WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:
JANE AUSTEN’S FANS AND THEIR SEQUELS TO PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

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By

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This thesis is dedicated to the patience of many, specifically Kathryn Temple, Nicole DeMarco, and Ruth Murray.

Many thanks,
Ursula Marie Gross
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Introduction

Setting out to continue Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, Linda Berdoll’s *Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife* imagines Elizabeth and Darcy’s marriage in intimate detail, likewise firing the passions of its readers. In 2007, the film *Becoming Jane* went so far as to imagine a full and detailed life for Austen – making the title more descriptive of the screenplay than of Austen’s own life. And in mainstream culture, Austen is associated with tea parties and politeness, Regency costumes and romance. Her fans’ definition of her has become the prevailing view, with biographical facts being only a small part of a much larger entity. Some fans, like Berdoll, take an active role and write sequels to her works, projecting their own admiration and desires onto what was originally Austen’s canvas. Read by other fans, these sequels are expressions of their own Austen enjoyment. This paper analyzes sequels such as Berdoll’s to understand these fans and, by extension, who their Jane Austen is.

The most basic definition of an Austen fan is someone who likes Austen’s work, but the term is further delineated into “Janeite” and “Austenite,” though neither is formally or even frequently defined. Section one of this paper discusses the difference between the two, focusing on the less academic categorization of “Janeite.” Janeites, briefly, are the fans that attend tea parties, dress up in period costume, or read sequels to Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*. Also in section one, I consider the Janeite response to sequels, using Hans Robert Jauss’ theories as a context for interpreting a collective group response and online responses from Janeites. Why a Janeite would write or read a *Pride and Prejudice* sequel is explored, as well as what she may gain from this activity.
I read dozens of sequels to Jane Austen works for my research, the most common being a continuation of *Pride and Prejudice*. In fact, when choosing what sequels to include in this paper, the volume of stories about Elizabeth and Darcy confirmed my decision to use only *Pride and Prejudice* sequels, despite finding some interesting sequels to *Sense and Sensibility*. I also considered how fairly the chosen texts represented other sequels, looking at similar plots or character traits. Similarly, my use of readers’ online responses also considers their representative quality insofar as other responses to the same texts.

In section two, I discuss what themes in the sequels prompt such responses, first considering changes in the characters of Elizabeth and Darcy. Each assumes more traditional male/female roles, with Darcy being strong and brave and Elizabeth becoming weak and uncertain. These changes are fitting with the more patriarchal themes that also emerge in the sequels, one being an emphasis on family, discussed in section three. Despite having moved from the Bennet household, Elizabeth Darcy is still tethered to it emotionally and socially, and the focus on family is heightened as she feels pressure to start her own family and create an heir. With this emphasis on more traditional female roles – Elizabeth in her home, with her family, having children – the sequels easily enter the interior spaces that Austen did not, from the bedroom at Pemberley to the emotions in Elizabeth’s mind. I examine this inside/outside tension in section four, analyzing the relocation of literal events and interior thoughts. These departures from Austen’s text illustrate not only how Janeites view Austen, but also the ways in which they recreate her today.
Section One

Jane Austen completed only six novels, but she is one of the most well-known and highly regarded authors of her time. She is studied by scholars and also celebrated by ordinary readers, a combination that creates a sizable and diverse body of work about a comparatively small amount of text. In fact, much of the cultural cache surrounding Austen is a product of other individuals and their perception of her. The first and very sanitized biography of her life by her nephew James Edward Austen-Leigh impressed upon readers the ways in which Jane Austen was the perfect 19th-century woman – modest and decorous. Conversely, Searching for Jane Austen, written over 130 years later by Emily Auerback, is adamantly opposed to this sanitization of the witty, satiric feminist. While each writer approaches Austen from a different perspective, they both care her work and her reputation. They are both fans. From the 1870 Austen-Leigh memoir to the 2007 film adaptation Becoming Jane, scholars and students, readers and writers created today’s Austen, and, in this way, any discussion of the author is a discussion of our perception of her. A discussion of Austen, then, is really a discussion about us.

This section will begin by discussing the specific type of fan who wants to further engage with Austen’s world, mapping the terms “Janeite” and “Austenite.” Such fans seek film adaptations, historical tours, and tea parties in order further experience Austen as she has been interpreted. Reader-response theory is one means of considering the validity and purpose of such fan activities, including reading sequels to Austen’s work. Selected online reviews of the sequel Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife will be
highlighted, illustrating readers’ reactions to a sequel and what they gain from their reading.

Since the word “fan” can encompass both Emily Auerback, a university professor, and a Regency tea party attendee, the term “fan” must be further defined. Michael Hayes in his article “Trubetzkoy, Austen and the Evolution of Culture” writes, “Two Austens emerge in a nice structuralist balance: popular readers patronizingly nicknamed by George Saintsbury ‘Janeites’, and the critical readers denominated ‘Austenites’…Both Austens lend themselves to caricature” (220). In this definition, he references an important set of words, “Janeite” and “Austenite,” though he is short on specific examples. He locates the difference between the two groups via discourse:

It is also easy to recognize the legitimacy of two very different discourses:

Janeite, which tends to be informal, intimate and personal accounts of her social and sentimental costume dramas, and Austenite, which is formal, intellectual and objective in its explication of her ironic, moral and subtle narratives that constitute a social and moral analysis. (221)

According to Hayes, the Janeite discourse is dependent on both personal narrative and period trappings, while Austenite interaction is marked by a more academically rigorous and formal evaluation of the same work. One is considered an “account,” or a subjective retelling, while the other is an “analysis,” a type of discourse implying greater intellectual agility.

Deidre Lynch also explains this difference in fan types. In her introduction to Disciples and Devotees she writes, “‘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 pleasure of *Bridget
Jones*” (12). Both Hayes and Lynch portray Janeites as the more emotional, less
sophisticated, and easier affected of the two fan groups (ironically, a description similar
to that of the 18th-century concept of “sensibility” as opposed to “sense”). Moreover,
these two delineations of popular versus critical consumption are two of the few
references in texts or online of the *difference* between these two words. If used at all,
“Janeite” or “Austenite” is generally not accompanied by an explanation or point of
reference, reinforcing the relatively unspoken divide of the two types of Austen fans.

This distinction between fans can become clearer in the context of fan studies.
*Textual Poachers*, a leading book in the field of fan studies, defines a fan community as
“a social group struggling to define its own culture and to construct its own community
within the context of what many observers have described as a post-modern era; it
documents a group insistent on making meaning from materials others have
characterized as trivial and worthless” (Jenkins 3). To adapt this definition to Austen
fans means having Janeites create meaning from elements and emotions in Austen texts
that Austenites consider worthless (such details will be analyzed later in this paper, but
elements are the materialistic aspects of Darcy’s wealth and how Darcy and Elizabeth’s
“true love” plays out after their marriage). The universally acknowledged value of
Austen legitimizes Janeites’ enjoyment to society in general, but their ignorance of the
scholarly important elements of Austen sets them in further opposition to Austenites.
Janeites are marginalized from the Austenites in this fan studies rubric, with Austenites acting as the “others” who judge the eager pursuits of the smaller group.

The few definite explanations that have been published of the difference between Janeites and Austenites consider how each subset is perceived. The self-selected nature of an Austen fan, though, makes the reader’s own reception of the text as important as society’s perception, and this distinction merits an approach that considers textual relationships from the reader’s position. Reader response theory, and, more specifically, Hans Robert Jauss’ theories on textual history and reception examine those who consume literary works in increasingly new and distant ways from the original text, shifting the emphasis of study away from the author and toward the reader. In Jauss’ view, the “historical essence” of literature is revealed when a “work is mediated not only through the producing subject but also through the consuming subject” (15). This approach to the life of a literary work such as *Pride and Prejudice* is valuable when examining both the Janeite community and *Pride and Prejudice* sequels because not only does it acknowledge the presence of engaged readers, it also values their response. Jauss also emphasizes the cumulative history of readers’ responses, acknowledging the enduring nature of the Austen fandom.

This cumulative history would include the more recent fan activities – the movies, the tours, the sequels – despite their decidedly less academic overtones. These modern methods of consuming Austen cannot and should not be ignored since “the historical life of a literary work is unthinkable without the active participation of its addressees” (Jauss 19). As distasteful as it might be to her, even an Austen purist will
somehow be exposed to a film preview or be the recipient of the kitsch frequently gifted to Janeites and Austenites alike. And these scholars will write articles and teach classes with these reference points in mind, and their product – essay or lecture – will be received by an equally, if not more saturated, audience. The Janeite’s Jane Austen is becoming more widespread and increasingly accessible as it proves itself a marketable consumer product.

Scholars cringe at the movie adaptations and tea parties, but these products, unlike the original text, are an additional means of consuming Austen for those already familiar with the books. This process creates a deeper level of engagement in the text for readers, as they are asked to reevaluate what they were expecting of a given work. For example, a Janeite who saw the film adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility* because she loved the original novel might be surprised to find the youngest sister with such a visible role in the film. She must return to the text – even if only mentally – to evaluate this change and to decide how this alteration affected the film. In Jauss’ view, this change “from passive to active reception” is then followed by creating “a new production that surpasses” previously held assumptions and expectations of the work (19). For Austen fans, this new production is frequently literal: a new movie, sequel, or heritage tour. Whether Jauss, who was not writing about Janeites specifically, would agree with Hayes and Lynch in their definitions of Janeites or, instead, acknowledge the group’s active reception is unknown. Academic analysis is not for every reader, but Janeite activities are, nonetheless, debatable, particularly to those protective of authorial intent and the sanctity of the original texts.
Austenites worry that these new productions can surpass Austen’s texts in the hierarchy of Austen enjoyment, or even that these new means of consuming Austen surpass the original act of reading entirely. As Deidre Lynch points out:

Indeed to academics, many present-day Austenian cultures of appreciation appear alarmingly ready to cease engagement with the texts as just another ritual of appreciation, one only moderately more important that others. Reading, to be sure, does appear rather effete and unsociable when contrasted to more robust ways of performing one’s Austen identifications. (117)

While a legitimate concern, Lynch is not recognizing that even the most robust performances of Jane Austen allegiance stem from the original novels and a desire for a deeper understanding of the period and that participating in these Janeite productions has a cost of entry. For example, in order to engage in a discussion of an Austen sequel over tea, one has to have read Austen’s novels. To have read the sequels and not the originals is unlikely for the Janeite who seeks total immersion, not partial enjoyment. To participate in the sequels is to enter the world that privileges reading Austen above all other means of engagement, a requirement that locates all “Austen identifications” in the primary texts of Jane Austen, at least to begin with.

Given that a thorough reading of Austen can be assumed, exploring Janeites’ reaction to a sequel to Pride and Prejudice can not only offer a tangible occurrence of reader response theory, but it can also provide insight as to how Janeites use a post-modern product when engaging in their Austen identifications. Equally as important, sequels themselves are a reaction by a Janeite (the author of the sequel) to the original
text (*Pride and Prejudice*), so any further reaction to the sequel becomes a type of conversation among Janeites about how they perceive their enjoyment of Austen. Discussions of the sequel are discussions of the traits of their own enjoyment.

*Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife* is one of many *Pride and Prejudice* sequels. Initially self-published as *The Bar Sinister*, the book received enough attention that Sourcebooks republished it in May 2004. Since then, according to Berdoll’s profile on Amazon.com, it has sold over 100,000 copies, and Sourcebooks cites it as the number-one selling Jane Austen sequel (Amazon, Sourcebooks). No matter how you prefer your Austen, you cannot deny that Berdoll has done something right, or at least something culturally resonant. In the spirit of reader-response theory, one means to understand what readers found so compelling in this sequel is to examine the online reviews of *Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife*. While not a scientific sample, the reviews allow the readers to “speak” directly about their enjoyment (or disappointment) – a fitting medium given that the book is, in essence, one reader’s response to *Pride and Prejudice* writ large.

Part historical romance, part bodice-ripper, and part Austen-adoration, *Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife* imagines Elizabeth and Darcy’s marriage in intimate detail. It has been described both as “soft pornography” and “interesting, witty & well written” in varying online reviews, with the only point of agreement among readers being the sheer volume of sex Austen’s previously prim characters have (Scott, MacLachlan). Although *Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife* is undeniably not Jane Austen (Berdoll herself will admit as much), it does serve as a point of access to Jane
Austen for readers. Whether that access is further enjoyment of the characters or a deeper engagement with history and the Regency period, controversial sequels such as Berdoll’s do not diminish Austen’s value to Janeites, but serve as an additional means to consume it.

*Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife* encourages added reflection on Austen and her characters by its Janeite readers, even if only cursory in nature. A reviewer on the Pemberley.com site said: “I loved the way Linda [Berdoll] captured the love between Darcy and Lizzy. Oh, I fell in love with Mr. Darcy all over again after reading this. (For awhile I was starting to prefer Col. Brandon how silly of me.)” (Elizabeth). Earlier in her review, she stated that she had read Austen first and then read Berdoll – the cover of the book with a couple in a passionate embrace perhaps alluding to “the love between Darcy and Lizzy” she happily found in Berdoll – and the sequel prompted her to revisit her opinions on Austen characters, even those characters in other original Austen works.

In this instance, *Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife* is read in addition to Austen, not in lieu of, and the sequel engaged the reader with the cannon a second time. Although there is a potential blurring of authors (Berdoll’s work influenced the reader’s opinion about Austen’s characters), the reader nonetheless returned to Austen to form her final opinions. This comparison agrees with Jauss’ tenet:

The aesthetic implication [of the relationship of literature and reader] lies in the fact that the first reception of a work by the reader includes a test of its aesthetic value in comparison with works already read. The obvious historical implication
of this is that the understanding of the first reader will be sustained and enriched in a chain of receptions from generation to generation; in this way the historical significance of a work will be decided and its aesthetic value made evident. (20)

Jauss’ view of reception indicates that a reader relates and understands the text through comparison with earlier texts. *Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife* intentionally evokes Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*: its readers expect to be reminded of the original text. These expectations, though, “are then varied, corrected, altered” based on the elements of the sequel – which is where to scholars like Auerbach, the sequels are harmful to Austen. Most Austen scholars would probably prefer readers to have a shorter but more authentic Austen experience, with limited exposure to the more interpretive Austen activities.

What spurs the creation of such Austen interpretations? Ironically, when asked what prompted her to write a sequel to *Pride and Prejudice*, Berdoll first cites the BBC mini-series – another Austen-inspired text and not the original. In other words, she was inspired to produce a book that speaks to the same audience with similar effects, those who in some cases initially interpret Austen indirectly. The complimentary reviews indicates that those readers who are visual – who want to see the story completed, or who reference the films in their positive review of the books, are those most satisfied with Berdoll’s work. One review harkens to the most active moments of the book and uses words that imply she has *seen* the sequel instead of having read it (with my emphases in italics):
I thought the author captured Elizabeth and Darcy's characters very well, indeed, and I LIKED seeing them in all of their passion and vulnerability…And Elizabeth is very well drawn as well - spirited and intelligent as ever. I was able to look past the author's odd spelling choices…The twists and turns of the story were mostly very good. I liked the suspense of figuring out precisely who John Christie was, and Lizzy's kidnapping (with Darcy's thrilling rescue - Go GET 'EM, Darcy!) was a highpoint…things galloped along from page to page, and I'll give the author credit; she knows how to tell a story. (Thecla)

On the other hand, another review writes, “I couldn't get past 40 pages. I think it borders on the pornographic. And the writing style is truly odd: archaic vocabulary within strange syntax” (M., Kathleen). This review focus on Berdoll’s characters and writing style as compared to Austen’s, and those most offended by the more textual details are, by in large, the least happy with the sequel. Such expectations, though, echo the weight Jauss gives “the subjectivity of the interpretation and of the taste of difference readers or levels of readers,” indicating that shared past experiences with the text cannot overcome an individual’s taste (23). Since a reader’s taste has a role in her reaction to the sequels, the burden of any misinterpretation can be shared by the individual and the writer. In other words, this type of Austen allegiance involves the text, the reader, and her own reception.

So in addition to the disdainful opinions of Austenites like Lynch – if she would even call herself an Austenite – there are divisions among those who read the sequels.
These differences of taste can be seen in the aforementioned debates among Janeites about the sequel – so while Janeites are not shy about performing their Austen identifications, not all sequels are created equal. (It is only fair to add that I have never read a review that even suggested parity with Austen’s work. While sequels can be enjoyed, they are not Austen.) Sequel authors have tasked themselves with creating a conditional simulacrum – the need to replicate existing characters in an inexistent storyline, to create an original plot within two inches of ivory. The changes and shifts that occur when writing in Austen’s world indicate what elements of the original texts Janeites identify with or seek out, and examining consistent changes throughout many sequels offers insight into this community of readers. The following sections analyze changes in Elizabeth’s personality, the heightened emphasis on family, and the ways in which sequel authors redraw the boundaries in the original text.
Section Two

*Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife* is only one of many *Pride and Prejudice* sequels; Amazon.com recommends more every time I log in. These stories are remarkably similar, even when taking into account the creative limitations sequel writers inherit. For the sake of clarity, this section will pull examples from just a few sequels, but they were selected, in part, because they are a fair representation of the larger group of work. The previous section uses *Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife* to understand how and why Janeites read a sequel, looking to reader response theory and reader reviews for theoretical and literal interpretations. This section will also analyze the sequels, but will focus instead on how Elizabeth and Darcy change when written by a modern Janeite and what these changes indicates about this fan community and the ways in which it engages with Austen’s characters.

Unsurprisingly, the Elizabeth Darcy of the sequels differs from the Elizabeth Bennet from the original novel – different authors, varying abilities, and separate time periods causing an expectable incongruity between texts. The question, then, is not *why* the characters are different, but *how* can the differences be interpreted? Laura Mooneyham White explains the unrealistically attractive, charming actors in the 1990s film adaptations by saying, “This cultural logic insists that the simulacrum is better than the original, because of its greater resemblance to what we need now.” Using this logic, the changed characters in the sequels respond to what Janeites want to read now – the elements of Austen novels that resonate most strongly.
While it is not unexpected that Elizabeth appears different in the sequels, how she has changed is surprising. The sequel authors weaken Elizabeth’s personality by making her insecure and rash. She is surrounded by servants, a situation that further emphasizes the difference in her and Darcy’s backgrounds and, in addition, showcases the characteristics of her new – and daunting – life as mistress of Pemberley. As the sequels bring Elizabeth down, though, they raise Darcy up as a more stereotypical hero. These changes in character prioritize domestic and patriarchal themes in the sequels, positioning Elizabeth as if she has much to prove to her husband and to the classes both above and below her.

Darcy’s behavior – heroic and noble in public and comfortable and at ease in private – is what Elizabeth aspires to embody. In Halstead’s *Mr. Darcy Presents His Bride*, Elizabeth pretends to have an icy demeanor when she arrives at Pemberley, only to ask Darcy later if he was impressed by her efforts. “‘Congratulations, Duchess’… ‘The servants will not immediately forget your arrival,’” Darcy replies, with Elizabeth then admitting, “‘By the time they do, I should have some idea of what I am about’” (26). This lack of self-knowledge appears throughout the sequels, frequently with her behavior being compared to her husband’s. The result is that she often feels the need to be more formal in public or more at ease in private, less friendly toward men or less reserved toward women, and so on, depending on the specific sequel. In portraying Elizabeth in her new life as Mrs. Darcy, the sequel authors not only create insecurities, but also they spell out these insecurities for their readers, putting the focus on what Elizabeth is not instead of what she is or will become.
Such insecurities are related to another trait Elizabeth Darcy develops in the sequels: a tendency toward rash judgments and actions. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Pemberley is as much a part of Darcy’s character as is his pride, and Elizabeth realizes the connection between man and estate when she thinks, “As a brother, a landlord, a master, she considered how many people’s happiness were in his guardianship!—How much of pleasure or pain it was in his power to bestow!—How much of good or evil must be done by him!” (Austen 208). Berdoll, however, specifies the exact moment Elizabeth falls in love with Darcy at Pemberley. In her sequel, Elizabeth “first fell in love with him…from his portrait” that hung beside his ancestors (56). Compare Austen’s Elizabeth, with her admiration of the principles of Pemberley and Darcy’s management of his estate, to Berdoll’s Elizabeth, who makes a much quicker judgment about her feelings for Darcy, in addition to a more superficial one. Indeed, Elizabeth Darcy makes many quick judgments, often assuming the worst about every occurrence and culminating in the belief that Darcy does not love her anymore and/or Darcy is cheating on her. In one instance, she resolves this issue with the sweeping realization, “She had been more than prejudiced, in her reaction to the affair: she had been blind” (Tennant 224). In the sequels, she rushes not only to judgment but also to action; believing her marriage to be over, Elizabeth retreats or runs away in some manner before even speaking with Darcy (making the Elizabeth of the sequels more similar to the original Lydia than her intended counterpart). In contrast, the original Elizabeth’s affection for Darcy came upon her “so gradually” that she hardly knew it began (Austen 311).
If Elizabeth identifies seeing Darcy’s picture as the moment she fell in love, she certainly was also aware of the history of his family and estate. Given that she is not intimidated by his wealth before she marries him, the character’s awkward moments of self-doubt and feelings of inferiority in the sequels are disconcerting to read. Not only is Elizabeth often surprised by how different her life is as Mrs. Darcy, but she also behaves as though she is unworthy of the position – a significant change from Austen’s Elizabeth, who did not cower in the face of wealth or stature. Austen’s Elizabeth finds fault with her own prejudice in the original novel; however, the sequel writers have her censure her every action within Pemberley’s walls. Similarly, the gregarious Elizabeth of the original novel was acutely aware of etiquette, whereas “Several times at Pemberley she [Tennant’s Elizabeth] had felt the eyes of Mr. Darcy on her, and had wondered at the intensity of his scrutiny, only to realise with shame that the hour was late and there were wives and daughters still at table who should long ago have left the men to their port” (Tennant 64). That Elizabeth would make a repeated social faux-pas is odd, but that her reaction to something relatively trivial is shame is even more out of character. Yet, throughout all the sequels, readers are told of Elizabeth’s uncertainties, from the appropriateness of her dress color to her ability to have children. Such a character makes the sequels less “light, and bright, and sparkling,” and Elizabeth is no longer “as delightful a creature as ever appeared in print,” as Austen phrased it in a letter to her sister (Le Faye 203, 201). In answering, “what happens next,” the authors create a heroine who lacks confidence and good judgment and is hypercritical of herself.

When Elizabeth Darcy doubts her own abilities in the sequels, though, it is giving both
writer and reader the opportunity to know her better than she knows herself at that moment in the text. There is no question that Elizabeth will triumph in the sequels – she is still the heroine, after all – but when reading about Elizabeth’s insecurities, writers and readers can indulge in their knowledge of the character’s greatness and then watch as she reaffirms her success. This is not to say that the original Elizabeth Bennet was not critical of herself; she certainly critiqued her behavior toward Darcy and her misjudged confidence in her first impressions. But her opinion of herself on the whole remained unchanged in *Pride and Prejudice* – Elizabeth Darcy, however, only stops short of doubting her shadow.

The abundance of servants in the sequels is another variation from Austen’s style and a detail the sequel authors employ to create further class-consciousness. Although servants are frequently shown in film adaptations for accuracy’s sake, they are not necessary for period allegiance in books, readers being able to infer details without explicit references. That being the case, Austen had few servants in her novels (Mrs. Reynolds being the most notable), but all Austen sequels include them throughout. Roger Sales believes servants are useful for more than period accuracy. Referring to the numerous servants in film *Persuasion*, he notes, “Servants themselves may be marginalized figures and yet, given the way in which Anne is cast by her family, service and subservience can also be seen as central themes” (189). Indeed, as Sales indicates, the servants’ actions in the film *Persuasion* emphasize the excessive lifestyle of the Elliots – servants physically protect Sir Walter from himself as he exits his carriage and as a hoard of creditors heckle outside Kellynch. This tactic of using servants to
emphasize a grandiose lifestyle easily adapts to the sequels, particularly since sequel authors are more focused on life inside Pemberley instead of the more public spaces of *Pride and Prejudice* (for example, even Elizabeth’s private thoughts occur at others’ homes like Hunsford and Pemberley). Moments within the walls of Pemberley that would normally be private are accessible through the perspective of servants.

Applying this example, the many servants placed in the same textual space as Elizabeth displays how much closer her background is to the working class than Darcy’s. Although she is a gentleman’s daughter, her rise to Pemberley was extremely unusual and lucky – most women with neither dowry nor land found themselves moving in the opposite direction as Elizabeth in society. The aforementioned self-doubt of Elizabeth, however, taints the fortuitousness of her class mobility. Early in Berdoll’s story, Darcy curtly tells Elizabeth, “the Mistress of Pemberley must never redress the Master of Pemberley in front of the help” (84). His address of her in third person implies that she is not present and that she has not yet filled the role of mistress of Pemberley, adding to Elizabeth’s feeling of undeservedness. This conscious effort by the author to build tension and plot into the story seems untrue to the original characterization, but it also allows readers to have sympathy for Elizabeth and, at the same time, indulge in common fantasies like becoming suddenly wealthy. Such an ascent, however, requires some drama and a relatively poor heroine. Austen uses less overt indicators to convey characters’ wealth, and these indicators are particular to her time period and easily understood by Austenites and Austen scholars. Those who read
the ersatz narratives of the sequels, however, are more likely to need the presence of servants in order to appreciate Elizabeth’s good fortune.

While the character of Elizabeth struggles to adapt to her new position in public, the sequels also have her struggling to assume more authority in private. Austen’s Elizabeth is clearly wooed by Pemberley, but what impresses her most is the intent behind the image. The man who was thought to be disagreeable and selfish emerges as an individual of taste when viewed alongside his estate, one humble enough to let nature adorn his estate rather than forcing his own preferences. The Pemberley of the sequels, instead of representing the intellectual ideals of the two protagonists, is a domestic challenge, a place for Elizabeth to prove her merit as the wife of Darcy and overcome the uncertainty she feels in the role. She is “stunned by the sheer number of responsibilities now in her charge. Even having held such previous trepidation over what she was commissioned to undertake, she still was overwhelmed” (Berdoll 66).

Instead of Elizabeth being a natural match for the ideals and daily life of Pemberley, there is an unspoken demand that she rise to meet such ideals and impress members of the estate with her ability to do so. The confident heroine of Pride and Prejudice who spoke to Lady Catherine as an equal is unnerved by what is her own estate in the sequels, thus reshaping the heroine and even her reaction to the estate from admiration and appreciation to fear and apprehension. In Austen’s novels, the heroines’ triumph takes place in the context of a rigid society, a public setting that requires wit, intelligence, and self-knowledge to be truly victorious. The sequels, on the other hand,
assign merit-proving activities to the home, locating their heroine in the traditional
domestic space.

The presence of servants and the grandness of Pemberley not only highlight
Elizabeth’s upward mobility, but they also make it possible for authors to indulge in the
day-to-day implications of status in the period. Tennant, for example, is specific about
Elizabeth’s duties:

The reason for the delay in inviting her mother and her sister lay with Elizabeth:
she had much to learn, or so she argued to herself, when it came to being
mistress of Pemberley; and obligations to estate workers and tenants, as well as
the setting up of a model dairy and the reconstruction of a fruit and kitchen
garden long neglected, had left her little time to consider her family. (Tennant 7)

Readers familiar with Samuel Richardson’s 1748 novel *Clarissa* might recognize these
tasks, particularly the model dairy. A favorite place of Clarissa’s, the dairy house is one
of the many spaces from which she is eventually banned, illustrating her family’s
control over her life. In an article in *The Journal of Design History*, Karen Lipsedge
argues that Richardson uses the many spaces in *Clarissa* (her article focuses on the ivy
summer-house) to “explore the intimate relationship between an individual and the
architectural space that he/she owns …[and] to examine…a woman’s control over the
domestic space” (194). Tennant’s use of the model dairy, however, lacks the same
significance in the text as well as with most Janeites (there is no model dairy in Austen
texts). Tennant, who has written several works of historical fiction, certainly uses the
model dairy as a reference intended to illustrate her deep period knowledge – an Austen
identification unto itself – but its presence in the text reinforces a larger Janeite symptom. The duties that most Janeites would perceive as idyllic (gardening, picking fruit, and so on) are given the weight of onerous responsibilities in Tennant’s text, reinforcing the idea that Regency life is comprised of little more than tea parties and balls. Moreover, the simplicity of these tasks both reassures the reader that the heroine will rise to the challenge and, at the same time, makes a Janeite wistful for such an existence. This quaint but selective portrayal of history is fitting for an audience of Janeites looking for a glossy historical drama, but it also suggests that Janeites enjoy the period details more than the nuanced characters when reading Austen.

The inherent domesticity of subjects like becoming a wife and moving to Pemberley lends itself to the minutia of public/private behavior, daily chores, and servants, despite none of these plot elements being well suited to portray the character of the original Elizabeth. Given that Elizabeth’s triumph occurs before the beginning of the sequel, though, makes her descent as the story progresses almost inevitable when in the hands of lesser writers. This juxtaposition of Elizabeth’s personality and triumph from *Pride and Prejudice* against the sequels’ adaptation embodies characteristics of the romance novel. Janice Radway, in her discussion of the reception of romance novels, points out that:

> despite this proclamation of female superiority, in continuing to relegate women to the arena of domestic, purely personal relations…the romance leaves unchallenged the male right to the public spheres of work, politics, and
power…and then depicts their [women’s] satisfaction by traditional heterosexual relations. (217)

Indeed, Darcy is unchallenged in his traditional masculine role of the hero throughout the story, particularly because Elizabeth needs more attention in various physical and emotional ways. Although his actions in *Pride and Prejudice* are heroic, they are limited in their scope by point of view and narrative time. The sequels, on the other hand, create space for his nobility to be unsurpassed, his physical strength to be called upon, and the combination of the two traits to save Elizabeth, oftentimes from herself.

Whereas Elizabeth becomes less admirable in the sequels, Darcy’s character approaches near perfection – a stylistically debatable method of balancing the story. Darcy embodies all standard heroic traits (loyal yet independent, noble yet kind, brooding yet sensitive, etc.), but his heroism in the sequels goes beyond typical strength and valor: his actions protect the patriarchal society as well. For example, in Tennant’s sequel, Darcy is mysteriously involved with a young, husbandless woman who lives on his land and is expecting a child. Elizabeth naturally believes he is having an affair (particularly since she has yet to give him an heir), but Darcy is not the father of the child. His involvement in the scenario is in an effort to protect the adulterous Charles Bingley from ruin, even at the risk of damaging his own reputation (Tennant 224). On the surface, Darcy’s actions are that of an exceptional friend, one who often looks out for Bingley’s best interests. In a book with so much emphasis on producing an heir and preserving the traditional family line, however, Darcy’s altruistic actions can also be an effort to protect the man with more patriarchal capital. Bingley’s wife has already
produced a family of children, including a male heir, and a scandal would discredit him entirely. Darcy, on the other hand, does not have a family that could be discredited, Jane’s fecundity having further convinced Elizabeth of her own bareness. At the conclusion of the story, however, Jane has accepted the illegitimate (and conveniently now motherless) child, forgiven Bingley, and Elizabeth is pregnant: all is again well within the social order.

Like Tennant, Berdoll also casts Darcy as a preserver of patriarchy, but her portrayal of him as the physical protector is the *ne plus ultra* of her characterization. When highway robbers kidnap Elizabeth, Darcy rides to where she is held captive and easily kills three men – one with his sword and two with a pistol – and then carries her from the tavern (202). A close reading of this scene indicates several conscious or unconscious efforts to create an absolute hero, one who has the wisdom to find Elizabeth, despite not being present at the time of the attack, and the deadly skill to efficiently kill three men. Equally as important is the manner in which he acts: his eye-for-an-eye sense of justice induces him to kill the would-be rapist with his impressive sword (the other two assailants are impersonally shot), and his sensitivity toward women prompts him to shield Elizabeth against his chest while committing these acts. Of course, he also has the strength to carry her away from the horrific scene on horseback.

In the same way that Darcy’s heroism has an indirect relationship to Elizabeth’s personality in the sequels, his physical presence also weakens hers’. Elizabeth defends herself and Georgiana (who is not kidnapped) and is “plotting both escape and defiance”
when hostage at the inn (200). Her efforts are impressive enough that her captor was “having a bit of trouble maintaining an erection in light of her attempts at emasculation,” but she was rendered a victim as soon as Darcy entered (201). Whereas just a moment ago, Elizabeth was avidly fighting, scrambling out of her clothes to escape, and cursing with rage, upon Darcy’s entry she is “almost blubbering” and her legs buckle when she tries to stand (202). Darcy arrives and leaves a hero, but Elizabeth, who arrived fighting, nonetheless leaves as a victim.

Darcy’s heroism is confirmed – if it is still in question – by a brief shift in the story to the butler’s point of view. The butler, a stereotypically silent, sage observer of goings-on, narrates Darcy’s return to Pemberley: “Mr. Darcy, of course, did return with Mrs. Darcy. There was no question of him ever returning without her. However, it was not the glorious and romantic return…envisioned. She was injured. Clearly, she had been wounded egregiously. Very egregiously” (205). Note that the glorious return to the estate was not marred by Darcy, who fulfilled his role by returning with Elizabeth, but by Elizabeth and her condition. Moreover, the repeated use of “egregiously” implies that Elizabeth’s appearance reveals her near-rape. Although Elizabeth was wounded badly, significantly, or even terribly, Berdoll chooses “egregiously,” a word with the more specific connotation of being shameful (OED). Her rape would have brought shame to Pemberley, particularly if she had become pregnant. In this sense, Darcy’s physically saving Elizabeth preserves his portion of the social order – if Elizabeth had a son as a result of a rape, Darcy would have to either accept the child (keeping his wife’s
dignity intact but then introducing an outsider into Pemberley) or disown his wife’s child, thus tainting his marriage and future children.

If the sequels indicate what Janeites want to read now, it would be elements of a weak and uncertain Elizabeth Darcy, an over-the-top hero, and a romanticized view of the period. Rose Scrittori in “Rewriting Jane Austen” summarizes the problems of Austen sequels:

- In most sequels to *Pride and Prejudice* (Pemberley, for instance) the endless variations on such Austenian themes as the choice of the right partner, the regressive image of female characters totally enclosed in the vicious circle of sentimental and domestic life, together with the presentation of a British provincial life-style, become commonplaces of an escapist ideology which totally contradicts Austen’s ideas of the role and function of novel writing and novel reading. In spite of the writer’s efforts to disperse the ‘visions of romance’, the imitators often bring them back. (266)

This shift, as frustrating as it may be for Austen scholars and Austenites, reflects more of the modern world than may initially appear. Janeites today are not required to resist a social system pressuring them into marrying a Mr. Collins; rather, modern women need only to find their Mr. Darcy. To incorporate the oppressive social code when writing from a modern perspective, the sequel authors have events happen to their heroines instead of their heroines actively pursuing their own stories. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth’s ability to stridently choose is vital – imagine if she daintily turned down Mr. Collins, or shyly refused Darcy, never being so bold as to illuminate him to his pride. In

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the sequels, though, Elizabeth measures her behavior by Darcy’s approval — the opposite of Austen’s foretelling of Elizabeth’s “lively, sportive manner of talking” to Darcy (323). Whereas Elizabeth Bennet strives to distinguish herself, Elizabeth Darcy seeks acceptance. Surprisingly, Austen — who knew no other society — was less limited by the social code than the authors who have the benefit of hindsight and over a century of feminism. Such a regression, if you want to call it that, can be attributed to either a limited understanding of what is considered feminism in Austen’s novels or a belief that romance must be constructed from traditional gender roles in order to be fulfilling.

While Scrittori is correct in saying that the romance becomes the thrust of *Pride and Prejudice* sequels, her analysis excludes the readers. Janeites, aware of their ardent admiration of the character, have given themselves permission to rewrite Elizabeth. While the sequels are marred by their romance-novel style, they also feature an approachable heroine, one who worries about her husband, wants to become pregnant, and has bad in-laws — a heroine significantly easier to identify with than the witty, intelligent, fearlessly independent, and nearly perfect Elizabeth Bennet. Given that Elizabeth firmly remains the heroine in the sequels regardless of her new traits, the sequels’ tendency to dull Elizabeth’s admirable character is both a plot device and a method of creating a relatable heroine. In other words, it allows Elizabeth to struggle, succeed, and for readers to do so along with her. Austen’s Elizabeth shines the most when being read by a reader cognizant of the time period; Berdoll’s Elizabeth and her surrounding circumstances appeal to a very specific set of readers.

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Section Three

The specific set of readers referred to in the previous section enjoy the romantic stories of the sequels, or at least find them worthy of reading. In section one, I defined these readers as “Janeites,” focusing on their engagement with Austen texts and the sequels. Section two analyzed how and why the characters change in the sequels, specifically examining Elizabeth’s shift to a nervous and unsure wife and Darcy’s role as the absolute hero. This section will analyze how Janeites imagine the lives of their changed characters and their answer to “what happens next?” Consistently in the sequels, Elizabeth and Darcy’s family members influence their lives, and in imagining what happens next, the sequels negate the important gains Elizabeth makes at the end of *Pride and Prejudice*.

Fish’s theory of interpretive communities considers how groups of individuals can dictate similar readings of a text. Instead of considering individual interpretations, Fish defines the concept of interpretive communities by a shared, preconceived approach to a work (Fish 1-17). For example, *Reading the Romance* specific set of readers that, as Janice Radway discovered, looks to romance novels for specific themes, such as patriarchy or heroism. An interpretive community is not necessarily bound by physical location (although Radway’s readers were in the same locale) or an awareness of their belonging to the community, but instead by a common approach that shapes the reading of the text. As such, “there is no single way of reading
that is correct and natural, only ‘ways of reading’ that are extensions of community perspectives” (Fish 16). Allowing multiple ways of reading and, at the same time, believing them to represent a larger perspective sanctions the Janeite community and its approach to Austen. Reoccurring ways of reading, therefore, indicate the community’s perspective on its subject, and analyzing these approaches furthers an understanding of the Janeites.

One “way of reading” that indicates the Janeite perspective is the creation of Elizabeth’s life at Pemberley and the associated themes that emerge throughout many of the sequels. Unlike attempts to reproduce Austen’s characters, imagining a life at Pemberley has no template, thus allowing the sequel author to create her ideal continuation of *Pride and Prejudice*. This act of creating instead of replicating means, according to Fish, that:

> The reader has responsibility for the production of a meaning that itself was redefined as an event rather than an entity. That is, one could not point to this meaning as one could if it were the property of the text; rather, one could observe or follow its gradual emergence in the interaction between the text, conceived as a succession of words, and the developing response of the reader.

(3)

The meaning that emerges in *Pride and Prejudice* sequels is the importance, if not persistence, of family. Elizabeth maintains her relationship with her family despite her having moved away, and there is also a strong focus on her creating her own family by
having children. Plot lines develop by problematizing both, but such developments often elide critical themes in the original *Pride and Prejudice*.

Family is certainly valued in both Austen – “3 or 4 Families in a Country Village is the very thing to work on,” after all – and in the sequels (Le Faye 275). In Austen, though, family is a mixed blessing – both embraced and distanced, depending on the person and situation: by the end of *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen separates Elizabeth from Lydia, keeps her close to Jane, and puts Kitty somewhere in between. Karen Newman, in an article in *ELH* discussing the meanings behind Austen’s endings, writes:

What is positive or and pleasurable about Austen’s or Bronte’s novels is that their heroines live powerfully within the limits imposed by ideology…that a woman’s freedom is not simply a freedom to parody male models of action…[E]verything about Elizabeth – her poverty, her inferior social position, the behavior of her family, her initial preference for Wickham, and her refusal of Darcy’s first offer of marriage – all these things ideologically should lead…to genteel poverty and spinsterhood. (705)

Newman continues by saying that Elizabeth’s marriage against the odds overcomes the aforementioned ideology, creating the happy ending and affirming the community of readers that sees Austen as a feminist writer. The Janeite community recognizes these triumphs, but in imagining a wealthy and privileged Elizabeth, the community omits the realities of what she left behind in the original Austen text. In Austen’s ending, the heroine is no longer at the mercy of her family – she is saved from “genteel poverty and spinsterhood” despite her family’s behavior. The physical distance marriage puts
between the heroine and her parents contributes to this independence; Elizabeth no longer has to endure Mrs. Bennet’s nerves or Mary’s righteousness every day. At the same time, Elizabeth is no longer in danger of having to bear the consequences of her family’s actions: if Kitty were to run off to Brighton, Elizabeth would be pained, but not ruined. In the sequels, however, the distance between Longbourn and Pemberley has become shorter, or at least it traveled a great deal more often. The sequel authors reintroduce what was a barrier to Elizabeth’s happy ending, making her once again powerless to control her family’s effect on her life.

One example of a sequel author incorporating the Bennet family into the text is *Letters from Pemberley*. Dawkins creates a homesick Elizabeth in her epistolary story, with Elizabeth writing to Jane that:

I wish you could have been with me on my walk today, that we could have…climbed my favorite hill…to admire the incomparable Derbyshire vista, then turned home to Longbourn where Mary would be reading, Kitty and Lydia trimming a bonnet, Mamma exclaiming over a piece of gossip from Aunt Phillips and Papa hidden behind the newspaper. (60)

That Lydia is at Longbourn dates Elizabeth’s fantasy to before the Wickham scandal, but also before Jane and Elizabeth married. Although Elizabeth adds that she does not regret her current life, her desire for both her husband and the Bennets is a dualism that counters Austen’s development of Darcy and Elizabeth’s relationship, one based on the actions of each in regard to family members. By naming the unfortunate behaviors of the Bennets – Kitty and Lydia being superficial, Mrs. Bennet becoming excited by
gossip, and Mr. Bennet not taking an interest in his children’s or his wife’s frivolities – Dawkins discounts what Elizabeth painfully learns and experiences in *Pride and Prejudice* about herself and her family.

While Dawkins portrays Elizabeth as missing her family, Barrett nearly reinvents the Bennet family. In *Presumption* “Elizabeth’s own regret [at her parents not attending Pemberley’s ball] was keen since she had eagerly awaited the solace of her family’s company” (Barrett 29). This desire to mingle socially with her family is surprising since Austen’s Elizabeth is well aware of her parents’ inappropriateness at balls, in the past having “blushed and blushed again with shame and vexation” at her mother’s behavior (Austen 86-87). In another effort to create close family relationships, Barrett exaggerates characters, making Bingley, for instance, foolish instead of simply good natured. Anticipating the Bennets’ arrival, he says, “And the very best of it…is that your parents have chosen rather to stay with us than at Pemberley,” an exclamation so incongruous with Austen that the author has her versions of Caroline and Mrs. Hurst mock him (Barrett 57-59). Austen’s Bingley, while aware of Jane’s lineage, chooses to ignore it, stating, “If they [Jane and Elizabeth] had uncles enough to fill *all* of Cheapside…it would not make them one jot les agreeable” (33). Making Bingley ignorant of their faults instead of simply indifferent recreates the Bennet parents as possibly annoying, instead of Austen’s decidedly inappropriate, thus allowing and explaining their continued presence throughout the sequel.

Barrett even replicates a portion of Austen’s own life in the novel. In *Presumption*, Elizabeth’s Aunt Philips is accused of stealing lace from a haberdashery,
and this act puts the Bennet family’s reputation in peril. Such a scandal also engages Georgiana, who throughout the novel is often preoccupied “in devising the fashion in which she herself might step forward to champion the Bennet family in this, their present adversity” (221). Like Bingley’s excitement at the Bennet’s arrival, Georgiana’s championing of the Bennet family is unlikely given both the social implications and the fact that Austen’s Georgiana is “exceedingly shy” (Austen 216). This incorporation of an Austen reference within the heroine’s own family plays to the importance of family while rewarding the Janeites who catch the reference.

Tennant, though, is the most blatant in creating far-fetched family situations, with the pinnacle being a dinner party that includes Mrs. Bennet (now a widower), her suitor Col. Kitchiner (a military imposter after Mrs. Bennet’s money), Master Roper (a painful caricature who is a distant relation of Darcy), a mean-spirited Georgiana Darcy, her close ally Caroline Bingley, Lady Catherine, the Gardiners, Lydia and Wickham, Kitty, and Jane – who is upstairs and ready to go into labor at any moment (141-147). Tennant’s flair for the ridiculous dominates this scene, with the entire party drunk, disdainful, or clueless, and with conversations ranging from how to conceive a boy to how well Lady Catherine pares her pear. Ralph Breuer, in writing about a different, yet stylistically comparable sequel of Tennant’s, comments, “Sometimes Tennant’s sequel is so absurd that one is unable to suspend disbelief. Could it be a parody? Alas, no.” The absurdity in this scene panders to an audience who watches sitcoms and comedies, conditioned to anticipate a scene with all the characters present and poised to participate in whatever the climax may be. Individual resolution is gone in favor of the group
experience, and any meaning or revelation is experienced with the ever-present cast of
characters. *Pride and Prejudice* disabuses characters of their “first impressions” (the
initial name of Austen’s novel), while the sequels make much of the obvious.

Sequel authors also lean toward soap-opera plots, creating long-lost relatives and
unlikely couples. In *Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife*, for example, Elizabeth tries to foster a
relationship between Darcy and a stable hand she suspects may be his illegitimate son,
until she learns that the father is Wickham. Georgiana also marries Fitzwilliam, a
popular husband for her in the sequels. In this union, the sequel authors create even
stronger familial bonds: now Georgiana is his wife, his ward, and his cousin. This
protects those within the family literally and figuratively: Georgiana is Fitzwilliam’s
nurse as he heals from his battle wound. The stable hand, linked to the family only by
the story’s antagonist, remains outside, killed in battle at the end of the story.

What can be understood by identifying the Janeite community’s need for family
– immediate, orphaned, or otherwise – in the sequels? A Fishian explanation to this
consensus would be that “members of the same community will necessarily agree
because they will see… everything in relation to that community’s assumed purposes
and goals” (15). Thus, that an all-female community like the Janeites prioritizes
accomplishments involving family and children is not surprising; the emphasis on
Elizabeth’s desire and difficulty in becoming pregnant in all the sequels, though, is
noteworthy. Such an emphasis is another example of the authors creating elements that
have no relationship to the original novels since in Austen’s stories, few admirable
characters have children. Austen mocks both Bennet parents (for different reasons), as
well as Mr. Woodhouse. It seems almost unlikely that Mr. Elliot is the father of thoughtful and reflective Anne, and the Morlands – even in their satiric simplicity – are too busy to give much thought to their daughter. The parents in *Sense and Sensibility* are the least malevolent, but irritating nonetheless: Mr. Dashwood grossly misjudges his son’s character, and Mrs. Dashwood not only lacks financial wherewithal, but encourages Marianne’s wrought sensibility. The Prices are written out of half the novel, only to reappear as a foil to Fanny and her advantageous upbringing. On the other hand, the mentors in the novels are either not parents, or at least consistently unattached. Lady Russell has no children, the Gardiners are never with or even constrained from lengthy trips by theirs (even at the end of *Pride and Prejudice* Austen continues to speak of the Gardiners’ frequent trips to Pemberley and still makes no mention of their children). Although somewhat reductive, this trend suggests that if Austen liked children, she at least did not want to include them in her novels.

The heroines of the sequels, however, are desperate to have children, with all plots involving Elizabeth’s conception difficulties and, to a lesser extent, Jane’s numerous pregnancies. These plots, along with the gaggle of children that find their way to Pemberley through relatives, being orphaned, etc., suggest that Janeites, above all, want their heroines to have children. The “original, blissful symbiotic union between mother and child…is the goal of all romances despite their apparent preoccupation with heterosexual love and marriage” Radway writes in *Reading the Romance*, identifying an unexpected theme in the genre (156). The sequels fit this description, but they also add another element: because Elizabeth has difficulty
becoming pregnant, when she does conceive, it is seen as an accomplishment, not simply a matter of biology. By doing this, the sequels privilege conception, making the most basic of female gender traits more valuable than Elizabeth’s individual personality or moral character.

This inability to have children again makes Elizabeth’s place in society, this time as Darcy’s wife, tenuous in the sequels. Her status is no longer based on her marriage, but on her ability to procreate – the sequels often returning her to her family until she is able to do so. In *Pemberley*, for example, Elizabeth is distraught over what she thinks is Darcy’s illegitimate child and, thus, a possible heir to Pemberley. She leaves Pemberley and goes to Longbourn, where she is quickly evicted by Mr. Collins in order to make room for guests of higher stature. She then travels to the home Darcy bought her mother and sisters in Merryton, only to be further rejected there. This progression from Pemberley to possible homelessness (as it is portrayed in the story) makes the bastard child not only an heir to Pemberley, but Elizabeth’s usurper as well. With this plotline, the power of reproduction is held above marriage and even country (as Darcy’s presumed mistress is a scandalous French woman), while infertility sends even a woman as wealthy as Elizabeth Darcy to the streets and to a profession – once believing that Darcy has left her, she intends to become a teacher or a governess (Tennant 202). In *Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife*, Elizabeth again faces banishment from Pemberley as a result of her childless state. When Lady Catherine believes Darcy is dead, she bemoans that “‘Had he married my daughter none of this would have bechanced,’” also saying, “‘There is no heir and you shall not be welcome as his widow’” (Berdoll 389). In the
sequels, Elizabeth is repeatedly returned to her former life, despite having secured her happy ending in *Pride and Prejudice*. Austen novels are a social commentary on a society that rewards the married woman; however, the sequels knit the need for an heir with status, negating the gains of marriage with the consequences of not producing a child.

These consequences of infertility are not limited to Elizabeth; the status of Pemberley is also dependent on her having a child. In Dawkins’ book, Elizabeth tells Darcy the news of her pregnancy by insisting that the modernizing improvements planned for the nursery wing of Pemberley by be done by “June of next year at the latest,” pairing a reference to her due date with the continued existence of Pemberley (198). Emma Tennet writes that “It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a married man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a son and heir” (3). And within the first ten pages of her book, we’ve been told that Jane has conceived twice, Charlotte is pregnant, and that Lizzy feels woefully indebted to Mr. Darcy, and knows not how to repay him since she has no money of her own. Although Tennet does not explicitly connect the feeling that Elizabeth owes Darcy a son, she has Mrs. Long say how indebted Mrs. Bennet must feel – wherein Mrs. Bennet quickly points out that Mr. Darcy is indebted to her for bringing Elizabeth into the world, again circling it back to “Without you, Mrs. Bennet… I believe there must never be an heir to Pemberley at all” (5).

Tennant, though, goes beyond implying a relationship between heir and estate by creating Master Roper – an actual threat and a legitimate heir to Pemberley if Elizabeth
cannot produce one. Master Roper is tiring beyond even a reasonable caricature; at his most ridiculous, he tutors a party about phrenology (123). In this case, the implication is that Pemberley would not only no longer belong to the Darcy family, but that its new master, however legitimate, would be undeserving of the role and would make Pemberley a joke, much like himself. This threat hanging over Pemberley is real to Berdoll’s characters as well, Elizabeth proclaiming: “I intend to have my husband’s baby in his home and be there when he returns…I will have this baby at Pemberley,” (442-3). Elizabeth is restored to Pemberley when she gives birth, having gone into labor at Longbourn and nonetheless arriving at Pemberley to deliver at the end of the story – similar to her original path in *Pride and Prejudice*.

Returning Elizabeth to Pemberley with her children is a tidy ending for a book in this genre, though it still naturally merits debate even within the Janeite community, as evidenced in section one’s discussion of *Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife*. In a thorough essay on Austen sequels, Rolf Breuer writes about the secret of sequel writing:

obviously a sequel cannot be too far removed from the original or else it loses its *raison d'être* as continuation; but it also should not be too close to the original or else it will be epigonal; somewhere in the middle seems to be the right place, and to find this ‘somewhere’ is the secret of a good sequel-writer.

This solution is a surprisingly simple analysis in an otherwise insightful essay. Perhaps Brueur’s agility in the field of “post-texts” surpasses his knowledge of Austen, explaining the absence of any thematic discussion of Austen novels or comparisons with original characters. A good sequel writer – if such an author exists in comparison to the
original – must do more than find a balance between borrowed and personal style. The spirit of the characters and, relatedly, the likelihood of the plot are vital, but I would also argue that adding to the larger conversation about the novel is equally as important. In other words, the author must do more than fill in the scenes and the details she wishes exist in the original text; she must bring new ideas into the novel’s intellectual space, ideas that are legitimate enough to demand that others at least consider these new possibilities or neglected themes.
Section Four

Writing about the family and the estate does more than answer what happens next; such an emphasis also gives the sequel authors license to enter the more intimate and private parts of the home. The sequels eagerly make use of every room in Pemberley — bathrooms, bedchambers, dressing rooms, stables — whereas Austen barely took us past the parlor or library. The exception, of course, is Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey*. Catherine’s perception and then invasion of private spaces eventually teaches her that world outside the gothic mansion is more relevant and interesting than the interior of locked rooms. In *Northanger Abbey*, private spaces are a setting for satire, with Catherine feeling foolish when she realizes how uninteresting the rooms are in reality. The sequel authors, not unlike Catherine Morland, believe the most interesting parts of story can be found in private rooms and secret spaces, bringing what is kept out of Austen novels into the sequels. In many instances, this invasion occurs literally; important scenes take place inside the home, and the protagonists’ natural place is indoors. In addition to literal space, though, the sequel authors introduce different writing styles to the text. The clichés that Austen cleverly manipulates to develop characters are used without irony in the sequels, bringing a cast of stereotypes into the stories. The sequel authors also switch from Austen’s free indirect discourse to a style closer to third person limited, detailing Elizabeth’s emotions from only a single perspective.

Austen creates suspense throughout *Pride and Prejudice*, keeping Elizabeth and Darcy from fully understanding the other’s intentions until the end of the novel. The
reader is left to “assemble” the meaning of the text – or connect the dots, so to speak – as Wolfgang Iser says in *The Act of Reading* (ix). Of course, Janeites make these connections like any other reader, but for the sequel authors, the product of such imaginings becomes the foundation of the sequels. This can be problematic, since “The reader…can never learn from the text how accurate or inaccurate…his views of it [are]” (Iser 166). In an effort to convey a sense of accuracy and legitimacy – or at least alignment with Austen’s original work – the sequel authors attempt to replicate Austen’s style and reawaken her characters. Without knowing how accurate their interpretation is, though, the sequel authors awkwardly conflate historical fiction and personal narrative. “For many of us, [marriage] is not the end, but the beginning of life's story,” Berdoll writes on her Amazon page, indicating that her books are a result of a “longing to know what happened to Darcy & Elizabeth.” Instead trying to move Darcy and Elizabeth’s story forward, though, sequel authors like Berdoll fill in what they imagined in the original texts. Indeed, Berdoll astutely identifies Austen’s style in saying, “I was struck, not so much by what Jane Austen told us, but by what she did not.” Despite such observations, in wanting to know both what Austen did not tell us and what happened to Elizabeth and Darcy, the sequel authors incorporate the elements that Austen keeps out – both literally and figuratively.

In Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, the moments that propel Darcy and Elizabeth’s successful relationship occur outside. For example, Darcy’s rejected proposal occurs inside, his successful proposal is made outside. This is not to say that the less copasetic meetings are any less important, but in terms of imagining Elizabeth and Darcy’s future
happiness, the outdoor scenes are more indicative. Their chance encounter at Pemberley is on the grounds of the estate, the moment Elizabeth exits the house. Austen locates Elizabeth and the Gardiners relative to the natural river on Pemberley’s grounds, with the party having “walked across the lawn towards the river” immediately before Darcy’s entrance into the scene (208, my emphasis). After this meeting, Elizabeth’s mind is full of Darcy as she walks away from Pemberley, only to have Darcy meet her once she is on the opposite side of the river, where he also meets Elizabeth’s aunt and uncle of a lower class. The moment at which Darcy takes Elizabeth’s arm is apparently when they are closest to the water – just having descended “to the brink of the river” – situating them at this moment on middle ground (212). Even at the end of their tour, “He then asked her to walk into the house – but she declared herself not tired, and they stood together on the lawn” (213).

On the other hand, what consumes much of Elizabeth Darcy’s time happens inside the home, marking how much smaller her world has become in the sequels. Indeed, physical danger lurks beyond the grounds of Pemberley, with robbers and rapists outside but an intangible danger inside the house:

“I have long decided to retain my freedom and walk as far afield as I please, on my own,” Elizabeth replied. “I have no fear of the gypsies” – and here she came to take Jane in her arms and hold her close – “I have more to fear here at Pemberley than in the fields, dear Jane.” (Tennant 110)
Gypsies – an authentic Austen danger, so to speak, from *Emma* – have been eclipsed by the perceived dangers of Elizabeth’s life within Pemberley, a situation that allows the sequel authors to keep their heroine indoors.

If Elizabeth is kept inside, the less circumspect women of the sequels are found outside. Darcy’s possible mistresses in the sequels are often French, literally putting them outside of England and the social structure the sequel authors readily introduce Elizabeth to. Tennant utilizes a French mistress in her story, and if the reader was uncertain about how she should feel about the French, Tennant has the always-inappropriate Mrs. Bennet tell us (unrelated to Darcy’s mistress) that insofar as conception, the French “are more advanced than we are in such matters, you know” (144).

Berdoll goes further in her characterization than Tennant, making Darcy’s lover a French woman who became an expensive prostitute after escaping the guillotine. Although Darcy was frequently behind closed doors with her in flashbacks in *Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife*, in the story’s real time she is only ever outdoors. Aware that Darcy discreetly kept a mistress prior to their marriage, Elizabeth is nonetheless disconcerted when Darcy acknowledges a strange woman in the street in London, thus identifying her to Elizabeth. Her response is “‘I wish we were home,’” meaning safely within the walls of Pemberley (195). Later in the book, Elizabeth has her own meeting with the mistress, Juliette, arranged via a cryptic letter and outside Pemberley in London. Again, the French woman defies customary place, with the address perplexing Elizabeth: “It was not a building, shop, nor home. It appeared not to exist. There was only a park” (423).
Darcy is in France, and wanting to send word to Elizabeth that he is safe, employs the only person he knows is returning to England: his former mistress, Juliette. To further the contrast between Juliette, who merits no address, and Elizabeth, Berdoll sets this scene at the end of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, having Elizabeth chastise herself for having “done the heedless and exposed her condition in public” (425). At that moment, Elizabeth embodies Pemberley – married to its master and pregnant with its heir – and the inappropriateness of her being outside increases the polarity of the two women. Although Elizabeth is beyond Pemberley in both instances, she is acting on behalf of her husband; when set against gypsies, foreigners, and prostitutes, Elizabeth’s proper place is clearly indoors.

Once indoors, the sequels luxuriate in the walls of Pemberley, creating scenes specific to each room, public and private. Darcy and Elizabeth aim to have sex in each room of Pemberley in *Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife*, and even those who create or design space are privileged in the sequels. In *Presumption* an architect and a naval officer vie for Georgiana’s hand. The architect, hired to improve the family’s home, becomes Georgiana’s true love, with the fickle officer returning to his life outdoors on the sea. On the other hand, one of the few indoor marital scenes in *Pride and Prejudice* is that of an unhappy marriage. Austen’s description of the domestic habits of Mr. and Mrs. Collins is best remembered by Charlotte’s careful arrangement of her sitting room to minimize the presence of her husband, specifically described by Austen as “backwards” (143). Indeed, much of this marriage is the opposite of what it should be, with Mr. Collins encouraged to be outside as much as possible when Charlotte is inside. This
interest in interiors in the sequels is another plot device (without servants, slamming doors, dinner tables, or beds the sequels would have little action) as well as another anachronistic theme. Austen’s protagonists are at their most heroic outside (for example, Elizabeth’s muddy walk to Netherfield or Persuasion’s Anne’s competent nature at the sea wall) because they have no agency inside yet, no home to run, and no dinning room in which to walk in first. Austen did not utilize interiors, but the sequel authors do not know how not to. Modern authors do not have access to the 18th-century mindset and reasoning for being outdoors; sea air no longer cures bad lungs and cars are a more efficient way of getting beyond the home.

The sequel authors introduce what was kept out of Austen novels in less literal ways as well. Iser uses Virginia Woolf’s analysis of Austen in his book, quoting her belief that Austen “stimulates us to supply what is not there” (qtd. in Iser 168). In Iser’s further analysis, what is said takes on significance only when one realizes what was left out. While the sequel authors successfully realize what was not in Austen novels, they do not realize how such exclusions augment the text. For example, Wickham, at first, is the dashing gentleman of the Pride and Prejudice. Of his set, he “was as far beyond them all in person, countenance, air, and walk,” seemingly giving us a short list of ideal qualities desired by every woman, the heroine included (66). By the end of the novel, however, our perception of Wickham has changed, his charms no longer signifying the perfect man. In this case, “the iconic signs” – Wickham’s charms – “fulfill their function to the degree in which their relatedness to identifiable objects” – the qualities of male perfection – “begins to fade” (Iser 65). In other words, at the end of Pride and
Prejudice, the reader’s perception of perfection has changed. Affability, good looks, and general popularity no longer signify a hero; instead, in Austen’s world, a hero is reserved and dignified, one whose actions speak louder than his words (if he speaks at all).

Austen initially encourages us to be smitten with Wickham by making his many attributes explicit, but with Darcy she gradually uses his actions to prove his heroic nature. Along with Elizabeth, the reader has learned a lesson about first impressions after seeing what was not originally there. Iser explains this thought process by saying, “What is concealed spurs the reader into action, but this action is also controlled by what is revealed; the explicit in its turn is transformed when the implicit has been brought to light” (169). In other words, the act of reading is guided by the explicit/implicit relationship, with a transformation occurring as the relationship plays out in the text. Without this relationship, reading is no longer an action, or, to take the idea further, even active. In the sequels, the explicit – or the “iconic signs” – is embraced, and, as a result, the story becomes a series of clichés.

The authors use these clichés to preserve Darcy’s hero status in the sequels. Radway encapsulates a number of heroic characteristics when she summarizes the romantic hero of the romance novel as a man who “stands out as that world’s most able representative and the essence of all that it values” (13). The Darcy of the sequels is exactly this type of hero. He defends the innocent in the rape scene discussed previously in Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife and saves Elizabeth’s aunt from an unjust prison sentence in Presumption. Unquestionably strong and agile, he rides horses, fights
villains, and lifts his wife with ease. Nonetheless, his gentle nature is brought out in
Elizabeth’s presence, with all the sequel authors making Austen’s vague phrase, “a
woman may take liberties with her husband,” to mean that Elizabeth can draw Darcy
out, not necessarily speak her mind (323). Barrett has Darcy “on occasion…laugh out
loud” as a result of Elizabeth (11), and Halstead takes a surprisingly feminist position
with Elizabeth’s advice to Georgiana:

Married people always have quarrels, Georgiana dear. I believe I can face a row
and survive. The sermons tell us to bow our heads meekly under injustice, but
women did not have the writing of them. A woman had best assert herself a
little, if she does not desire her husband’s contempt. (35)

In all cases, the best of Darcy’s character – however unlike the original taciturn and
reserved gentleman from Austen – is apparent when he is with Elizabeth. Since Darcy’s
role as hero was never in question at the start of the sequels, the authors, for lack of any
other option, make the nature of it so explicit as to ruin any dynamic qualities of his
character. The reader, in Woolf’s words, no longer needs to “supply what is not there.”
Where Austen’s text required readers to be active in their reading, the sequels, with their
explicit nature, require only passing interest, not engagement.

In addition to outdoor/indoor and implicit/explicit tensions between Austen and
the sequels, there is a difference in perspective. Austen’s use of free indirect discourse
presents us with the narrator or heroine’s point of view, with limited introspection on the
heroine’s part. Elizabeth’s realization that “she had been blind, partial, prejudiced,
absurd” is an integral moment in her character’s development, but also a rare moment in
the novel – in *Pride and Prejudice*, characters do not often express emotions outside of conversation with other characters (176). Even when Elizabeth reveals this emotion, she *speaks* her feelings, making them theoretically available to anyone in her vicinity. Sarah Morrison comments on this point of view and the effect it has on readers when she writes, “We still so often read the novels as if the consciousness of the heroine is merely an aperture through which we get a glimpse of a more significant or interesting story than Austen was willing or able to relate.” Believing that there is more to the story, the sequel authors take ownership of the heroine’s internal thoughts, breeching the final inside/outside boundary.

This augmentation of Austen, or the belief that there is potential for something more interesting is part of the larger phenomenon Auerbach identifies in *Searching for Jane Austen* – “the alcohol-free Jane Austen remains the dominant image in the twenty-first century” (273). In other words, Jane Austen continues to be disempowered by contemporary society, with publishers and marketers making much of quaint phrases and witty remarks, often taken out of context. This sense of entitlement is apparent when Austen’s portrait is redrawn or a movie is produced based on sketchy facts of her life. As I write this, in the spring of 2008, Barnes and Noble stores have begun creating displays of Jane Austen sequels, with teasers like, “If you liked Jane Austen.” Within the Janeite culture, the feeling of suspense when first reading *Pride and Prejudice* evolves to believing that there is more: more to write, more to see, more to do.

Catherine Morland, after reading some interesting novels, believes that she can immerse herself in the same experiences. The sequel authors, after reading Jane Austen,
believe that they, too, can write about Elizabeth Bennet and create a world for her. The
difference, however, lies in that Catherine’s love of fictional adventure *is* fiction, not to
mention a means of parodying the Gothic novel. The sequel authors, however, have
nothing to check their enthusiasm. Janeites have created a legitimate community of
female readers, a community that prolifically creates and consumes more Austen.
Conclusion

Jane Austen, in addition to being an author, has come to stand for what many women see as lifestyle, a vehicle for nostalgia, romance, or even friendship with like-minded readers. The many uses of Jane Austen have rendered her familiar, cozy, and, worst of all to Austen scholars, accessible. Given this feeling of intimacy, Austen fans think nothing of writing or reading sequels that perpetuate their version of their favorite author. This kind of engagement with Austen goes beyond the original texts, and scholars and other Austen purists question if these types of Austen identifications – along with the tea parties and tours – have surpassed the text entirely, with Janeites participating in only a simulacrum.

Given the importance of readers – Janeites – in this paper, I looked to Hans Robert Jauss for his theories on readers and their influence on the cumulative history of a work. While Jauss validates reader-centric analyses, affirming my study of Janeite sequels, his theories are at odds with Emily Auerback’s biting arguments against the actions of Austen fans. On one hand, I am convinced of the validity and power of readers, and, on the other hand, I am troubled by their treatment of Austen – a tension that is not easily resolved even in this conclusion. After all, any “damage” is, for the most part, both unintentional and engaging – I will even admit to becoming a youthful Janeite after watching Emma Thompson’s Sense and Sensibility adaptation at fourteen.

To a certain extent, this tension is better addressed by fan studies than literary theory. The crux of fan studies is the tension that emerges when two groups have differing tastes, with one group treating “popular texts as if they merited the same
degree of attention and appreciation as canonical texts” (Jenkins 17). In other words, those who memorize the badge numbers of Mulder and Scully of the X-Files are marginalized from those who memorize lines from Shakespeare’s plays – pop culture is second to high culture. Janeites, though, join academics in admiring Austen’s work, and as a result, Janeites are marginalized because of their interpretation of the work, not because of the work itself. I am uncertain if fan-studies scholars Henry Jenkins and Matt Hills would include Janeites, with their canonical novels and popular author, in the field alongside those fans unified by mainstream derision. To include Janeites, though, would broaden fan studies to encompass a group with a less neatly defined membership (a Janeite might consider herself an Austenite either because she is unaware of the difference or because she has an alternate definition of the terms). It would also introduce the possibility of studying fans and reception in a specific time period, adding the potential for historical scholarship.

Even when arguing against sequels, it is important to remember that even the least intellectual Austen pursuit is based in her original novels – after all, there is little else to work with. To have any sort of Austen experience, academic or otherwise, one must use her texts, a fact that should hearten the most militant Austen purist. To participate in Austen without having read the books, while possible, defeats the point of participating at all. In other words, no one would substitute a visit to Chawton with reading Pride and Prejudice in the Austen hierarchy of activities: the former only augments the latter. This approach to participating in Austen exemplifies Stanley Fish’s theories on interpretive communities. Janeites find meaning in the text from elements
that resonate most strongly with their community of readers, and these elements are how they identify with other Janeites and Austen herself. A visit to Chawton, for example, allows a Janeite to participate in Austen lore with others who enjoy a similar approach to their favorite author.

While it offers one understanding of why Janeites seek out certain elements of Austen, Fish’s theory does not address the problems with pairing those elements with Austen. I used Iser’s concept of explicit/implicit to analyze how the sequels change the ways the reader makes meaning from the text. The lack of implicit elements causes the sequels to become a series of clichés, resulting in a reader that is not spurred to understand the implicit, but is reading because she seeks to merge such clichés with Austen’s work. Because of the romantic nature of these clichés, I was tempted to lean more heavily on Janice Radway’s *Reading the Romance*, but these sequels are not stand-alone romance novels – they are texts that, for better or worse, invoke Jane Austen. As such, the tendency toward romantic tropes is less important than what that tendency means when associated with Jane Austen.

Unlike *Foe* or *Wide Saragasso Sea* (sequels to *Robinson Crusoe* and *Jane Eyre*, respectively), Jane Austen sequels do not add to the conversation about the original works or the author. And Austen’s novels are not without period fodder; the rising class of military officers like Wentworth in *Persuasion* would be enough for a postmodern analysis, not to mention the family business in *Mansfield Park*. Austen sequels, though, only engage their readers, and while these types of engagement work well with critical thoughts regarding readers’ relationship to the text, such interaction with Austen is also
part of a larger problem separate from reader response theories. In trying to recreate what they perceive as the Austen experience, the authors perpetuate a misleading image of Austen to Janeites while also reminding academics how misunderstood she is in popular culture.

Contrary to what her nephew wanted us to believe in his memoir of his aunt, Austen was not a traditional, prim author who wrote neatly within the social code of her time. Her heroines are upwardly mobile women, smarter than other members of their family, and subsequently courted by forward-thinking men. This perspective, though, is lost among the Austen industry of movies, souvenirs, and other products. This paper sought to acknowledge the difference between fans and then to understand how these differences manifest themselves in *Pride and Prejudice* sequels. While active forms of engagement – particularly ones that create communities, virtual or otherwise – are admirable, the sequel authors are part of the larger problem this fan has: I study Jane Austen for the privilege of understanding her, but fan products like the sequels mislead less informed readers to think they understand her work as well.
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