal and the result?
- What narrative does each site create of Austen, her novels, Regency England, and her fans?
- Despite the differences between each site, can we extrapolate one Austen “brand”? Who is Jane Austen™?
- How does Austen’s writing shape our expectations of the tourist experience and does the Austen brand in turn affect how we interpret her writing?
- What are the implications of the kind of marketing around tourist sites being so closely tied to literature?

To answer these questions, I will start by looking at Austen’s fans – their history, their status, and their petty grievances. In order to understand how tourist sites interact with their visitors, we have to understand who they are marketing to, and who they may be excluding. After that, I will pivot to a brief study of the history of literary tourism so that we may understand how today’s tourist attractions came to be. The appurtenances of modern literary tourism, such as the ever-present gift shop and café, would certainly be alien to Austen or her characters, but they did understand the hunt for the perfect vista or the excitement of visiting a lavishly decorated home, and these touristic urges eventually morphed into the hallmarks of tourism today.

The crux of my study will be an in-depth look at two famous tourist sites for Austen fans: Jane Austen's House in Chawton and the Jane Austen Centre in Bath. The house museum is located in the house where Austen lived and wrote for many years, and it contains almost all of the existing artifacts from her life. The Jane Austen Centre, on the other hand, capitalizes on the enduring association of Austen with the city of Bath and has established itself as the number one stop for Austen enthusiasts in Bath despite a complete lack of artifacts directly associated with the author. I will explore every relevant aspect of both these locations in detail in order to examine their distinct approaches to literary tourism and discover what each reveals about the creation of an Austen brand that is marketable to tourists. In particular, the curators of Jane Austen's House are very focused on the appearance of authenticity and adherence to Austen's biography. The Centre in Bath, on the other hand, leans into a more obviously artificial construct out of necessity, painting a picture for the visitor of Austen's life in the city before sending them off to explore. Even though the Jane Austen Centre revolves around an overtly artificial construct while Jane Austen's House strives for an image of authenticity, both demonstrate the way in which literary tourist sites must turn the author and their works into a "brand" that is then marketed and sold to the public. The rest of this paper will strive to locate the origins of that brand and sketch its silhouette (which exists in clearer detail than the few surviving sketches of the author herself) in order to comment on its implications for tourism and literature.

### **"Janeites" and Austen fan culture**

The term "Janeite" has existed to describe fans of Jane Austen since 1894 and it has taken just about every possible connotation since. It has referred to enthusiastic (mostly female) amateurs with "I Love Mr. Darcy" tote bags, it has indicated dedicated (entirely male) academics



discussing serious literature, and it has even titled a satirical work by Rudyard Kipling about WWI soldiers who form a secret society based on Austen's works. It has been a badge of honor, a sarcastic self-deprecating joke for others "in the know," and a demeaning epithet thrown at enemy groups in the everlasting Austenian civil wars. But why the specific word "Janeite"?

As I mentioned in the introduction, Jane Austen's fans find themselves very personally attached to the author herself in a way that is distinct from any other literary figure. Deirdre Lynch's hypothesis is

That knowing Austen has from the start involved fantasies of knowing her the way an affectionate family member would [from her nephew's memoir] may help explain, as well, a phenomenon that will be central to this discussion: the fact that since the Victorian era many admirers of Jane Austen have insisted, their swelling numbers notwithstanding, that there is something private and personal in their admiration. ("Cult of Jane Austen" 112)

Indeed, Austen fans tend to view her as family despite the very little information we have about her personal life and the gap of now over 200 years between her and them. James Edward Austen-Leigh's memoir of his aunt, to which Lynch refers, has led to constant references to "Aunt Jane" from centuries of admirers. Perhaps Lynch is correct, and the fond remembrances of Austen by her family members, as well as her surviving letters to her sister Cassandra, have created an unusual feeling of intimacy. Whatever the case, the term "Janeite" indicates a first-name level of familiarity that is not extended to any other author. Things may be "Shakespearian" or "Dickensian," but "Austenian" is too cold a word for those who feel themselves to be Miss Austen's niece/nephew or friend.

The Hill sisters certainly believed themselves to be very close to “Aunt Jane” a century after her death. As they explored Austen’s world in 1902, they encountered many people who could still remember Austen’s direct descendants, who could connect place and living memory for them and their readers. Constance Hill also attributes such a feeling of closeness to the family memoirs, musing,

‘No one,’ writes her brother, ‘could be often in her company without feeling a strong desire of obtaining her friendship, and cherishing a hope of having obtained it.’ That friendship seems to be extended to all who, whether through her works, her biographies or her letters, can ‘hold communion sweet’ with the mind and with the heart of Jane Austen. (viii)

Every reader and tourist ultimately seeks to “hold communion sweet” (another religious reference) with the beloved author, and they express that hope through endearments such as “Janeite” or “Aunt Jane.”

There is also a blending of fact and fiction that tends to come with the familiarity of the Austen fan community. Constance Hill expresses such a blending when she writes, “The personages introduced to us by Miss Austen are not only her creations they are her friends, and have long since become the friends of her readers, and so we pass and repass from them to their author as if *all* had equally together walked this earth” (145). We may not know everything about Jane Austen’s inner thoughts and feelings, but we know Lizzy Bennet’s and Emma Woodhouse’s, and we conflate them with their creator. There is such an intimacy to the characters and tone of Austen’s novels that we feel we have been let into some secret world. The characters and the author become real for us, and we feel entitled to our own relationship with them.

Such relationships have a tendency to feel proprietary, and there have indeed been many battles fought over the proper identity and ownership of “our Jane.” Deirdre Lynch rather hilariously exclaims,

Are there any other writers who have seemed so vulnerable to being loved by so many in so wrongheaded a way? Repeatedly over the last 190 years, certain admirers of her novels have seen fit to depreciate the motives and modes of every one else’s admiration. Indeed, a customary method of establishing one’s credentials as a reader of Austen has been to regret that others simply will insist on liking her in inappropriate ways. (“Sharing with Our Neighbors” 7)

The main front on which a battle over admiration of Austen has taken place is that between academics and the “amateur” fans. The original self-proclaimed Janeites were male academics who celebrated Austen’s place in high literature, while poking fun at their own disproportionate devotion to the author herself. Even serious literature scholars have never been able to avoid Austen’s pull towards intimate familiarity. Meanwhile, Austen also developed a cult following among avid casual readers who were drawn more towards the romance and compelling characters than dissecting the structure of Austen’s plots and deep social commentary. Literary scholars took these kinds of readings as seriously “wrongheaded” and set out to protect Austen’s status as strictly Great Literature. Lynch once again argues, “As the disputes about how best to like Austen and the ideas about rescuing her suggest, popularity and marketability appear in some way to threaten Austen’s canonicity. Their being greatly liked compromises the novels’ status as Great Books” (“Sharing with Our Neighbors” 10). There is an ingrained notion that art that is popular can no longer be great art, and Austen was becoming *very* popular. The term

Janeite became a weapon, suggesting that the amateur fans were on too casual terms with a great author.

The debate over Austen as high versus low culture continues to rage to this day. Devoney Looser's book, *The Making of Jane Austen*, explores popular depictions of Austen through the centuries, and she points out that the greatness of Austen's work seems to have been in certain danger from popular adaptations since its inception, but it has never actually suffered any dire consequences. Nevertheless, both sides continue their quest to protect "their Jane" from any and all attacks on her character. The movie *Austenland*, based on the novel of the same name, depicts a woman obsessed with Austen's novels and adaptations who must come to grips with reality after an act of literary tourism and immersion proves shallow and unfulfilling. Another movie based on a novel, *The Jane Austen Book Club*, follows a group of women (and one man) as they apply Austen's characters and plots to their own lives in order to find meaning. Both of these depictions attempt to prove one reading of Austen over another.

The same debate continues in another form with the two sites I will be discussing: Jane Austen's House and the Jane Austen Centre. As I will later demonstrate, Jane Austen's House shies away from popular adaptations of Austen's work, instead focusing almost entirely on biographical evidence. The Jane Austen Centre, on the other hand, is proud of the movies shot in Bath and even encourages roleplay with its employees. Even seemingly academic venues are not immune to the controversy. Academic conferences like those hosted by the Jane Austen Society of North America will include scholarly panels followed by costumed Regency balls, and although some academics may object to the juxtaposition, many can nevertheless be found playing dress-up for the night.

There is no way to discuss the othering of those who like Austen the “wrong” way without discussing gender. As I mentioned previously, the original Austen fans were male academics at a time when women were almost completely excluded from such pursuits. In a way, amateur readings of Austen would have been an outlet for women who were not allowed to approach great literature in the traditional way. Stereotyping of amateur Austen fans as female has given fuel to the attacks thrown at both men and women who engage in casual fandom, as well as driving the tourism and souvenir industry’s marketing. Looser has written persuasively on the evolution of Austen as a gendered property, arguing,

For [Andrew] Lang and others, knowing and loving Austen marked a reader as a member of an exclusive male enclave. Austen was happily inaccessible to the less-discerning, naïve female readers, a group he seems to imply wouldn’t properly appreciate her anyway. ... Like Lang, some of the literati imagined the Emmas and Catherines as rare reader-enemies. By 1900, rarity could no longer be alleged. Girls and women had discovered Austen en masse...As for the Emmas and Catherines – as their Austenian fictional names seem to imply – they certainly came from varying economic circumstances. Could they properly appreciate her? A professed love of Austen had become deeply political. (148-149)

The early distinction Looser outlines here is between a male academic love for great literature (personified here by critic Andrew Lang, who extolled Austen for not being popular with “Emmas and Catherines”) and a female popular love for romance and story. Thus the great divide is not only between high and low culture, but between *male* high culture and *female* low culture. Since they were not admitted into academic spaces, women’s admiration for Austen had to be everything men’s was not.

The familiar derogatory names Looser mentions for female fans, the Emmas and Catherines, echoes the shift of Janeite from a self-deprecating term men used for themselves to an accusatory label for women who loved Austen the wrong way. As Lynch writes,

Then, too, “Janeite” works, as corresponding terms do not, to highlight the author’s gender and to imply that the reader’s is the same. The intimacy of the reading situation the epithet evokes is enhanced by the suggestion that Jane and the Janeite share their gender and more: lately, indeed, some of the annoyance critics express when confronting the spectacle of Janeiteism seems motivated by their suspicion that the novels provide cultural spaces where we girls can all be girls together. (“Sharing with Our Neighbors” 14)

Lynch’s argument is that gendering the word Janeite and making it derogatory implies that female spaces are inherently inferior. Even today, when academia is far more open to women, the distinction between academic pursuits and feminized fandom is clear. Many of the women scholars I read in research for this paper felt the need to explain their interest in fandom activities and reclaim them as not contradictory to their academic pursuits and credentials.

Outside of academic spaces, the general public needs no mental gymnastics over the “right” and “wrong” way to read Austen in order to form a misogynistic view of both Austen and her fans. Claudia Johnson has written at length about the queer perspective of Austen, including her male fans. She argues,

The history of Austen criticism has often been darkened by the scorn Austen-haters express for novels in which men and women are more absorbed in village tittle-tattle than in each other. For this reason, male admirers of Austen have had much to endure at the hands of a world that frowns upon their love ... A man

content to read novels by “a mere slip of a girl,” as Garrod describes her, must be a mere slip of a girl himself. Having unmanned themselves not simply by admiring a woman writer – which is bad enough – but, even worse, by idolizing a sharp-tongued woman unimpressed with men . . . , men who *like* Austen are like the “pansy” in Bersani’s story, doubly feminized. (“The Divine Miss Jane” 149-150)

By coming in contact with the feminized space of Austen fandom, men who associate themselves at all with Austen are stained with the mark of being “queer.” As I will explore later when talking about specific tourist sites, many men who visit cite accompanying a female companion as their reason for doing so, and those who admit to Austen fandom themselves cite a female friend or relative as their introduction to the novels or adaptations. Gender plays a key role in marketing literary tourism.

As we go into our further discussion of literary tourism, it is important to keep the fan dynamics I have outlined in mind. The curators of tourist experiences certainly think about these things when putting sites together and marketing them. The popular audience is large and avid, and their reading of Austen is markedly different from the academic perspective and dramatically affects interpretation of locations and artifacts. The gift shops are a clear indication of the gender bias in marketing, selling jewelry and women’s clothing stamped with Colin Firth’s face. Before I discuss specific instances, however, I want to look at the history of literary tourism and how we ended up where we are today.

## A brief history of literary tourism

**Grand houses and the picturesque:** E. Rhodes wrote in *Peak Scenery; or, The Derbyshire Tourist* in 1824 that “the tourist has higher privileges and a happier avocation; like a bird upon the wing, he explores a wide horizon, flits over all that is uninviting, and rests only on pleasant places” (xiii). Such a happy prospect was certainly Elizabeth Bennet’s goal when she travelled to Derbyshire in *Pride and Prejudice* as she famously exclaimed,

What are men to rocks and mountains? Oh, what hours of transport we shall spend! And when we *do* return, it shall not be like other travellers, without being able to give one accurate idea of any thing. We *will* know where we have gone—we *will* recollect what we have seen. Lakes, mountains, and rivers shall not be jumbled together in our imaginations; nor, when we attempt to describe any particular scene, will we begin quarreling about its relative situation. Let *our* first effusions be less insupportable than those of the generality of travellers. (154)

Elizabeth’s statement evokes the feeling that still persists of tourism as a transcendent and deeply personal experience. She acknowledges the general disappointment that I will discuss later which is the result of unfulfilled impossible expectations, but like every other tourist before and after her, she is determined that *her* experience will be different. However, the dark cloud of Darcy looms over Derbyshire, and contrary to Rhodes’s and her own expectations, Elizabeth does not find “only...pleasant places” on her journey; nevertheless, the trip is certainly memorable.

We can find quite a bit of evidence for the kind of tourism with which Austen was familiar in her own writing. Elizabeth Bennet travels to Derbyshire with her aunt and uncle in search of the “picturesque” in the form of “rocks and mountains,” a value which Rhodes extols in his guide to the county:



Derbyshire, however, notwithstanding the neglect it has experienced, is richly stored with the most valuable materials for picturesque purposes. The wildness of its mountains, the beauty of its dales, and the various objects with which they are adorned, entitle it to a distinction it has never yet attained. (xii)

People of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries fervently chased after the picturesque, searching for vistas that fit a specific ideal of beauty. In *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine Morland's introduction to sophisticated society includes a lesson on the picturesque, in which Henry Tilney "talked of foregrounds, distances, and second distances—side-screens and perspectives—lights and shades; and Catherine was so hopeful a scholar that when they gained the top of Beechen Cliff, she voluntarily rejected the whole city of Bath as unworthy to make part of a landscape" (112). Today, tourists flock to Bath eagerly seeking the sights that Catherine rejects precisely because they associate them with her and with Austen.

Meanwhile, Elizabeth does indeed encounter men on her quest for rocks and mountains. The Gardiners spend their trip touring fine houses and their grounds, including Darcy's estate, Pemberley. They must request permission from the housekeeper, who takes them on a tour of what is still a lived-in family home. Today, these houses no longer have permanent occupants, but thanks in part to the popularity of Austen adaptations filmed in them, they still attract tourists seeking a connection to the past and half-hoping to come around a corner and suddenly find Mr. Darcy returned home unexpectedly.

**Poets, graves, and birthplaces:** The picturesque and grand homes – these are the kinds of tourism associated with Austen's time. However, as Aaron Santesso argues, literary tourism as we imagine it today was already beginning to take form in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. There was no guidebook, or the Jane Austen audio tour of Bath, so enthusiasts hunted

down important locations connected to their favorite authors themselves. The Grand Tour of Europe, a tradition for wealthy young English gentleman, evolved to include certain popular locations where tourists could read classic works “on the spot.” These spots could include places mentioned in the works, or they could be biographical to the author. Tourists today continue such a tradition, including the aforementioned audio tour, “In the Footsteps of Jane Austen,” which plays passages from Austen’s works along with historical trivia while the tourist wanders the streets of Bath. Young men on the Grand Tour would also seek out living authors as well as the spots where their works were constructed. Today’s tourists can only hope to evoke the spirit of Jane Austen and others in their travels. All in all, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw for the first time a growing interest in the author themselves in connection with their work.

In 1769, David Garrick organized the Shakespeare Jubilee in Stratford-upon-Avon to celebrate William Shakespeare, an event which marked the beginning of literary tourism destinations as we know them. People came from all over England to Shakespeare’s birthplace, and they haven’t stopped coming since. The interest in sites connected with authors, primarily great poets, that began in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries flourished throughout the nineteenth. The key destinations began as birthplaces and gravesites.

A fascinating thing about birthplaces is that they often retain very little real connection to the author. Shakespeare’s life and work centered around London and its theaters, but Stratford-upon-Avon remains a huge draw for tourists seeking a connection to the great playwright. Jane Austen’s birthplace is even less impressive – the Steventon parsonage was torn down centuries ago, and only a pump remains to mark the spot in an empty field. Emma Spooner draws on her own experience as an Austen tourist when she writes,

Sentimental value binds location and tourist by inciting emotion through an infusion of personal meaning. Thus, it is through the imagination that an abandoned field or ghostly pump can become a personal experience which transcends objective value ... This emotional tie is persuasive enough that groups of diverse people will travel to England and spend two weeks cooped up together in a tour bus periodically popping out into the pouring rain to take pictures of empty fields. (44-46)

Emotion, as Spooner argues, is the prime currency of the tourist industry. Without it, a birthplace is merely a spot on the ground that sentimentality turns into the sacred birthplace of genius.

Henry James mocked this transformation in his short story “The Birthplace.” He writes of a tour guide,

It was ever his practice to stop still at a certain spot in the room and, after having secured attention by look and gesture, suddenly shoot off: "Here!" They always understood, the good people—he could fairly love them now for it; they always said breathlessly and unanimously “There?” and stared down at the designated point quite as if some trace of the grand event were still to be made out. This movement produced he again looked round. “Consider it well: the spot of earth—!” “Oh but it isn't earth!” the boldest spirit—there was always a boldest—would generally pipe out. Then the guardian of the Birthplace would be truly superior—as if the unfortunate had figured the Immortal coming up, like a potato, through the soil. "I'm not suggesting that He was born on the bare ground. He was born here!"—with an uncompromising dig of his heel. “There ought to be a brass, with an inscription, let in.” “Into the floor?”—it always came. (Ch. VII)

What is clear from James's satirical depiction is that from the beginning of literary tourism, there has been a disconnect between the value of what can be seen and what is felt by fans as they make the connection between place and author.

It is much easier to make the connection at a gravesite, where one is as physically close to the author as possible. Because the connection is so obvious and tangible, as well as because of the solemnity of the spot, there tends to be much less mediation at a gravesite. In Lorraine Brown's study of literary pilgrims in France, she found that visitors appreciated the simplicity of a gravestone that allowed them to forge their own connection to the author in question. Brown also found that in lieu of the tradition of souvenirs, visitors would often *leave* tokens to mark their visit. She postulates,

The study reveals that visitors were motivated by a desire to feel close to, to pay homage to and to meditate on the influence of their literary hero or heroine. For many it was not enough to simply spend time at the graveside, they also wanted to leave a physical reminder of their visit, a token of esteem, love or respect. In religious language, they wanted to leave an offering, a testament to their devotion.

(173)

In the act of leaving offerings, devotees demonstrate a motivation for tourism that is rarely discussed – the idea that readers feel obligated to the author and want to give back by paying homage in the places where they feel closest to them. Tourism is a way to make the relationship reciprocal.

**Austen Country:** With the beginning of the twentieth century, we turn once again to the Hill sisters and their trek across “Austen Country” in 1902. Jane Austen had died nearly a century before, and yet Austen tourism was just beginning. To set the scene, Constance writes,

On a fine morning, in the middle of September, a country chaise was threading its way through Hampshire lanes. In it were seated two devoted admirers of Jane Austen, armed with pen and pencil, who were eager to see the places where she dwelt, to look upon the scenes that she had looked upon, and to learn all that could be learnt of her surroundings. (1)

The two sisters in their country chaise could have just set out from an Austen novel, “armed with pen and pencil” just as she was. Their goal seems to have been to inhabit the author’s life and to learn about her by becoming her as far as was possible.

Like the early tourists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Hill sisters had no guidebook. Instead, they set out to write one themselves for other “devoted admirers” who would come after. Constance’s account of the search for the spot where the Steventon parsonage had stood and the joy upon finding it truly captures the touristic spirit: “Presently we reach a meadow at the foot of the hill and notice that the ground slopes up to a grassy terrace. This is the place! We cannot mistake it. This is the site of the old parsonage-house where Jane Austen was born!” (7). With no tour guide to proclaim the spot like in Henry James’s story, they still manage to find a deep connection with the beloved author at her birthplace.

The sisters sought advice and shelter with locals who were still close enough to remember people who remembered the Austen family. They visited any place that had any connection to her, including inns where the Austens may very possibly have stayed. With such lofty goals and exhaustive research, scholar Felicity James wonders if Constance and Ellen found the same disappointing gap between expectation and reality that so many tourists do, like Catherine Morland found in trying to compel a narrative from Northanger Abbey. However, Constance assures her readers:

Such a pilgrimage in the footprints of a favourite writer would, alas! in many cases lead to a sad disenchantment, but no such pain awaits those who follow Miss Austen's gentle steps. The more intimate their knowledge of her character becomes the more must they admire and love her rare spirit and the more thorough must be their enjoyment in her racy humour. (v-vi)

According to Constance, tourism, at least in the case of Jane Austen, can only make one appreciate her more and bring oneself into a more intimate connection with her, which as I have discussed is particularly important to Austen readers.

In order to further such a connection, Constance and Ellen take it upon themselves to become intermediaries for those who cannot make the pilgrimage themselves to Austen Country. They assure us of their devotion both to us and to Austen so we know that their narrative is faithful. When at the famous steps in Lyme from which Louisa Musgrove fell in *Persuasion* and which Lord Tennyson was so eager to see, Constance proclaims, "We can ourselves bear witness to the 'hardness of the pavement' below, which Captain Wentworth feared would cause 'too great a jar' when he urged the young lady to desist from the fatal leap" (140). One of the central ideas of tourism is to "bear witness," to find for ourselves the truth of the words we have read. The Hill sisters and the countless numbers after them have sought to bear witness to Jane Austen's life through tourism and spiritual communion with the author through place.

**The 1990's and the Pemberley Effect:** 1995 saw the release of the BBC's miniseries adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* starring Colin Firth and Jennifer Ehle. The series was an unexpectedly massive hit, and six more Austen film and television adaptations were released before the end of the decade. There was now a huge, brand-new audience seeking their Jane Austen fix, but they weren't looking for traditional literary tourism. Instead, they were looking for the lake where

Colin Firth climbed out with a wet shirt. And just like that, the English heritage landscape and Austen marketing changed permanently.

Many scholars in both the literary world and the tourism world have analyzed what Amy Sargent calls “The Darcy Effect” and Sarah Parry calls “The Pemberley Effect: that is, transformation of a house from an important property, though one relatively unknown to the general public, to a property linked to the ‘Jane Austen’ brand and all that this connection confers in terms of marketing and public awareness” (113). Austen adaptations have filmed in a great many of the historic houses across England, and those houses capitalize on that draw by advertising and hosting Austen-related events and exhibits. According to studies analyzing the “Darcy Effect,” the popular adaptations bring more money and exposure for conservation efforts of the houses used for filming, as well as a general interest in English history that benefits all of the Heritage sites. M. Pennacchia argues as well that the more popular form of film tourism boosts the more niche literary tourism as tourists come across the sites in their travels.

However, there are many criticisms against the image that English Heritage promotes along with such tourism, as well as the exploitation and what Sargent calls the “branding of Britain.” The image of England that comes along with Austen’s often insular worldview is narrow and possibly harmful. As Deirdre Lynch argues,

...the prime mover in Austenian tourism is often a nostalgic, Anglophilic notion of “heritage”: the premise that Chawton, Steventon, Winchester, and Bath...permit a kind of time-travel to the past, because they preserve an all but vanished Englishness or set of “traditional” values. (“Cult of Jane Austen” 116)

People crave the idea of Austenian traditional English values, and they flock to the film and literary sites and grand estates in search of a non-existent ideal. In other words, Mike Crang

refers to the “cult of the country house” that is spatially contained, isolated, and separate from the colonial narratives that haunt Austen’s period of English history. Such a view is harmful and selective in passing over the unpleasant parts of history like Rhodes’s “bird upon the wing.” Others criticize the National Trust for allowing filming at historic sites, arguing that they are “aiding the vulgarization of serious art in abetting filmed novels” and “creating theme parks” out of English history (Sargent 181).

Whatever the case, the Austen film and television boom of the 1990’s permanently altered Austen Country. Many visitors to Chawton and Bath have never read Austen’s novels, or are much more familiar with the filmed adaptations. The tourist sites and gift shops must decide how to cater to these visitors as well as the literary pilgrims, which I will explore in-depth in an analysis of Jane Austen’s House and the Jane Austen Centre.

### **Case studies: Jane Austen’s House and the Jane Austen Centre**

**Social media and websites:** Unless they happen to stumble across a tourist site on accident, visitors usually get their first impressions not from the site itself but from its website. This is where the most aggressive marketing happens as curators create a concentrated version of the brand they are selling in order to entice interested parties to visit. By examining the websites and social media presence of each of my case studies, I can perhaps determine their most basic narratives without even setting foot on British soil.

The front page of the Jane Austen Centre website reads “Step into Jane Austen’s world” – an echo of Constance Hill’s request for her readers to “Step with us into Miss Austen’s presence.” It isn’t hard to determine from the get-go that the Centre’s main objective is to draw its visitors into the world of Austen and her novels – and indeed, the line between fiction and



reality is blurred throughout, as will become clear with each section of this analysis. The Centre's tagline is "Celebrating Bath's most famous resident." The Centre and its building have no historical ties or artifacts connecting them to Austen; instead, according to the founder, the idea from the beginning has been to create a starting point for Austen enthusiasts touring Bath. In other words, the Centre itself is just a building that serves as the introduction and marketing for an artificially curated experience that encompasses an entire city. Just from looking at the two key phrases on the home page of the website, we can see that the Jane Austen Centre isn't interested in providing merely a tour or one piece of Austen's life to look at – what the curators are selling is an experience and the city of Bath.

Meanwhile, the Centre's Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram pages facilitate the extension of the experience back home with us. At a glance, the Instagram page is an aesthetic mix of mostly knick-knacks from the gift shop (to be discussed at length below) and images taken from various Austen adaptations accompanied by quotes from Austen and her novels – a correlation which places the adaptations on equal footing with the original text, creating a sense of artificiality. Even the occasional meme is thrown in, including a Mr. Darcy version of the "Dolly Parton Challenge" with examples of what his LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter profile pictures would be (with a wet shirt Colin Firth and a Matthew Macfayden edition, courting the female gaze). The geeking out continues on Twitter and Facebook, where screenshots from the adaptations are accompanied by questions to boost conversation and engagement, including a notable tweet from February of 2020 asking, "Can you call yourself a true Jane Austen fan if you have never read *Northanger Abbey*? What do you think?" with the accompanying hashtag "#Janeite". Questions like this are designed to provoke spirited discussion among "fans" and promote gatekeeping, or deciding who belongs in a community based on arbitrary factors.

Twitter is not the only place the Centre tests its audience's Austen knowledge, as the waiting area includes trivia sheets of different difficulty levels with which to pass the time. There is an interesting tension here, as the Centre also caters to a large audience who has never read any of Austen's novels. Asking whether you can be a true fan without reading one of her lesser-known novels is not the kind of question you would expect to find in an academic setting, but it *is* reflective of the ongoing battle over how to love Austen the "right way." Nevertheless, we can see the kind of community the Jane Austen Centre seeks to foster through even a quick snapshot of their social media presence, and I will explore it further as I ask what kind of narrative this site is creating of Austen fans.

The Jane Austen's House website welcomes the visitor with the words, "Welcome to the most treasured Austen site in the world." Once again, these words alone provide much insight into how this tourist site presents itself. Rather than an experience, the house museum is selling prestige. The welcome places itself above all other tourist sites, including the Jane Austen Centre. Even the word "treasured" is loaded, as the museum owns almost all the known extant Austen artifacts. The next slide on the home page once again asks us to go back in time to follow in Jane Austen's footsteps, but only after establishing the authority that this is the best place to do so – *this* place will lead you to the real Austen.

The Instagram for Jane Austen's House consists almost exclusively of shots of the house itself and the items in its collection, as well as a small number of items from the gift shop. There are no memes here, or images from the adaptations (except when promoting upcoming films). Instead, quotes from Austen and her novels accompany "real" artifacts or images from her "real" house where she wrote many of her works. Much of the same content is replicated on the Facebook and Twitter pages, where the curators seek engagement in a very different way from

the Jane Austen Centre. Instead of asking questions to promote conversation and fandom, the Jane Austen's House team promotes events, such as writing competitions for those inspired by Austen or events featuring experts that further promote the credibility of the museum. One final interesting detail to note is that, while the Jane Austen Centre has roughly double the followers on social media as Jane Austen's House, the pages have the same amount of engagement in the form of likes, suggesting the more mature audience for Jane Austen's House is more invested in the content.

**Gift shops:** One glaring detail about the Jane Austen Centre website that I skipped over was that the primary image on the front page is not the outside of the Georgian building that houses it with the waxwork figure of Jane Austen in front; nor is it the throngs of people in Regency dress who flock to the annual Jane Austen Festival in Bath. Rather, we are invited to "Step into Jane Austen's world" by an image of smiling tourists in the Centre's gift shop gazing at coffee mugs and conversing with eager employees in Regency outfits. The gift shop at a tourist location is ubiquitous, but the Jane Austen Centre puts it front and center as they sell you more of their curated experience to take home with you.

So what is it exactly that the Jane Austen tourist sites are selling based on the works of a notoriously non-descriptive author who was much more concerned with writing about social hierarchy than trinkets? The answer slightly differs based on location. At the Jane Austen Centre, we see a rather predictable pattern start to develop with the Mr. Darcy collection, including "I [heart] Mr. Darcy" tote bags and an endless supply of knick-knacks featuring Colin Firth's face. At Jane Austen's House, you can find stationary based on various original wallpapers found or reproduced in the cottage, as well as appropriately Austen-branded home goods like tea towels and spoons. Mugs and teapots are popular at both locations, as well as collector's editions of

Austen's works. Visitors with more expensive taste can choose from jewelry replicated from Austen's own or Regency designs.

Whether the gift shop is selling home goods, clothing, or jewelry, we can clearly see that it is overwhelmingly crafted for the female market. There are very few men eager to walk around with an "I [heart] Mr. Darcy" tote bag, and the tea towels and mugs are printed with delicate floral designs. Furthermore, the habit of collecting Austen knick-knacks is geared towards the amateur rather than the scholar – the Janeite. Deirdre Lynch connects Janeitism and gift culture:

"Janeite" can conjure up the reader as hobbyist – someone at once overzealous and undersophisticated, who cannot be trusted to discriminate between the true excellence of *Emma* and the ersatz pleasures of *Bridget Jones* or Barbara Pym or a Regency romance, and who is too *nice* in the modern sense of the word, not nice enough in Henry Tilney's. This figure is soul mate to the avid consumer whose purchases of Austeniana – coffee mugs and Regency writing paper – help sustain, along with additional purchases of potpourri and porcelain from National Trust shops, what is a conspicuously female-centered and female-staffed gift culture (and what is, in addition, a mode of engaging past times that proves endlessly vexatious to the professional historian). ("Sharing with Our Neighbors" 12)

Lynch links an academic disdain for amateur Austen fans to souvenir and gift culture, two historically female spaces. The gift shop is one more place where "we girls can all be girls together," which automatically separates it from the sacred world of academia.

There is a strange appeal to gift shops. We all groan at them and mumble about how "they always make you leave through the gift shop," but we've all bought things, for ourselves or loved ones, and developed a sentimental attachment. Full disclosure, I myself left England the

proud possessor of Jane Austen pajamas that I find equal parts adorable and ironically hilarious, as well as various mugs and Christmas ornaments for myself and my family. I think Mike Crang gets at the heart of the matter when he writes, “Souvenirs are mementos around which stories get woven and rewoven” (123). Pictures certainly serve a purpose with memory, but souvenirs are tangible items with which to create a story, which in the end is the key to the tourist endeavor – to have one’s own story that intersects with the beloved author’s. We buy gifts for our loved ones to bring them into that story. Furthermore, both the curator’s need to raise money and the tourist’s need to physically document their experience has existed as long as tourism has. Nicola Watson points out,

Somewhere nearby will be the shop selling mass-produced souvenirs, prints, postcards, small gifts and novelty maps, but it would be a mistake to think of this aspect of the phenomenon as anything like as recent – in Stratford-upon-Avon, the first commercially produced literary souvenirs were available as early as the 1760s. (12)

Although we may all be like Charlie Brown and grumble about the commercialization of Christmas and Austen, the gift shops have always been with us and will certainly continue.

**Interpreters:** One of the most overt ways in which the curators of a tourist site are able to guide a visitor’s experience is through their interpreters, whether they be tour guides, gift shop clerks, or food sellers. At Jane Austen’s House, this takes more of a traditional museum approach. As you walk through the house, employees or volunteers are stationed in various locations ready to answer questions or chat with visitors. If you merely want to find your own way and create your own experience, you can easily do so. On the rainy March day that I visited, the house was nearly empty, and the guides were happy to chat with each guest about their stay in Chawton and

their touring plans, as well as their interest in Austen. When I mentioned my work, one guide enthusiastically mentioned various Jane Austen societies, suggesting a keen personal interest in the author.

There is one final observation about the staff at Jane Austen's House that is relevant to this analysis, coincidental though it may be. On the day I toured the house, all of the guides within the museum were men, while the gift shop was staffed by women. As I say, this may be coincidental – I returned the next day and purchased a mug I had my eye on from a gentleman in the gift shop. Nevertheless, the fact that the gender divide was so stark that first day illustrates the persistent perceived divide between male academics and female amateurs in Austen's orbit.

The Jane Austen Centre, meanwhile, is not a museum but an immersive experience, and therefore the curators and guides take a much less academic approach to their subject matter. From the very first, I was greeted outside the building by a gentleman in Regency dress who was happy to take my picture with the Jane Austen statue standing outside, and whose main function seemed to be to make sure the experience began before you even entered the building. Every employee wears a name tag, not with their own name, but with that of an Austen character such as "Marianne Dashwood" or "Captain Wentworth." The name tags seem to serve a mostly aesthetic purpose, as it would be awkward to address the employees as though they were the character they represented. They are dressed in Regency clothing, but they do not go so far as to pretend to be living in the Regency like, for instance, theme park employees at the Wizarding World of Harry Potter. Unlike the fictional tourist experience in *Austenland*, the Jane Austen Centre tries to draw some lines between fiction and reality.

The tour guides at the Centre are not merely there to wait for your questions. When you arrive, you are shown to a waiting room until a guide appears to start the tour. They lead the

gathered group into a presentation room, where they give a short presentation on Jane Austen and her family with visual aids such as maps and portraits. At the end of the presentation, the guide leads the group down to a hallway filled with confirmed and unconfirmed portraits of Austen herself, explaining the history behind each. Finally, the group is free to explore the exhibits on Austen and her life in Bath while the guide lingers to answer questions. According to Juliette Wells who interviewed the Jane Austen Centre's founder David Baldock, the guides are given a loose script, but they are encouraged to provide a personal touch to improve the experience for their visitors. In my experience, the guide was personable and engaging, and the whole staff was young and energetic, as opposed to the stately academic atmosphere at Jane Austen's House.

**Artifacts and interpretive material:** Deirdre Lynch describes Jane Austen's House as "part museum, part souvenir shop, part chapel with reliquaries, part haunted house" ("Cult of Jane Austen" 115). The haunted part is a large part of the goal – visitors want to be haunted by Jane Austen's ghost. To this end, curators fill the house with artifacts, or reliquaries, that have any kind of relationship to Austen in order to evoke her presence two hundred years after her death. There is plenty of quantity as well as quality, as the curators have been collecting every single extant Austen artifact for decades. Juliette Wells writes about an avid American Austen collector named Alberta Burke who was able to obtain a lock of Austen's hair in 1948. The newly opened Jane Austen's House put pressure on Burke to donate the hair, feeling strongly that Austen artifacts belonged to the British. Tempers came to a head at a meeting of the Jane Austen Society at the opening of the house in 1949, when the owner complained publicly about the lock of hair, at which point Burke muttered, "I will give them the damned hair" and rose on the spot to

announce her donation (Wells 55). This event gives us a glimpse into how Jane Austen's House has such a complete collection of Austen artifacts.

Perhaps because of its function as a recreation of a domestic space, or perhaps because much of Austen's life revolved around domestic matters, the atmosphere at Jane Austen's House is very much one of tranquil domesticity. The little table where Austen wrote is the most prominent of very few artifacts relating to her novels, and even this sits humbly in the corner of the family dining room, close to the famous squeaking door that would alert Austen to put away her writing and return to domestic concerns. The rooms upstairs feature artifacts of three women's quiet life at home, including a quilt stitched by all three women of the house and toys to play with various nieces and nephews. The only evidence of the outside world is in the room dedicated to Austen's brothers and their naval careers. Felicity James intimates that the house creates a "domestic English landscape," and refers to the time of its opening in 1949 as she argues, "The Jane Austen's House Museum is therefore a double memorial: an act of familial as well as literary piety, whose commemoration of the English past was informed both by nostalgia for the eighteenth century and by the recent trauma of the Second World War" (140). Because of both artificial and authentic circumstances, Jane Austen's House contributes to a nostalgic narrative of a fictionalized and romanticized English past that longs to return to a supposedly lost sense of domesticity and quiet country values.

Despite the official authenticity of the objects on display at Jane Austen's House, many critics have described the experience as artificial due to factors such as the carefully curated nature of a museum, including its manufactured sense of domesticity, as well as the sheer number of objects only tangentially related to Austen. Claudia Johnson focuses particularly on the disappointment created by the gap between expectation and reality, arguing,



To the extent that this possessive lulls us into a sense that the house and its diverse effects and appurtenances were – and in some sense still are – *Jane Austen's* and that in entering the house we might be visiting Jane Austen herself, we will be charmed, but it is inevitable that we will be disappointed as well.

(“Jane Austen’s House” 153)

Johnson is clear in her argument that no matter how much we might wish it, Austen’s possessions fail in their purpose to bring Austen back to life. She further expounds,

The fact that the museum proudly displays fragments of wallpaper contemporaneous with Austen still visible beneath the layers of plaster painstakingly peeled away demonstrates how desperate we are for any material shreds that can connect us with her, and we go to these lengths to materialize her – even, as we have seen, to impersonate her – in part because there is so remarkably little of her left. (“Jane Austen’s House” 175)

The image of “layers of plaster painstakingly peeled away” is an apt one for illustrating the process of creating a tourist experience that evokes the atmosphere necessary for calling on an author’s ghost. It is not, in my opinion, such a pitiful and desperate thing as Johnson suggests. Wallpaper scraps and other such artifacts are common at historical reconstructions, after all, and they facilitate an atmosphere of authenticity into the artificial experience. Ashely Orr is a little kinder in her assessment, writing, “The artificial collation of Austen artefacts facilitates the tourists’ sense of travelling back through time to the period when Austen inhabited the house” (249). A historic recreation must by its very nature be artificial, and it is that very artificiality that allows us to perform an impossible feat, to travel in time and call forth some version of Jane Austen.

The Jane Austen Centre, meanwhile, is not very interested in authenticity. Jane Austen's House already had all of the extant artifacts in its collection, so the Centre had to find another way to evoke the author's spirit. The interpretive material is very focused on the city of Bath, as the Centre's goal is to provide a jumping off point for tourists to explore the city. There is a notable amount of material from both of Austen's books set in Bath, *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, including interchangeable references to the adaptations as well as the novels. For instance, the waiting area includes an exhibit on the 1995 film version of *Persuasion*, which was partly filmed in Bath. The "museum" portion, meanwhile, focuses on Austen's life in Bath, as well as the lives of her characters. The information cards on the walls provide background and quotes from Austen's novels and letters about themes such as shopping and urban life – a sharp distinction from the decided domesticity of the Chawton house. Aside from the printed information, there are many tactile objects designed to immerse the visitor in Regency life, such as quills to write with and biscuits to try.

As I have already mentioned in reference to the staff, the Jane Austen Centre does not mind mixing fiction with reality. The portrait hall that the tour guide leads guests through has images on each side, and visitors who are not familiar with every aspect of Austen's history are then informed that one side portrays confirmed images of the author herself, and the other side holds the unconfirmed examples. For the Centre's goals, it doesn't matter which are which. It only matters that guests *feel* like they are in Austen's presence. While this inauthentic immersion may draw some visitors in and make them eager to explore more of "Jane Austen's Bath," it is off-putting to others. In writing about the Austen tourist experience in Bath, Richard Berger complains,

The Centre is an important aspect of tourism in the city; however, its relationship with the reality of a writer's life is problematic. The fans flock to the Centre, full of artifacts from the various adaptations, because the fake is more intoxicating; they would rather visit the Jane Austen Centre than the real locations of her life. (136)

However, some fans are not as taken in as it would seem. In his essay, Berger also quotes a Trip Advisor review from a Janeite in 2010:

I am what you would call a Janeite. I've read all the novels, seen all the film adaptations; bored friends with Jane trivia and am, perhaps most embarrassingly, a member of the Jane Austen Society of North America. That said, save yourself the money and eventual aggravation. The Jane Austen Centre actually \*annoyed\* me; they have ZERO artifacts directly related to Austen herself. The exhibit is actually laughable; all reproductions and mannequins. Don't waste your time. Instead, hop on the train and head from Bath to Alton, grab a cab and go to the Jane Austen House Museum in Chawton. To say it is 1,000 times better would be an understatement (Trip Advisor, August 2010). (135)

What is interesting about this review is that it ticks all the boxes for what seems like the Centre's key audience: enthusiastic amateur fan, up to date on trivia and equally familiar with both the novels and adaptations. Yet a proud Janeite is in full agreement with Berger, an academic, in their search for authenticity and proximity to Austen. It would seem that it is the less enthusiastic fans who will find the Jane Austen Centre's approach to artifacts appealing.

**Geography and location:** When you go to the "Visit Bath" website, you will find a whole section on "Jane Austen's Bath." There you can download a free walking tour called "In the

Footsteps of Jane Austen,” which will take you around the city and describe locations both in Austen’s life and in Regency Bath. You can listen as actors read sections from Austen’s letters and novels, and sound effects such as horse hooves play in the background as you learn about what the spaces around you were like in Austen’s day. It is a truly immersive experience in the way that even Jane Austen’s House is not. You can truly feel like you are occupying the same space as Jane Austen – and her characters. Once again, the line between fiction and reality is blurred; as Ashley Orr points out: “The tour differs from both heritage locations used in adaptations and Chawton itself, in that it evokes a sense of Austen and her characters sharing the same physical space – as though they are equally fictional constructs – and invites the tourist to do the same” (253). Since we mostly find Austen’s Bath through the eyes of Catherine Morland and Anne Elliot, we imagine them in the space as much as we picture Austen herself.

Even our popular image of Austen in Bath is incomplete. The Jane Austen Centre calls her “Bath’s most famous resident,” but her personal views on the city are not as clear. The Centre portrays an urban life filled with shopping and society, which it tries to recreate for visitors as they embark on their visit. Catherine Morland is enamored with the society and glamour, but she finds falseness as well as true love among the residents. Anne Elliot despises the city, and yet the audio tour will take you down the Gravel Walk where she and Captain Wentworth begin their happily ever after. Austen herself had a difficult time in Bath; while living there, her father died and left the women of the family to sink closer to poverty. This was also the site of a writing slump that lasted until Austen and her family moved to the countryside. In short, the idea of “Jane Austen’s Bath” is a fiction cobbled together from almost no evidence. As Robert Dryden puts it, “In other words, we want to imagine Austen as a woman about town who loved Bath. We do not have the facts to prove that she loved Bath, or even that she went

about much, but the desire to perceive her that way supersedes actual knowledge” (107). Berger casts such an image as mercenary:

I will argue that the city takes on the “authorial signature” as Bath tourism seeks to commodify a completely fake notion of “authenticity”; as visitors walk around Bath, they confront an entirely false reconstruction of Jane Austen’s life, filtered through the many adaptations filmed in its narrow streets, crescents, and parks.

(121)

While it is indisputable that both Bath and the Jane Austen Centre capitalize on Austen’s association with the city, it is also true that tourists are drawn there regardless of advertising. Bath is a historic and beautiful city that is intimately connected with Austen, and it is easy to feel close to her there. Furthermore, all authenticity is inevitably fake – as I have already discussed, authenticity is carefully curated and developed in order to meet tourists’ needs. It is not actual authenticity we want – the possibility of that died two centuries ago. Rather, what tourists really want to be close to is their ideal version of Jane Austen, and Bath is both rich in material and a blank slate to cast one’s own feelings onto.

Meanwhile, while the Jane Austen Centre attracts many visitors with only a casual knowledge of Austen by virtue of its location in a tourist city, Chawton is squarely in the middle of nowhere. The neighboring town of Alton is only a few hours by train from London, but Jane Austen’s House is its best and only attraction. When I visited, every person who heard my accent asked if I was a Jane Austen fan, as there was no other reason for an American college student to be visiting. Because of this isolation, Jane Austen’s House is truly a pilgrimage destination. You must be a true Austen devotee to venture out this far, and that is a key idea that we must keep in mind in reference to the audience for each location. In a survey from 2001, 86% of Chawton

visitors had read at least one Jane Austen novel (Herbert). While this data is twenty years old, the geography has not changed, and while Austen's continued popularity growth may have increased traffic to her tourist sites, the audience for Jane Austen's House remains one which is already very familiar with her works. Meanwhile, the founder of the Jane Austen Centre explained that the gift shop sold many of Austen's books to visitors who had never read them (Wells). While both sites purport to cater to Jane Austen fans, their locations alone make their audiences very different.

It is the implications of catering to these different audiences that I want to turn to now. After providing what I hope is a clear enough picture of each site's approach to literary tourism, I can return to the questions I posed earlier to try and ascertain what my high school English teacher called the "so what?" of the points I have made so far.

## **Answering some questions**

### **What are tourist sites seeking to accomplish? How is it different for each location?**

#### **Are there discrepancies between the goal and the result?**

I have touched on many of the literary tourist's goals in this analysis, but they can all be distilled into a quest to accomplish the impossible – to call forth the spirit of an author and resurrect their ghostly presence. Since long before the Hill sisters invited readers to "put back the finger of Time," we have sought this unique combination of time travel and communion with spirits. In some places we accomplish this on the strength of our own imaginations with little outside interference, such as at a gravesite or gazing at the empty field that once held Jane Austen's birthplace. In the case of Jane Austen's House and the Jane Austen Centre, however, curators and visitors work together to create such an experience, to varying degrees of success.

Many scholars have described the interdependent relationship between tourists and curators that seeks to overcome reality, and the marketing experts for tourist sites are very much aware and ready to exploit it, as I will discuss later. Emma Spooner describes the cycle that results from this relationship:

The tour is the story of Austen's life, the story of how the tourist interprets Austen, the story of how the tourist travels to the Austen site, as well as the story of how the tourist defines themselves in relation to Austen locations and the responses they evoke ... Because tours and historical sites strive to meet the emotional needs of tourists, these literary sites change to suit the tourists. These changes can be small, but in a feedback loop they also influence the way in which tourists understand Austen at the site. (48-51)

In other words, each tourist creates a unique experience which both affects and is affected by the way the site is constructed and manipulated. Ashley Orr refers to the same exchange when she separates the experience from the physical site: "Meaning, far from being contained within the heritage site itself, develops – and can thus be redeveloped – through the dynamic interaction between these locations and their visitors" (250). Consequently, we can extrapolate that the goal of a literary tourist site is fluid, changing to match the collective needs of its visitors in balance with its own financial needs.

An often-expressed desire for visitors to historic sites is authenticity. However, as I have discussed already, complete authenticity is impossible if the goal is time-travel, and tourist sites have to decide how to craft the *feeling* of authenticity. Orr addresses this as well in relation to the exchange between visitors and curators, noting,

The work of the tourist lies not in discovering the “authentic” Austen residing in the place itself but the imaginative and interpretative process necessary for inscribing Austen’s presence onto particular sites. Though it’s important to note that this process is undoubtedly aided by the calculated marketing strategies of tourism bodies who have a vested interest in ensuring tourists can perform such imaginative leaps. (247)

Carefully constructed artificiality, then, is essential in achieving the ultimate goal of conjuring the author. The tourist expresses a desire for their own version of what authenticity looks like, which the curators then translate into an artificial rendering. If successful, the artificiality will be hidden in plain sight, and time-travel will be achieved.

So how does this work at each of the sites I am exploring? In the case of Jane Austen’s House, the curators strive for the most traditionally “authentic” display possible. The house has been restored as nearly as possible to the original, with notes accompanying every scrap of wallpaper and trinket authenticating their provenance and connection to Austen. Mentions of the numerous popular adaptations of Austen’s works are relegated to the gift shop and the outbuildings, leaving the house a pure and holy place for Austen’s spirit to reside and for time-travel to occur, free from as many anachronisms as possible. In fact, even Austen’s novels are mainly absent from the house itself, except for the little table where she would write, as though the works that made Austen famous were too fictional to invade the reality of this space.

We know, however, that true authenticity is impossible, and the atmosphere at Jane Austen’s House is a well-crafted fiction. The tabletop, for instance, is the only original part of the little writing table that is the highlight of the museum. The house itself was divided into low-income flats before restoration in 1948, so even the current layout is an approximation. The real



question is not if the narrative is a fiction, but if that fiction is successful in creating the illusion of authenticity and evoking Austen's presence. In this endeavor, the museum is incredibly successful. Jane Austen's House has a rating of four and a half stars out of five on Tripadvisor, with visitors claiming they felt as if Austen had just left the room. As for the expected disconnect between expectation and reality, it is undoubtedly present for many visitors, but it does not seem to diminish the experience. As for myself, I found the atmosphere compelling and evocative, and the extremely necessary signs warning the unwary not to let the cat into the buildings only added to the domestic charm.

Meanwhile, the Jane Austen Centre lies at the other end of the authenticity spectrum. The thorough integration of material from the adaptations and the lack of genuine artifacts are enough to establish the different approach the Centre has taken to creating an experience for its visitors. The interview that Juliette Wells conducted with the Centre's founder David Baldock sheds some more light on this tourist site's goals. Baldock is clear that the Jane Austen Centre "cannot and does not purport to be a museum," but that it instead is intended to serve as a complement to Chawton, filling a niche missed by the more authenticity-driven site's approach (Wells 115-118). The Centre is intended as a starting point for tourists, with the city of Bath as the main attraction. The goal is to provide a framework for Regency Bath, immersing visitors in Austen's world before setting them on a journey through the city. The eschewing of strict authenticity partially stems from the site not wanting to cater exclusively to Austen fans, but to those only casually acquainted with her work and its adaptations who may be put off or bored by extreme attention to detail.

If we consider the question from the point of view of the casual fan, the Centre seems to have achieved its goals. Tripadvisor reviews point to the incredibly friendly and enthusiastic

staff, as well as having learned a great deal about Austen and her life in Bath. An advantage of the lack of historical artifacts means that many of the exhibits are interactive, making the experience very engaging, especially for families with children who have not yet been exposed to Austen. Avid Austen fans and scholars, however, may find the experience lacking, as the writer of the Tripadvisor review in the last section expressed. Those seeking authenticity will find a severe disconnect between expectation and reality and may be better served by creating their own experience in the city itself, which looks much the same as it did during Austen's residence.

**What narrative does each site create of Austen, her novels, Regency England, and her fans?**

Creating a cohesive narrative is important for tourist sites looking to engage visitors throughout their stay, and the dialogue between curators and tourists is important in deciding what that narrative is. Using feedback from previous visitors, the curators of the site determine the qualities people most associate with Jane Austen, her novels, and the time period she lived in and craft a world distilled to those qualities. Such a simplistic rendering seems disingenuous to creating a faithful representation of a complex subject, but simplified narratives are key to attracting a broad audience and allowing each individual to project their own ideas onto the experience. Austen herself is an excellent candidate for such targeted storytelling, as we know very little about her life in a time that is widely looked on with nostalgia as simple and charming.

So what narrative have the two sites in question decided to follow? Even though they revolve around the same subject, each has a distinct approach. Beginning with Jane Austen's House in Chawton, I have already explored the distinctly domestic atmosphere. Located in a

cottage within a small English village, the story practically writes itself. Furthermore, as a woman living in the Regency, almost all of the extant items connected to Austen are domestic. The rooms of the cottage are filled with hand-stitched garments and other evidence of feminine domestic accomplishment. Austen's writing table, the only indication that the woman who owned it ever strayed outside her household responsibilities, sits modestly in a corner surrounded by family life, while one is invited to imagine the writer hard at work, only to be called back to domesticity by the famous squeaking door. Even more than her fame as a writer, Austen is associated with various exhibits of children's toys and games, furthering the image of the beloved Aunt Jane that began with her nephew's memoir. One room upstairs, however, is in stark contrast to the rest. This is dedicated to Austen's brothers and their naval careers, whose travels and adventures defending England are kept safely separated from the feminine space in the rest of the house. Only their gifts of delicate jewelry are allowed to interact with Jane's narrative.

The England defended by the Austen brothers is very much another character in this story. English heritage tourism is in great part defined by a traditional sense of Englishness that many find exemplified in Austen's novels. The domestic setting, the male and female spheres, and the tribute to the Navy, as well as the proximity of the grand Chawton House estate are all factors that tie Jane Austen's House to the traditional, nostalgic view of Regency England that I mentioned earlier in regard to the Pemberley Effect. The curators of the museum have certainly made a conscious effort to continue the comforting narrative that, while excluding the many painful aspects of British history, attracts droves of tourists to English country houses every year.

The Jane Austen Centre is not so focused on the kind of nostalgia that the countryside evokes, but it certainly seeks to provide a narrative of Austen and her time period. That narrative

is centered around the city of Bath and the social engagements Austen associates it with in her novels. While Jane Austen's House barely mentions life outside the little cottage, the Jane Austen Centre's exhibits display excerpts from Austen's correspondence and novels regarding balls, shopping, and social engagements. The family's tragedies while living in the city do merit some consideration, but Austen's ambivalence towards Bath is not present in the presented narrative. Rather, the visitor is thrown into a world where the author and her characters occupy the same vibrant world full of parties and romance. The picture of Regency Bath is inextricable from the world Austen created in her novels. While in Chawton Jane Austen seems to occupy her own little sphere in the world set out for her, the Jane Austen Centre's Bath is entirely a fiction of Austen's creation. Free from any pretensions of authenticity, the Centre can create its own world using Austen's works as a template. The spotless narrative perhaps works better here than it does in Chawton, as both the curators and the visitors enter a mutual understanding that they are entering a fantasy, rather than pretending that the Regency world and Austen's life were as simple as they appear to be.

In creating narratives *for* Austen fans, tourist sites also must create a narrative *of* the fans in order to respond to their needs. As discussed, this is slightly different for each site, as Jane Austen's House is more suited to devoted disciples, while the Jane Austen Centre seeks out novices who may only be familiar with the screen adaptations. In certain aspects of the presentation, however, especially in the gift shops, we can extrapolate a similar narrative between the two sites that connects the experienced fan and the possible fan-to-be. This fan is particularly interested in characters and relationships, particularly any and all versions of Mr. Darcy. They want to buy replica jewelry and tea towels. Most importantly, they are female. According to Juliette Wells's survey of Jane Austen House visitors in 2011, male visitors were

much more likely to cite a female companion as the reason for their visit rather than their own interest in Austen, and the few male fans cited women as their introduction to the author. Despite her early following among male academics, it has become nearly impossible to extract Austen from the damning social stigma of femininity. Rather than attempt to attract a male audience or cater to those who tail their female companions in embarrassment, both Jane Austen's House and the Jane Austen Centre lean into the feminine-associated aspects of Austen fandom and focus their narratives on romance, domesticity, and relationships.

**Despite the differences between each site, can we extrapolate one Austen “brand”? Who is Jane Austen™?**

The Jane Austen I have been discussing in this thesis has not been the real woman who was born in Steventon on December 16, 1775 and whose body now rests in Winchester Cathedral. No, the author whose spirit pilgrims seek to raise is a fiction. She is Jane Austen™. I have used her last name as much as possible in order to show the same kind of respect as a male author, but I need not have bothered. I wasn't referencing Jane Austen, I was referencing “everybody's dear, Jane.” Robert Dryden puts it very clearly when he writes,

Jane Austen is arguably the most popular author ever to write in the English language. She is a commodity, an industry, a corporation, and a celebrity, who has been enjoying immense and varied popularity for decades ... My argument is that the realms of pleasure, passion, and possessiveness in the Austen world are all possible because, to a great degree, Jane Austen is an invention. You might say that aside from the novels, Austen does not entirely exist. The historical “Jane

Austen” is a fiction, a screen onto which the desires, fantasies, and passions of her audience members are constantly projected. (103)

According to Dryden, Jane Austen is “a commodity, an industry, a corporation, and a celebrity,” not a person. In other words, the brand is all she is.

So if Austen is only a brand, why is it so hard to define what that brand is? I have been thinking about that question for a year now, and I am no closer to an answer than I was at the beginning. In fact, I am further from it. Most people, including hardcore fans, have an image of Jane Austen in their heads that is so ingrained that there is no need to try and define it. But when you delve deeply into any aspect of her life and work, be it literary criticism, social commentary, fan studies, adaptation studies, or anything else, it becomes increasingly difficult to pin her down. She has been co-opted into both sides of any number of issues ranging from personal to political – was she anti-feminist or feminist? romantic or cynical? insightful or obtuse? Each of us, no matter how much we know about her, have a strong opinion on each of these questions, and we are shocked to find that anyone has a different answer. Jane Austen is a deceptive enigma.

If we go back to Dryden’s thesis, he gave us a key to the enigma, telling us, “The historical ‘Jane Austen’ is a fiction, a screen onto which the desires, fantasies, and passions of her audience members are constantly projected.” Not only does Jane Austen not exist, but Jane Austen™ doesn’t either. She is different for each of us as we project ourselves onto her. The basic framework is there, like the famous silhouette that we don’t even know for sure is of “our” Jane (how fitting a contradiction), but we fill it with our own personalities, wishes, and desires. These are ever changing, adding to the enigma of Jane. The question I posed for this section was not “who **was** Jane Austen™?” but “who **is** Jane Austen™?” Dryden comments, “there is a

distinct way that fans embrace the present tense when they imagine Austen's life: Jane is as opposed to Jane was. There is also a feeling among Janeites that Austen's life is still evolving and in process—not static” (106). It is impossible for Austen's actual life to evolve two hundred years after her death, but it is our own lives that are evolving, constantly changing what we project onto her.

Having said all of this, I still need to answer my question: what is the Jane Austen brand? Who is the spirit that the curators of the tourist sites are trying to evoke for visitors? If Jane Austen is a fiction based on whoever is looking at her, we have to turn to the fans for answers. In creating an image of Austen, what they are really doing is creating an image of her fans collectively in order to provide what they want and expect to see. In that respect, I have already answered the question in the last section. The narrative tourist sites have crafted around fans is the brand. Jane Austen™ is a model Janeite: feminine, romantic, a lover of character and wit, and deeply entrenched in the perceived charms of Regency England. At Chawton, she is perfectly content in domesticity and English family values. At Bath, she is an eager socialite with a history of romantic affairs. She may not be *your* Jane or *my* Jane, but she is manufactured to represent the most enthusiastic of her fans as a whole. In the end, no matter what her public brand is, it is comforting to know that whoever you think Jane Austen is, you will never be wrong.

**How does Austen's writing shape our expectations of our tourist experience and does the Austen brand in turn affect how we interpret her writing?**

Our unique opinions and life experience will always affect how we approach any piece of writing. They form part of the paratext that makes every reader's experience different. Therefore,

one's preconceived notions about Austen will undoubtedly affect one's interpretation of her work. As already noted, based on Wells's survey as well as personal observation, many men are very quick to point to a female influence on any perceived interest of theirs in Austen. Others are often completely dismissive of her work, even if they do happen to read one of her novels. The feminization of Austen's brand has drastically affected public opinion of her work even though the novels themselves are no more traditionally feminine than other, more popularly "accepted" female authors. Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* challenges authority to control her own destiny in a similar way to Elizabeth Bennet, but Brontë's work is regarded on the same level as Dickens, while Jane Austen is seen by the general public as a frivolous romance novelist. This is not exclusively a masculine phenomenon, either. Women who are eager to break away from female stereotypes that plague them can be equally dismissive of Austen's work. For example, Virginia Woolf found Austen to be not rebellious enough, perhaps biased by her own struggles against the male-dominated literary field. By playing into the feminization of Austen's brand, tourist sites like the ones this essay explores exploit rather than challenge the stereotypes that color our view of her work.

It is not only the feminized aspect of the public view of Austen that affects interpretation. Woolf's finding Austen too tame is not a unique perspective. Many people today also believe that Austen's novels are merely about pretty, upper class people complaining about "first-world problems." English heritage tourism and the grand estates capitalizing on the "Darcy Effect" have done much to perpetuate this view. It is an interpretation that misses much of the subtle social commentary present in all of Austen's novels that reflects the precarious social and financial position she herself struggled with throughout her life. The true narrative is indeed



present at both Chawton and Bath, but it takes a careful reader to find it beneath the polished surface designed to attract visitors expecting an image of bygone elegance.

Lest we spend too much time despairing of the ignorant public's opinions of Jane Austen and her work, we must also look briefly at the scholarly failings as well. For while the Janeites have congregated in one direction, scholars have taken the other. Janeites tend to focus on the characters and relationships within the novels, especially the romance. This is especially evident in the sheer amount of "I love Mr. Darcy" merchandise available in any tourist site's gift shop, as Darcy is arguably the most complex and "romantic" character of Austen's creation. They are also intensely focused on "Jane" as a person, whatever that may mean to each individual. Academic scholars, on the other hand, are more likely to focus strictly on plot and social class. At first this strict adherence may have been based in traditions of literary theory, but it is my belief that it has been somewhat solidified by a resistance to the popular image of Austen. Scholars have been keen to avoid association with the lesser class of Janeites, and have therefore avoided the popular aspects of her brand, likely hindering complete literary analysis. Austen herself, after all, was an avid reader of popular stories, and obviously delighted in creating complex characters and relationships. It has become clear to me, however, that as more women have begun to dominate in the literary field, the two sides of Austen have grown closer than ever, possibly leading to a bridge over the divide.

No matter what side you are on, it is possible that literary tourism itself is detrimental to your reading experience. In her seminal work on literary tourism, Nicola Watson posits,

After all these years of postcards from Anne Hathaway's cottage and biscuit-tins from Haworth, this continuing desire to situate canonical literary texts in equally canonical landscapes may seem almost natural, but in other respects it remains a

deeply counter-intuitive response to the pleasures and possibilities of imaginative reading. (1)

I have discussed at length the impulses that drive literary tourism, but Watson suggests that those impulses may be artificial, created in opposition to the idea of “imaginative reading.” Watson’s example is that of her children who, when presented with the real-life basis for their favorite fictional land, were unimpressed because it was far inferior to the one in their imaginations, and it wasn’t the real thing anyway. When we go seeking Austen’s picturesque little villages in the reality of Chawton, or even Regency Bath in the modern city, we are bound to be disappointed. Why should we even want to go see something that can never live up to our imaginations? And isn’t that the point of reading, to create a private and unique world in collaboration with the author?

Watson continues with an even more concerning theory:

The landscape sought by tourists, too, is a text, and a “dangerously supplementary” one at that: to go to a place by the light of a book is at once to declare the place inadequately meaningful without the literary signification provided by the book, and to declare the book inadequate without this specific, anxiously located referent or paratext. (7)

By participating in literary tourism, we may be linking Austen’s work inextricably with the brand the tourist sites are promoting. When we place such importance on things outside the original text, we are devaluing the text itself. We carry expectations with us that when we reach Chawton or Bath, we will be experiencing the world of Austen’s novels, and we amend our view of that world once we get there. It is therefore important to fully understand the narrative the tourist sites are selling, and how they are selling it.

**What are the implications of the kind of marketing around tourist sites being so closely tied to literature?**

As I have previously discussed, the production of literary place is a collaborative effort between the visitors and the curators. But is such a relationship completely mutually beneficial? We have already ascertained that the Jane Austen brand certainly affects our interpretation of her work, whether we want it to or not. David Herbert's article "Literary Places, Tourism and the Heritage Experience" contains neat, cyclical diagrams of the "Construction and Consumption of Heritage Places" where tourists experience a site's interpretation of a literary work or figure, react to the message they receive, and provide feedback that influences changes to the site. This ultimately creates a perfect balance between visitors' needs for authenticity and convenience. However, such an ideal situation ignores a larger world of marketing that does not put visitors' needs first. Rather, marketers hold their own needs first and foremost, seeking to either manipulate visitors into serving those needs or using the public's desires as leverage.

The article "Literary tourism: Opportunities and challenges for the marketing and branding of destinations?" written by Anne Hoppen, Lorraine Brown, and Alan Fyall was published in the *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management* in 2014, and I believe it contains many insights into literary tourism from a purely marketing point of view. The authors give an overview of different facets of literary tourism based on others' research, including David Herbert's, and describe how these aspects can be leveraged for creating and marketing literary sites. Their observations, such as nostalgia playing a key role in attracting visitors, are not new or shocking, but the idea of exploiting intrinsic qualities of literature for marketing purposes is quite novel to scholars used to passive literary analysis. Perhaps the most inflammatory point that made *this* scholar clutch her pearls was the idea of "product placement,"

or collaborating with authors to feature specific locations in order to create literary destinations.

The article reads,

Even though film-induced tourism differs from literary tourism, this proposed marketing vehicle could possibly be adapted to literary tourism, where authors may actively promote a particular destination through their fiction. This way, a particular destination could be favourably differentiated from competing destinations as well as being “positively positioned” in the minds of consumers, which could influence tourist behaviour. (Hoppen et al. 42)

Even in this day and age when everything is on the market, including your attention, literature (*real* literature) still seems like an untouchable, pure art form. The idea that even the Great Novel could be breached by advertisers is quite scary. A tourist influenced in the manner described by the article has no real influence on Herbert’s perfect cycle.

A key example of successful literary branding mentioned in this article is the *Harry Potter* universe. Along with traditional tourist sites such as the spot where J.K. Rowling completed the last book in the series, the author has collaborated with Universal Studios to completely fabricate a literary destination in the form of the Wizarding World of Harry Potter. Here, fans can visit the definitive version of the world portrayed in the *Harry Potter* books. The gap between fiction and reality is eradicated, replaced by this officially sanctioned replacement for readerly interpretation. Rowling herself is indistinguishable from the marketers, being very publicly in control of the entire endeavor. Is this the future of literature and branding – an author has complete control over her own brand, leaving nothing to the imagination of the readers, who must travel to expensive, officially sanctioned literary destinations to ensure they have the

correct interpretation of the work? This represents Nicola Watson's fears realized – that literary tourism is dangerously supplemental to the meaning of a text.

J.K. Rowling is very different from Jane Austen, however. Austen herself has had virtually no influence on her own brand. The book and film *Austenland* tried to depict an Austen theme park like the Wizarding World, but even that hypothetical scenario is set up to say more about Austen's fans than the author herself. Emma Spooner has written, "Literary tourism, however, is not just a new way to cash in on Austen's popularity: not only does it construct an interpretation of an author or a text, but it also exposes the changing cultural desires and anxieties of the reading public" (43). Austen's brand is certainly manipulated by marketers, but it is informed by the reading public. Ultimately, the marketers for Austen's literary sites have no choice but to reflect our own desires back to us.

I must admit that I have had difficulty in the last few sections in bringing my observations on tourist sites and the Jane Austen brand all the way back to the literature itself. When I posed my questions, I hoped by the time I got to the end to have come up with a profound statement on how most people's reading of Austen's works has been significantly influenced by the Austen brand perpetuated by tourist sites, but in analyzing that brand I find that is not the case. I think the largest factor in my conclusion is the extreme disconnect between the novels themselves and the Austen brand. The way the vast majority of the public have encountered Austen's work since 1995 has been through the vast number of adaptations, and the rest of their perception of her comes from her popular image. Maybe some have read *Pride and Prejudice* in high school or college, but in time that one experience becomes entangled with the aforementioned primary influences on their opinion. Those who truly read and study all of Austen's novels become detached from the brand quickly because they can immediately

recognize that it bears little resemblance to the work in front of them. In short – I still believe that the Jane Austen brand is well worth studying for all of the implications I have already explored, but its connection to and influence on the literary works of Jane Austen is nominal at best. In a certain way, I find this idea freeing – it allows Austen fans and academics alike to appreciate the “high culture” aspects of her writing and approach it critically while indulging fully in the escapist fun generated by purveyors of the Austen brand. I can hold on to my souvenir pajamas AND my literary analysis.

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