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Fan fiction : an analysis of genre and success

Jory C. Keller

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ABSTRACT

FAN FICTION: AN ANALYSIS OF GENRE AND SUCCESS

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This thesis project contains the study of four works of fan fiction based on Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. Through analysis of authorial intent, attribution to the source material, and faithfulness to the original in plot, theme, characterization, and style, this paper finds a correlation between the level of transformation and the work's commercial success.

NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
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FAN FICTION: AN ANALYSIS OF GENRE AND SUCCESS

BY

JORY C. KELLER

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Thesis Director:
Brad Peters

1. *“Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.” – Charles Caleb Colton*

2. *“Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery that mediocrity can pay to greatness.” – Oscar Wilde*

3. *“I believe that love--not imitation--is the sincerest form of flattery. Your imitator thinks that you can be duplicated; your lover knows you can't.” — Marilyn Vos Savant*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	vii
Chapter	
1. Introduction	1
2. Definition of Fan Fiction	3
3. Literary Borrowing Then and Now	7
4. Enduring Popularity of Jane Austen	10
Plot	11
Theme	12
Character	13
Style	14
5. Methods and Evaluation Criteria	16
6. Fan Works in Question	19
Linda Berdoll's <i>Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife</i>	19
Plot	20
Themes	21
Characterization	22
Style	23

Authorial Intent.....	27
Additional Comments.....	28
Helen Fielding's <i>Bridget Jones's Diary</i>	28
Plot.....	29
Theme.....	30
Characterization.....	31
Style.....	32
Additional Comments.....	34
Seth Grahame-Smith's <i>Pride and Prejudice and Zombies</i>	35
Plot.....	36
Theme.....	37
Characterization.....	37
Style.....	38
Authorial Intent.....	41
Additional Comments.....	41
Jo Baker's <i>Longbourn</i>	43
Plot.....	44
Theme.....	45
Characterization.....	46
Style.....	46
Authorial Intent.....	49
Additional Comments.....	49

Chapter	v
7. Overall Comparison	51
8. Conclusion.....	56
Works Cited.....	58
Appendix: Additional Titles	63

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Textual Comparison of <i>Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife</i> to <i>Pride and Prejudice</i>	26
2. Textual Comparison of <i>Pride and Prejudice and Zombies</i> to <i>Pride and Prejudice</i>	40
3. Textual Comparison between <i>Longbourn</i> and <i>Pride and Prejudice</i>	48
4. Faithfulness to <i>Pride and Prejudice</i>	52
5. Amazon Rankings	53
6. Goodreads Ratings	53
7. LibraryThing Ratings	54

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

One day, as I was browsing through the bookshelves at Target, I stumbled upon a book called *Death Comes to Pemberley*. My instinctual response to this book was disgust, not because I couldn't cope with the idea of tragedy striking my beloved literary friends, as the title suggests, but because I couldn't fathom the notion of an author writing a sequel to a book written by another author and profiting from it without some sort of legal or ethical conflict ensuing. As I considered it further, and began paying a lot more attention, it became clear to me that the borrowing of ideas and plots and characters has been a successful enterprise for quite some time, and recently has been going full force.

The ethical question of borrowing is a subjective one. Where one person might find the use of established characters and existing universes perfectly acceptable, another person might see it as an exploitation of the hard work the original author put into his creation. And there seem to be so many other factors in determining what is ethical. For example, why was I unsettled by the sight of *Death Comes to Pemberley* on the bookshelf, but I had absolutely no problem with the recent *Jane Slayre* or *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*? Was it because I felt that a sequel, such as the former, was somehow an attempt to add to canon, whereas the latter was clearly a farce, and therefore not to be taken seriously? Was I alone in this type of thinking? It was in struggling with these questions that led me to my research objective, which is to find out which types of commercial fan fiction work, and why. In the following pages, I will be sharing my

research on the many levels of commercial fan fiction, an analysis of four such works in the *Pride and Prejudice* fandom, and my findings on their successes and failures.

CHAPTER 2

DEFINITION OF FAN FICTION

The genre has been called by a number of names, from literary borrowing to plagiarism, from literary adaptation to para-literature, but the most recent evolution of the label is “fan fiction.” In simplest terms, fan fiction is any work of fiction that is derived from another author’s original work. Most people who have heard the term “fan fiction” associate it with the online communities of dedicated readers and viewers that can’t get enough of their favorite TV shows and books and must continue them in whichever way they see fit. However, there is much more to this ever-growing phenomenon than the hastily written wish-fulfillment fantasies that give the genre a bad name. Fan fiction is multifaceted and delves into numerous subgenres. Because of copyright and laws governing fair use, one such subgenre – fan fiction that is published commercially – is less commonly recognized or appreciated.

The legality of fan fiction, as typical of intellectual property law, can get convoluted and complex. However, Aaron Schwabach spells out the essentials in his book, *Fan Fiction and Copyright: Outsider Works and Intellectual Property*. Original constructions such as characters and invented settings are protected under copyright, but elements that are not original are not protected (21). The term of a given work’s copyright depends on when it was published, as the laws have changed more than a few times. However, the general rule of thumb for copyright term is the author’s lifetime plus seventy years (21). There are exceptions for books published prior to 1978, but that’s part of the convoluted bits that we won’t go into in this paper. A work

that is no longer protected under copyright is in the public domain and is considered fair game for any writer who wants to derive his work from it. For works that are still under copyright, there is an allowance for derivative works that qualify as “fair use.” Fair use, according to Schwabach, usually means that the work in question is not intended for commercial gain (63). However, this is also an oversimplification. Thus, with few exceptions, the fan fiction writer has two options: derive his writing from material that is in the public domain (such as *Little Women* and *Pride and Prejudice*) or comply with fair use (i.e., most noncommercial works). One exception to this, for example, is authorized commercial fan fiction, such as the novelizations of a given Marvel comic series (i.e., the novel *Down These Mean Streets* by Keith R. A. DeCandido – a chapter in the life of an adult Peter Parker/Spider-man – which was authorized by Marvel creator, Stan Lee).

Although the genres of fan fiction grow daily as fans manipulate their stories to fit their needs, the focus of this paper will only be on the types of fan fiction that appear in commercial works. Within commercial fan fiction, there are multiple subgenres, as differentiated by critic Rolf Breuer. These subgenres are unique in style and popularity among readers. In “Jane Austen, etc. An Essay on the Poetics of the Sequel,” Rolf Breuer defines the following variations of the sequel (Breuer Sec. I):

- The traditional sequel, which is a “continuation of a literary work in the same genre. A sequel uses the same or some of the same characters of the original and continues the action of the original into the future; sometimes it views the same action from a different perspective” (such as Alexandra Ripley’s *Scarlett*, a sequel to Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone With the Wind*)

- The completion – a “finishing off of a fragment,” (such as Marie Dobbs’s *Sanditon by Jane Austen and another lady*)
- The pastiche, which is “an imitation of the style of an author without being a sequel to, or a completion of, any specific original” (such as Peter Ackroyd’s *Last Testament of Oscar Wilde*)
- The parody, in which “the imitation, often as caricature, is intended to ridicule the original. (In contemporary literature, there are more and more borderline cases, mixing the seriousness of pastiche and the ridicule of parody in mere playfulness)” (such as John Updike’s “On the Sidewalk,” a parody of Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*)
- The counterfeit, which is “the rewriting and transforming of a text by taking it out of its historical and aesthetic context and transferring it into the respective present, creative, as it were, the contemporary counterpart of a famous older work” (such as Francesca Segal’s *The Innocents*, a modern retelling of Edith Wharton’s *Age of Innocence*)
- The adaptation, which is the “translation of a text into another medium or genre” (such as Peter Jackson’s “Lord of the Rings” films based on the novels by J.R.R. Tolkien)
- The fictionalization, typically of the author’s life, in which the original author is written into the story as a character, but in the prose style of said author (such as Lindsay Ashford’s *The Mysterious Death of Miss Austen*)

Breuer describes how parodies and counterfeits play by a slightly different set of rules than other sequels because they never attempt to be merged with the original storyline. Instead,

they “make us aware of the epigonality of the continued use of historical aesthetic forms when the world has moved on” and they are “unproblematical...because they are a very loose kind of adaptation where form and content can both be freely updated” (Breuer Sec. II).

In addition to Breuer’s subgenres, it is necessary for me to add another category that is becoming increasingly popular. This category is the spin-off, which takes a character or aspect from the original and plays off it with new events and plotlines but with a tie-in to the original, such as the overlapping character or element.

My study focuses on four published works that are fan fiction derived from *Pride and Prejudice*. Two of the works I have selected were popular enough that I was aware of them before developing this topic of study and thus they seemed like good choices to include. The other two works were selected by browsing through Jane Austen fan communities, reading reviews and recommendations, and selecting the titles that I recognized as recurring. I also attempted to select books that represented one of the different types of fan fiction, as defined by Rolf Breuer. The four works are: Jo Baker’s *Longbourn*, a sequel told from a different perspective; Seth Grahame-Smith’s *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, a parody; Helen Fielding’s *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, a counterfeit (modern retelling); and Linda Berdoll’s *Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife*, a sequel directly following the events of *Pride and Prejudice*.

CHAPTER 3

LITERARY BORROWING THEN AND NOW

In literature, media, and the arts, we have seen a long-standing tradition of imitation and borrowing. In fact, it's been going on almost as long as narrative forms of writing have been practiced. Virgil borrowed Aeneas from Homer; Geoffrey of Monmouth embellished existing tales of King Arthur and his Round Table knights; the great Shakespeare himself plucked bits and pieces from everywhere that inspired him. In fact, *Romeo and Juliet* is basically his Italian spin on Ovid's *Pyramus and Thisbe* myth. Borrowing and imitating was standard practice, and nobody thought twice about it. The borrowing of ideas and imitating of style continues, but nowadays it can be labeled with a stigmatized term, "fan fiction."

A common misconception of fan fiction is that it is superficially derivative. While online fan fiction, and some commercial fan fiction for that matter, could definitely be considered superficial and written purely for entertainment's sake, there are some kinds of fan fiction that merit closer attention than others. They result in quality work. Consider the following two examples:

In 1966, Jean Rhys published the critically acclaimed *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which is a prequel to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Although this work is technically fan fiction, by the definition provided in the previous section, it has come to be considered part of *Jane Eyre* canon.

In 2006, author Geraldine Brooks won the Pulitzer Prize in fiction for her novel *March*. *March* is a spin-off of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, telling the story of the March sisters'

absent father.

There is something that sets these quality works apart from the slush, but what? How does one determine the quality, or even the acceptability, of a fan fiction work? What about the aforementioned novels merits acclaim more so than any other fan fiction work?¹

In an article concerning Shakespeare's borrowing, George G. Williams claims that "originality lies in his selection if in nothing else...he did not borrow slavishly. He took old plots, added to them, subtracted from them, shuffled their characters, shifted emphases, combined them with other plots, changed them as he pleased, and generally made them uniquely Shakespearian" (313). As Williams concludes, Shakespeare's borrowing did not make him unoriginal. On the contrary, his originality stemmed from his ability to manipulate what he knew into something fresh and unique.

Williams is not the only critic to applaud skillful borrowing. In a *New York Times* article that is now over a century old, the writer claims that "plagiarism is always a crime, except when the author betters what he takes or restores to the world a gem it had forgotten" ("Famous Cases"). This unnamed writer has put his finger on that special quality that sets good fan fiction apart.

Some terms thrown around in discussions of what is considered fair use are works that are derivative and works that are transformative (Schwabach 63). Derivative works, according to Schwabach, contain only elements or excerpts of the original material without added meaning to

¹ Some may argue that the aforementioned works are not "fan fiction." If they refer to the online, unpublished, wish-fulfillment type, they would be right. However, the term "fan fiction" as I use it throughout this paper will comply with the definition provided in Chapter 2: "any work of fiction that is derived from another author's original work." Whether all would agree with that definition would be another topic of research for another day. I do not see a difference between Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Baker's *Longbourn* (see Chapter 5).

or “commenting on and critiquing the original” (68). Transformative works, on the other hand, contain a “higher degree of creativity” (67) and add new meaning. The best example Schwabach gives for a work that is simply derivative is the unofficial *Harry Potter Lexicon* that brought about a lawsuit from *Harry Potter* author, J.K. Rowling, in 2008 (Steel). The lexicon, which was compiled by a fan and not authorized by Rowling, was simply a collection of elements invented solely by Rowling and included nothing new or original (67). Schwabach claims that most fan fiction, by its nature, is transformative, but that “whether a work is transformative has nothing to do with its literary merit” (68). However, it may have something to do with a work’s popularity among readers.

This paper, therefore, is a case study to distinguish whether a correlation exists between the degree of each of the aforementioned fan work’s transformation and their successful readership, popularity, and longevity.

CHAPTER 4

ENDURING POPULARITY OF JANE AUSTEN

To thoroughly evaluate each fan fiction work, I first need to determine what makes Jane Austen a reader's favorite still, after more than two hundred years. What original elements attract her fans and make them so enthusiastic? In "The Appeal of *Pride and Prejudice*," Michael Timko points out that "contemporary criticism looks at the novels, especially *Pride and Prejudice*, from various points of view, especially as a feminist work." In Juliette Wells, *Everybody's Jane*, and Karen Joy Fowler's *Jane Austen Book Club*, it is made evident that each reader takes something different from Jane Austen's works, be it romance, social commentary, humor, or moral teaching. Dolores Puterbaugh describes Austen's readership as "the Cult of Austen," as she speculates what makes Austen so enduringly popular. NPR's Maureen Corrigan even tells of a "200-pound orangutan named Albert living in the Gdansk Zoo in Poland [that] insists on having 50 pages a night of *Pride and Prejudice* read to him at bedtime." But why? Every fan of Jane Austen will have his or her own reasons for cherishing Austen's works, many such reasons unique to them. However, the general accord among fans is an appreciation for Austen's plot structure, themes, characterization, style, or the way that any of the mentioned categories allow the reader to identify with the work. It is these very criteria that I then must compare with the fan fiction works.

Plot

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet is the second oldest of five unmarried daughters who diverts herself with simple pleasures such as reading, taking walks, and visiting with her friend Charlotte. Her mother concerns herself with finding all five daughters rich suitors, while her father preoccupies himself with teasing his wife. It is made known early on that the sisters must be married-off in order to be provided for, as their father's estate is entailed to a cousin.

The eldest daughter, Jane, soon catches the attentions of wealthy newcomer, Mr. Bingley, while Elizabeth takes an almost instant disliking to his friend, Mr. Darcy, having found him to be curt and arrogant. Her opinion of him worsens after hearing unseemly gossip about him and especially after he separates Bingley from Jane. However, when she encounters him months later while she is visiting her newly married friend Charlotte, he expresses his love for her against his better judgment and proposes marriage. Elizabeth rejects his proposal on the grounds of his interference with Jane, the rumors she's heard that mar his character, and because of his offensive rationale for her not being a suitable match for him. He writes her a letter explaining his side of the story and Elizabeth realizes that her first impressions of him were unjust.

Elizabeth and Darcy do not meet again until many months later, and this time they are both changed – he behaves more civilly to her family and she to him – and when a scandal emerges in Lizzie's family, it is Darcy's swift intervention and resolution that causes Elizabeth to believe that there is hope for them yet.

For some readers, it is Austen's plot structure and development that keeps them hooked. In "Jane Austen and the Masturbating Critic," Adam Roberts levels a common ground between the average reader and the scholar in their appreciation of Austen. According to Roberts, readers love Austen for how she depicts the reality of love, showing that "working out *how* to love

another is one of the most challenging tasks facing humanity” (52). In other words, for these fans, it is the journey of a relationship rather than the theme of love that is exciting. Austen’s plots place flawed characters in challenging situations, allowing the reader to see how the characters resolve their issues throughout the story. Meanwhile, Dierdre Donahue believes it is the scandal in the plot that intrigues the reader: “[*Pride and Prejudice*’s] villain, George Wickham, would probably be arrested today as a serial pedophile” (n.pag.). Michael Timko argues that it is the “melodrama [that] appeals to us because of its familiar framework: it reflects our deepest emotions” (n.pag.). Whether scandal or romance, however, Austen’s plots are complex and compelling, offering something special for a variety of readers. “Of all the technical virtues the novel commands, the cynosure of all attention is the economy and control of the plot because the ideal plot structure of the novel contributes in a big way to its classic success and enduring popularity” (Paul 443).

Theme

For other readers, it is Austen’s enduring themes – themes of love and courtship, reputation and first impressions, class and money, and manners and societal mores – that make her work so meaningful. Elizabeth Bennet, our heroine, personifies the themes of love and marriage as she refuses the first marriage offer she receives due to lack of affection. She stays true to herself by risking the possibility of not receiving another proposal because she knows that she cannot be happy marrying without love. Mr. Darcy personifies the themes of money and class distinction, as well as the importance of societal mores, as his objections to a match between his friend Bingley and Jane Bennet, as well as his objections to Elizabeth herself, stem from his criticisms against the manners of the majority of the Bennet family and their humbler social station.

Elisabeth Fairchild's assessment of Austen is that her "onion-layering" of theme makes it so that a reader must look deeper to fully appreciate her novels. "Jane's themes are not always initially seen or understood until the repetitive pattern of that core truth is recognized, but like an onion's pungent flavor, theme permeates whatever it touches. Its essence affects plot, character...try to remove theme from Jane Austen's work and the story fabric falls apart" (Fairchild 45-46).

Character

Another aspect that readers love of Jane Austen is her characterization. "The major characters are created fully with some degree of realism and psychological truth. Even the minor characters are faithfully depicted" (Austen, Sarkar 50). While Austen has been criticized as projecting only a narrow perspective of Regency England, scholars such as Subh Brat Sarkar defend her: "Few people in Austen's day would have belonged to the class Austen depicted yet it should be noted that this is the class in which virtually all of her contemporary readers would have been found" (51). Additionally, Austen's deep characterization is praised by critics such as E.M. Forster: "She is a miniaturist, but never two-dimensional. All her characters are round, or capable of rotundity" (qdt. in Austen, Sarkar 113). It is this very depth that allows Austen's readers to identify with her characters, either by recognizing characteristics of themselves or people they know in Austen's characters or by identifying a familiar face (i.e., an archetype). Finally, Austen uses her flawed characters to demonstrate character growth. "The best people in *Pride and Prejudice* are either free from social pride, affectations and snobbery, as Elizabeth, Jane, Mr. Bennet and Bingley are, or learn their errors of judgment. Austen shows how people are made better and wiser by their errors and recognition of them" (Austen, Sarkar 51).

Style

Readers also, according to Roberts, love the quality and style of Austen's writing: "She is so completely in command of her materials; her fluency and tone are so witty, so sparkling, so entertaining; her characterization is so deftly yet penetratingly done; her pacing and form so perfect" (52). And yet the critic finds more to appreciate in Austen's use of irony and double meanings, such as the opening line of the novel² "wittily amusing in its subtle revelation of the obsessive insistence of Mrs. Bennet on finding husbands for her daughters. It is ironic because when we read it we bring to it our knowledge of the way the world actually is, a world in which it does not hold true" (56). Sarkar agrees, "The witty narratorial comment at the beginning of the novel arrests the attention of the readers by stating an established social position and asking the readers to follow the rich bachelor who is in 'want of a wife'" (75).

Also according to Roberts, the critic appreciates Austen's subtleties, because "in the greatest literature it is not what is actually said, but what is implied, what is below the surface, those secret and hidden nexuses of textual pleasure, that are truly important" (57). And in Austen's case, "more than telling a story, or building a vivid world, or captivating readers with wonderful characters, [she] captures the truths of a flawed humanity" (Fairchild 49). Take this scene, for example, in which our heroine, Elizabeth, criticizes Mr. Darcy's understanding of an accomplished woman after Ms. Bingley lists her own qualifications for the term:

'Then,' observed Elizabeth, 'you must comprehend a great deal in your idea of an accomplished woman.'

'Yes; I do comprehend a great deal in it.'

² "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" (Austen 1).

‘Oh! Certainly,’ cried his faithful assistant, [Ms. Bingley], ‘no one can be really esteemed accomplished who does not greatly surpass what is usually met with. A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, all the modern languages, to deserve the word; and besides all this, she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions, or the word will be but half deserved.’

‘All this she must possess,’ added Darcy, ‘and to all this she must yet add something more substantial, in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading.’

‘I am no longer surprised at your knowing only six accomplished women. I rather wonder now at your knowing any.’

‘Are you so severe upon your own sex as to doubt the possibility of all this?’

‘I never saw such a woman.’ (Austen 32-33)

Though Austen’s language was written for a society that is now two centuries past, her style and wit is the same kind that is revered in contemporary society. Maureen Corrigan believes it is Austen’s style, her “smart girl voice – peppery wry, eye-rolling – that seems so close to modern consciousness” and likens Austen to contemporary snark-darlings such as Tina Fey and Lena Dunham.

CHAPTER 5

METHODS AND EVALUATION CRITERIA

I analyze each of the following works of fan fiction, using the same criteria: faithfulness to *Pride and Prejudice*, authorial intent, and apparent success.

To gauge the fan fiction work's faithfulness to *Pride and Prejudice*, I take a variety of factors into account, such as similarities to or consistencies in Austen's plot structure and timeline, recollection of Austen's theme or a similar use of different themes, consistencies or reasonable alterations to characterization, and similarities in style (if the author is indeed attempting to imitate Austen's style).

For analyzing style, I perform a textual analysis, with the help of software, a tool called SmartEdit, to compare the fan fiction works attempting to imitate Austen's style to her original. This textual analysis was inspired by *SLATE* writer, Ben Blatt, who performed a similar (but more sophisticated) analysis of current popular young adult novels. Tables containing data comparing the texts will appear for each fan works with the following categories: word count, average paragraph length, average sentence length, average word length, number of foreign words used, number of unique dialog tags (i.e., "he said", "she exclaimed"), instances of profanity, readability levels (with statistics from both Flesch-Kincaid and Dale-Chall), and the ten most used 'ly adverbs. The criteria were chosen in part because they were available to me in the SmartEdit software. While the criteria are not arbitrary, neither are they all-inclusive; many criteria I would have liked to look at were excluded (i.e., "Most Common Sentences" or

“Distinctive Adjectives”), due to the limitations of the software. These comparisons are necessary, particularly for the fan works attempting to imitate Austen’s style, because a reader of Austen would reasonably expect and appreciate a fan work to be written with the similar word choice, length, and readability. They are worth looking at because they “give us a sense of the authors’ respective proclivities and reflect the general tone” (Blatt n. pag.). Of course, textual analysis only skims the surface of what we call style. There is an aesthetic factor of style that cannot be measured as well as the subjectivity of reader preference that cannot be predicted. The textual analysis, in the case of this study, is therefore to supplement the analysis and should not be mistaken for the entirety of the analysis.

There are many motivations for deriving one’s work from another author’s original, and I believe that the very motivation says something about ethos of the writer and the quality of the work itself. Possible motivations for writing fan fiction include a simple desire to profit from something already established, a need to continue a story in order to satisfy unanswered questions, a desire to finish an incomplete work, an attempt to join the conversation that the original author began, or simply to feed the hungry fans. The motivation of the writer and how he acknowledges the original that inspired them is what I call authorial intent, and it influences the enjoyment of the reader. My rationale for this is simple. The type of person to choose a fan fiction work to read is likely the type of person who loved and respected the original. This type of person is also likely to be offended if the fan fiction author does not share and demonstrate their love and respect for the original. Similarly, the reader is likely to feel a sense of camaraderie with the fan fiction author if they share the same love and respect for the original. Authorial intent is analyzed in two ways. First, by how the fan fiction author attributes or credits Austen for inspiration or otherwise (i.e., an acknowledgement after the title page or a secondary

author credit). The other method I use to discover authorial intent is by examining the author's commentary on his or her motivation to write, attempts at faithfulness, and any claims the author makes about their work's relationship to canon.

Finally, because readership plays such a large role in the longevity of a work, as well as indicates how successfully the author invites the reader to identify with the work or the characters³, the apparent success of each fan fiction work will be gauged both by its rankings on Amazon.com (the industry's leading bookseller), Goodreads.com (a largely popular book reviewing website), and LibraryThing (another popular book reviewing website), and reader reviews found on these websites and elsewhere. I look for commonalities in the evaluations of the works. Amateur opinions matter just as much as, if not more than expert opinions when it comes to the success of a novel, because readers are the people that are buying the books. This is not to devalue the expert opinions, which I also sought in professionally published book reviews and any scholarly research I could find. However, the bulk of the criticism comes from naïve, or non-specialist, reviews because their purchases and recommendations, or lack thereof, control the success of the works. This is fan fiction, after all, and they are the fans.

³ In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Kenneth Burke details how identification occurs in rhetoric because in order to be persuaded, a person must identify with what is being said. I believe this occurs in good fiction as well. First, a work must provide the reader with something to identify with, be it a character, a situation, or a familiar trope. Then, after a reader is persuaded into enjoyment of the work, they must persuade others to read and enjoy it for it to be successful.

CHAPTER 6

FAN WORKS IN QUESTION

Linda Berdoll's *Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife*

Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife, by Linda Berdoll, was previously self-published under the title, *The Bar Sinister*, selling an impressive (for 1999) ten thousand copies before being picked up by Source Books and republished with fresh copyediting and a new title. It represents the traditional sequel form of fan fiction, by Rolf Breuer's definition: "a continuation of a literary work in the same genre" (Breuer Sec. I). This sequel is praised by some for a valiant attempt to imitate Austen's charming wit and prose and criticized by others for its failure on this front.

Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife begins immediately following the events of *Pride and Prejudice*. The novel begins with Darcy and his new bride on a carriage ride to Pemberley, his estate. The reader is made instantly aware of the lovers having consummated their marriage the night before by Darcy's gesture of proffering his wife a cushion to ease her discomfort during the bumpy ride. The novel then jumps backward and forward in the timeline, from the carriage ride back to the engagement, from Lydia and Wickham's miserable life in Newcastle to Jane and Bingley's surprisingly miserable marriage in London, from the introduction of a housemaid called Abigail Christie and her bastard son, John, to the rakish and scandalous youth of Darcy and Wickham in Derbyshire. And while much unfolds throughout the novel, such as a couple of murders, the

revelations of Darcy's illegitimate child, and Bingley's extramarital affairs, there is not much of a central plot.

It is a fan favorite among *Pride and Prejudice* sequels as light and enjoyable entertainment. However, it fails to remain faithful to Austen's characterization at times, and the "soft porn" nature of this novel, which focuses a considerable amount of detailed attention to the physical relationship between the newlyweds, is a dramatic hit-or-miss with Austen fans.

Plot

As mentioned earlier, the novel begins right where *Pride and Prejudice* leaves off, the lovers have just wed and are in the midst of their journey to Pemberley. However, this is where the novel departs from its source. While the structure of *Pride and Prejudice* is linear, with the exception of a few backstory explanations by way of letters, *Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife* jumps back and forth between the present and multiple characters' backstories. The plot and events of *Pride and Prejudice* are mentioned occasionally in only so much as a memory.

In addition to the structural differences, the continuity between *Pride and Prejudice* and this continuation is flawed, not to mention the historical inaccuracies and errors in logic throughout. For example, Darcy and Elizabeth, on their journey to Pemberley, travel from London to Derbyshire in a day when it should have taken four to five; illegitimate children (and there are quite a few, and from surprising parentage) are raised with their half siblings when this would have been far too scandalous in the Regency era; Georgiana is said to have a thirty-thousand pound a year inheritance, which would have been impossible given that Darcy himself only had an income of ten thousand a year.

Reviewer Jenny Scott also finds fault with its unnecessary “inclusion of so much graphic sex, violence and personal matters” that she feels are “untrue to the period and to the characters as we know them” (n. pag.).

Themes

The themes from *Pride and Prejudice*, such as love and marriage, social inequality, and pride and prejudice exist in *Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife*, but they take a backseat to the sex and the scandal that make up the majority of the novel. For example, the theme of reputation and first impressions is shallowly addressed as Elizabeth often misreads her husband’s moods and mopes until he shows her affection once again: “His note was economic at best. Compared to the verbosity of his letter responding to her refusal of his marriage proposal, it was not merely terse. It was very nearly rude. Could he not at least have used the word ‘love’ once?” (Berdoll 31).

Other themes, such as propriety and social manners are ignored entirely. Characters discuss their private lives openly, and, of course, there’s this charming scene: “With only an inkling of what weight her husband willingly took upon his shoulders, Elizabeth had lain that morning amidst the covers admiring their broadness as he sat availing himself of the chamber pot” (Berdoll 65). Mr. Darcy’s strict sense of class distinction and propriety is also neglected, as it becomes known that he, in his youth, impregnated a member of the household staff.⁴

⁴ While a case can be made that this was common practice among the nobility, it becomes a question of faithfulness to characterization and whether or not Mr. Darcy be the type of man to exercise that particular privilege. I do not believe he would.

Characterization

Of all the characters, only Wickham and Lydia are reasonably faithful. Elizabeth is transformed from a headstrong, self-assured young woman into an insecure and angst-ridden wife. CoffeeGurl complains, “All she did was swoon over Darcy’s sexual prowess. As for Fitzwilliam Darcy, he is not the misjudged gentleman in this one. The author has turned him into the jerk Elizabeth had thought he was in P&P. And what the author did to Mr. Bingley is nauseating. He cheats on Jane and has an illegitimate child” (n. pag.). Alexandra Cochrane cautions the reader: “If your images of the P&P characters have been established for a long time, and especially if you haven't seen or didn't care for the BBC miniseries (the lead actors in which the author freely admits her characters are meant to be based on), then I would recommend you not read this book” (n. pag.).

On the other hand, Linda Waldemar, a reviewer at *The Republic of Pemberley*, feels that Berdoll remained adequately faithful: “The behavior of the characters is not inconsistent with those that JA created. Mr. Darcy is unfailingly honest and honorable, taciturn and reticent; almost always in control. Elizabeth is playful and witty. Both have a strong sense of propriety and are very passionate. They are both good and likable characters. Their marriage is just what many of JA's fans would envision” (Waldemar). I must interject to disagree with Ms. Waldemar, however, on Mr. Darcy’s sense of control. It is, in fact, one of Ms. Berdoll’s favorite plot devices that Darcy is unable to demonstrate restraint in regards to his wife. His sense of propriety is set aside when his lust for his wife, even before they are married, takes over.

Contrastingly, reviewer Jenny Scott argues that Jane Austen’s characters are “portrayed in quite different and highly exaggerated ways to those in the original well-loved novel.” In a,

possibly unintentionally, hilarious scene in which Lydia takes it upon herself to educate her newly engaged sisters in the physical obligations of marriage, Jane is depicted as a “lamb for slaughter...wide-eyed, wary, whose face had lost all color” (Berdoll 10). However, while the Jane Bennet of *Pride and Prejudice* was described as sweet-natured and with an affinity for seeing the good in people, she is never characterized as naïve. And while an argument could be made that Jane’s reaction is befitting her sense of propriety, Austen’s Jane would have been aware of Lydia’s propensity to dramatize and would not have been foolish enough to take Lydia’s words without caution. Lydia, on the other hand, shows the closest resemblance by far to Austen’s depiction.

Not only are the characters altered in this version, but they are

as static as possible, perhaps in a nod to trying to stay true to Austen’s original depiction, but since so much else of the story was as Austen never would have imagined it, why bother to try to keep them slotted into their familiar molds when circumstances should have dictated growth? And even at that, some of the characters are more true to the BBC production than to the original book. (whitreidtan)

Beyond the faithfulness to character in this novel, the method of characterization differs from *Pride and Prejudice*. Whereas Austen revealed her characters’ natures through their dialog and actions and allowed the reader to slowly unwrap each character, Ms. Berdoll gives all away by detailing each character’s every thought and feeling.

Style

The language used in *Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife* can best be described as excessive. Ms. Berdoll takes the simplest of statements and convolutes them by using twice as many words as necessary. Take this sentence from the first chapter, for example, in which Berdoll is describing the newlyweds’ journey: “But once upon the road north, a legion of staring eyes could be

detected through the obfuscatory yellow fog that clung persistently to the streets” (Berdoll 3). An Amazon reviewer known only as “A Customer” plays the devil’s advocate, reasoning, “this book was fun. The diction wasn’t exactly on target, I admit... This is supposed to be entertainment, not Literature.” However, reviewer SKTCA couldn’t get past the errors: “Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife is full of malapropisms and misapplied SAT words...I was afraid to continue reading it lest I suffer irreversible left-brain damage” (n. pag.). As the novel was first self-published, grammatical mistakes are reasonable, but the editor for this published version missed many such mistakes.

Jenny Scott also found the language problematic: “Many long words are included which jar the reader. There are in every case simpler, more readily understood and more true to the period alternatives.” For example, the following sentence appears in the first chapter: “The single unseemliness bechanced in her dressing room” (Berdoll 4). Alexandra Cochrane, who otherwise provides a favorable review of the novel, also commented on its “overuse of thesaurus-researched words” (n. pag.), a sentiment reiterated by SKTCA: “It seems as if she used her word processor’s thesaurus to come up with obsolete/complicated synonyms for ordinary words, then simply substituted them without regard to precise connotation and nuance” (n. pag.). It is clear that Berdoll was attempting to write in a style and diction that did not come naturally to her and so relied too heavily on secondary resources.

Table 1 displays a textual comparison between Berdoll’s work and the source of her inspiration. Word count, average sentence length, and average paragraph length can indicate whether the style matches Austen’s in length and flow. This is worth looking at because a reader of Austen might dismiss a fan work if it is either too long or too short. The average word length, use of foreign words, unique dialogue tags (such as “said” or “excalaimed”), profanity, and ‘ly

adverbs indicate whether the language the author uses is similar to Austen's. The Dale-Chall and Flesch-Kincaid scores demonstrate whether the author's language represents a similar readability and flow as Austen's. For these scores, a higher number means a higher difficulty in language and sentence structure.

From a glance, it is evident that Berdoll's work is twice as long as *Pride and Prejudice*, which would be to accommodate the various subplots and backstories going on in the novel. The average word length is a close match, as is the average sentence length and paragraph length. The real differences in language usage are the instances of profanity (16 to Austen's 0), unique dialog tags⁵ (117 to 78), and use of foreign words⁶ (24 to 2). Of the top ten 'ly adverbs used, four overlap. The readability scores indicate a higher difficulty in language or structure in Berdoll's work, which could be accounted for by the long, thesaurus-found words many readers mentioned in their reviews.

⁵ It is worth noting that many words that Berdoll uses as dialog tags are inappropriate, such as "sighed" or "panted" or "choked" because for most of these it would be impossible to articulate a word while performing these actions.

⁶ It is also worth noting that many of the French and Latin words and phrases Berdoll uses as part of everyday speech would not have been present in the contemporary Regency language (i.e., blasé, femme fatale, flagrante delicto, joie de vivre, noblesse oblige, etc.) (OED).

Table 1

Textual Comparison of *Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife* to *Pride and Prejudice*

	<i>Pride & Prejudice</i>	<i>Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife</i>
Word count:	121,562	248,016
Average Sentence Length	20.3 words*/16.5 words**	15.1 words*/12.9 words**
Average Paragraph Length	3 sentences*	2.8 sentences*
Average Word Length	4.4 characters*/4.6 characters**	4.6 characters*/4.8 characters*
Foreign words:	2 (French)	24 (French)
No. of Unique Dialog Tags:	78	117
Instances of Profanity	0	16
Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level*	7.8	8
Dale-Chall Readability**	7.8	8.8
10 Most Used -ly Adverbs	Only Really Immediately Certainly Scarcely Perfectly Likely Instantly Merely Particularly	Only Simply Truly Particularly Actually Merely Exceedingly Finally Nearly Certainly

Unless noted, the information found in Table 1 is from the SmartEdit software results.

*Results from Microsoft Word's Readability Statistics function

**Results from WordCountTools.com

Authorial Intent

In an interview with the *Austenque Reviews* website, Berdoll states that her motivation for writing the sequel was the “undercurrent of passion that we all recognized in P&P...I literally could not bear Darcy and Elizabeth’s story to end – simple as that” (Esparza n. pag.). However, her justification for continuing the romance, as she elaborates in her novel’s preface, is a little more presumptuous:

As befitting a maiden’s sensibilities, her novels all end with the wedding ceremony. What throbs fast and full, what the blood rushes through, is denied her unforgettable characters and, therefore us. Dash it all! We endeavour to right this wrong by completing at least one of her stories, beginning whence hers leaves off. Our lovers have wed. But the throbbing that we first encounter is not the cry of a passionate heart. Another part of her anatomy is grieving Elizabeth Bennet Darcy. (Berdoll “Preface”)

In response to the criticism she has received for her controversial depiction of the beloved duo’s intimate life, she states, “If you believe that Jane Austen sequels are inherently wrong, I respect your position. However, I am quite annoyed by those who insist that I shouldn’t have written my books because my interpretation of the characters does not agree with theirs” (Esparza n. pag.).

And while the critic blurbs highlighted on her websites seem to consider her sequels as canonical, she says that she wrote them with a “wink and a sense of fun” (Esparza n. pag.).

In the *Austenque Reviews* interview, Berdoll establishes her credibility as a Jane Austen aficionado, claiming that she “devoured all of JA’s novels, several biographies, her Juvenilia, and was fascinated by her letters to her sister Cassandra.” She also spent months “pouring over nonfiction about the Regency Era,” but she admits that her “adoration of Jane Austen, *Pride & Prejudice*, Darcy & Elizabeth, and all things Regency was ignited by [the A&E] P&P mini-series” (Esparza n. pag.).

Additional Comments

Linda Waldemar, finds other obvious flaws with the book, notably:

It is poorly edited. There are sentences, too numerous to point out, where words are missing. Within four paragraphs, a character's name goes from Alexander to Richard to Alexander to Richard and finally back to Alexander. Names and relationships are unnecessarily changed: Thaddeus Collins (Mr. Bennet's nephew; son of his sister), Lady Elinor Darcy, Lady Anne DeBourgh, etc. And, there are also several characters of questionable paternity. Then there are the misspellings, Elisabeth and Pemberly, among others. (n. pag.)

Jenny Scott admonishes its “lack of continuity both between this novel and *Pride and Prejudice* and also within the book itself. Elizabeth and Pemberley are, for instance, misspelled as Elisabeth and Pemberly. At one stage the author forgets that the Bingleys have moved and they are visited at Netherfield” (n. pag.).

Amazon reviewer SKTCA cautions that “you avoid [Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife] if any of these things apply to you: 1) you’re a JA purist; 2) stupid metaphors drive you crazy; OR 3) you have a basic affinity for English grammar” (n. pag.). LibraryThing reviewer fourpaws2 claims that if you allow yourself to forget that these are Austen’s characters and settings, “it is just possible to get all the way through this book and discover that it is a passable Regency novel...for I found it pretty entertaining after I got the hang of changing all these names in my head” (n. pag.). On the other hand, A_Reader_of_Fictions states, “I would not have finished this suck-fest, if not for the sheer joy of ripping it apart (figuratively, although literally is also tempting)” (n. pag.).

Helen Fielding’s Bridget Jones’s Diary

Helen Fielding’s *Bridget Jones’s Diary* was initially published serially as an anonymous column in *The Independent*, a London newspaper, that became extremely popular thanks to a

protagonist that women everywhere could easily relate to. Because of its initial serial publication and its modern context, it took a while for readers to catch on to the fact that it is, in fact, a modern retelling of *Pride and Prejudice*, with the novel's heroine, Bridget, in the middle of a love triangle between a Wickham-esque character (Daniel Cleaver) and Mr. Darcy, himself (Mark Darcy, to be exact). This counterfeit *Pride and Prejudice* is also considered the forerunner for what is now known as the chick-lit genre.

The novel is about a thirty-something single woman who is hopeless when it comes to romance. It is written completely in short hand and formatted as a diary, starting every day with a calorie count, cigarette count, alcohol unit count, and anything else pertaining to the character's mood, so that the character feels like a real woman. Bridget has an affair with her playboy boss, quits her job in publishing, is forced into embarrassing situations in her new job in television, and eventually finds love in an unexpected place. She has a silly mother who is unsatisfied with her life, a father who is apathetic, and friends who both support her and talk straight to her. *Bridget Jones's Diary* pays homage to the 1995 BBC/A&E version of "Pride and Prejudice," which inspired the *Independent* column.

Plot

The plot of *Bridget Jones's Diary* loosely follows that of *Pride and Prejudice*, with Bridget as a caricature of Elizabeth Bennet, the rakish Daniel Cleaver as the Wickham character, and Mark Darcy as Mr. Darcy. The plot similarities really end here, however, as Bridget is a modern single woman living a modern single woman's life, with opportunities and experiences that Elizabeth could never have had. Other changes made by Fielding include the exclusion of the four sisters, making Bridget an only child. This change was likely made to enhance Bridget's

neuroses. Additionally, Bridget has an affair with her boss, a character meant to represent *Pride and Prejudice*'s Wickham, which ends badly, exaggerating her desire for true love. And rather than Mr. Darcy's coming to Elizabeth's aid in response to the scandal in *Pride and Prejudice*, Mark Darcy comes to her culinary rescue as she muddles up a meal.

Theme

The themes of Fielding's novel, though contemporized, mirror and update Austen's. For example, both novels place a high importance on romance and marriage, still their rationales are different: Elizabeth Bennet must marry in order to avoid poverty whereas Bridget wants to marry to avoid the stigma of spinsterhood. Both characters, however, place a high value on marrying for love. Additionally, where *Pride and Prejudice* is a commentary on social behavior and customs in the Regency's upper class, *Bridget Jones's Diary* is "a sharp critique of modern society where women have to have a husband, children, a house in the suburbs and a fulfilling job to be considered a success" (cecile.sune n. pag.). Unfortunately, some readers found the liberties taken to modernize the tale upsetting. LibraryThing reviewer, ncgraham, says, "the morality of this book really turns me off, and the fact that this is at least in part a reworking of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* only makes the bad taste it leaves all the more potent" (n. pag.).

The theme of first impressions is prevalent in *Bridget*, as she misjudges both Daniel Cleaver, due to his charming and charismatic outward behavior, and Mark Darcy, due to his initial abruptness and seriousness. She is also quick to believe the gossip she hears about Mark Darcy, reinforcing her negative opinion of him, just as Elizabeth believes the gossip she hears about Mr. Darcy.

Robert F. Scott, a professor at Ohio Northern University, included *Bridget Jones's Diary* in his Twentieth Century British literature course. One of his concerns prior to teaching this book was whether his American college students would be able to relate to a 30-something British “singleton.” Scott’s class discovered, however, that “beneath its humorous façade, Bridget’s chatty first-person account delivers a stinging attack on the various ways in which movies, books, and fashion magazines have negatively permeated the daily lives of all women” (109). Together, Scott and his students found the “subtle ways in which Fielding uses her heroine’s obsessive behavior to expose undue influence that today’s mass media has had in shaping women’s attitudes toward physical beauty, self-fulfillment, and romantic love” (109).

Characterization

For the most part, the familiar *Pride and Prejudice* characters that return in *Bridget Jones's Diary* are appropriate constructs of modern versions of their ancestors. Jones's mother is still silly and self-centered, tries to fix Bridget up and marry her off, and continuously makes a fool out of herself throughout the novel. Bridget's father is still sweet-tempered and easy-going to a fault, allowing life to make a mess of itself around him until it’s nearly too late. Daniel Cleaver and Mark Darcy are spot on as 21st Century Wickham and Darcy. However, “Bridget is no modern day Lizzie Bennet by any stretch of the imagination - too ditzy” (LisaMaria_C n. pag.). Reviewer ncgraham agrees, “I cannot picture a modern-day Elizabeth having an affair with a Wickham-like character, especially when she knows him to be untrustworthy” (n. pag.).

In the context of reading and discussing the novel, Robert Scott and his students read reviews of the book: “On the one hand were those reviewers who praised Fielding’s heroine as a ‘poster child for the confused woman of the 1990s’ and who argued that her farcical adventures

accurately depicted the personal and professional trials faced by many contemporary women...Conversely, there were a number of critics who found Fielding's novel to be superficial and who viewed Bridget Jones as a vulgar caricature of a helpless, marriage-obsessed single woman" (110).

Style

An Amazon reviewer, Volkswagon Blues, claims that "the humor of 'Bridget Jones's Diary' is its strongest quality" (n. pag.), and bookwormygirl, from LibraryThing, elaborates: "every entry not only has what's going on in her life but also counts her calories, cigarette intake, and how much booze she drinks. Now let me tell you that just those little numbers are a crack-up. You could definitely tell what kind of day she was having by how many cigarettes or how many drinks she had" (n. pag.). Another example of Fielding's wit is offered by LibraryThing reviewer lisamaria_c: "Bridget Jones had me at page one of her *New Years Resolutions* that included under the "I WILL NOT" heading, the line: 'Sulk about having no boyfriend, but develop inner poise and authority and sense of self as woman of substance, complete without boyfriend, as best way to obtain boyfriend'" (n. pag.).

In addition to the humor, which is quite fitting for a modern retelling of Austen, Fielding has a unique style of her own, a stream of consciousness that often needs no pronouns to cater to its diary format. Marc Cabir Davis praises Fielding, stating that, "the quality of language and the author's writing style here are wonderful and quite exceptional." Because the story is removed from the context of the early 19th century and transported to the 20th, there's no need for Fielding to attempt to mimic Austen's language or syntax, thus the textual comparisons (see Table 2), while interesting, are not necessary for the purpose of analysis.

Table 2

Textual Comparison of *Bridget Jones's Diary* to *Pride and Prejudice*

	<i>Pride & Prejudice</i>	<i>Bridget Jones's Diary</i>
Word count:	121,562	67,057
Average Sentence Length	20.3 words*/16.5 words**	12.2*/8.4**
Average Paragraph Length	3 words*	2.6*
Average Word Length	4.4 characters*/4.6 characters**	4.4*/4.5**
Foreign words:	2 (French)	1 (French)
No. of Unique Dialog Tags:	78	69
Instances of Profanity	0	23 (mostly slang)
Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level*	7.8	6.1
Dale-Chall Readability**	7.8	8.4
10 Most Used -ly Adverbs	Only Really Immediately Certainly Scarcely Perfectly Likely Instantly Merely Particularly	Really Only Suddenly Actually Completely Merely Exactly Probably Immediately Simply

Unless noted, the information found in this table is from the SmartEdit software results.

*Results from Microsoft Word's Readability Statistics function

**Results from WordCountTools.com

Additional Comments

While *Bridget Jones's* connection and faithfulness to *Pride and Prejudice* is only slight, the hints of a connection and its ability to create an identifiable, realistic, and flawed character draws readers in. LibraryThing reviewer bibliobbe explains: “I don't know a single woman who hasn't endured at least some of Bridget's humiliations or spent a similar amount of time wishing and dreaming her life away” (n. pag.). *Bridget Jones's Diary*, which has been around since 1996, has received mixed reviews. While many women found Bridget entirely relatable, others found her tedious. For example, Lauren Scaravelli rants,

Enough with the insecurities!...We all have the fat day, the too many drinks day, the hate all men and wish they would all spontaneously combust day etc. I found myself laughing out loud at certain points relating to the character. But, then about half way through I started to get quite annoyed... I became bothered by the fact that this woman could not find anything about herself too be happy about, that she could not find any measure of peace alone and that only in finding of a man would her life be fulfilled. By the end of the book I felt that she had become a character that bothered me, so I couldn't root for her. (n. pag.)

On the other hand, Gleick says “James Joyce it may not be, but show me the woman to whom this sort of stream-of-consciousness, self-assessing mental clutter is unfamiliar and I'll show you the person who will not think "Bridget Jones's Diary" is both completely hilarious and spot on.” (Gleick) Marc Cabir Davis, says, “This was written for twenty-somethings looking for a way to pass their time on a lonely weeknight, and not for aspiring professors of literature. Still, there are highly comic moments, and I'd have to give it to the author for sustaining my interest in the book until the very end.” And another reviewer, darkgds101@aol.com, argues that the poor criticism Fielding receives is due to her gender: “Of course if Fielding had been a man, she would have been universally applauded for her exuberant wit and candor and entertainment skills. As a woman she is ripe for marginalization and outright crucifixion” (n. pag.).

The novel really owes its success to Fielding's appeal to her readers' pathos. Burke's theory of identification deals not just with characters that readers can relate to, but character tropes that readers can identify. Lisa Schwarzbaum finds Bridget instantly recognizable: "You've read her literature under the bylines Jane Austen, Edith Wharton, Judith Krantz; you've seen her on TV, nicknamed Rhoda, Elaine, Ally. I think it was Flaubert who said, 'Bridget Jones, c'est moi'" (Schwarzbaum). In response to the readership, Fielding is quoted as saying "I was really, really surprised at all the women who wrote in saying they identified with Bridget because a lot of her thoughts are very paranoid, and when you realize that so many women have the same thoughts, it's massively reassuring but at the same time alarming... We're all mad" (Hoge).

Seth Grahame-Smith's *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*

Author and screenwriter, Seth Grahame-Smith, was contacted by his editor, Jason Rekulak, with a request to write a monster mash-up: "He called me one day, out of the blue, very excitedly, and he said, all I have is this title, and I can't stop thinking about this title. And he said: *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*. For whatever reason, it just struck me as the most brilliant thing I'd ever heard" (Grossman). *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* was published in 2009 and has since sold more than 1.5 million copies (Habash).

In *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, Elizabeth Bennet is the second oldest of five zombie-fighting sisters. While their mother, Mrs. Bennet, preoccupies herself with finding them wealthy husbands, their father concerns himself training them in martial arts and swordplay.

When the wealthy Mr. Bingley moves in nearby, he is immediately taken with the eldest Bennet daughter, Jane. However, his friend, Mr. Darcy, and Elizabeth instantly clash due to their

opposing views on the superior form of zombie-slaying. And when Darcy separates Bingley and Jane, it does not help Lizzie's opinion of him in the slightest.

While visiting her friend Charlotte Lucas, who has just been married and subsequently bitten by a zombie, Elizabeth once again encounters Mr. Darcy, who proposes marriage in spite of his own objections to her and her family. Elizabeth refuses his proposal and they proceed to engage in hand-to-hand combat.

After the refusal, Darcy writes Elizabeth a letter explaining his behavior and actions and she realizes that she has judged him unfairly, but her realization comes too late. He has already left. She will have to survive a cross-country trek, fighting off zombies at every turn, in order to meet up with him again and give him another chance.

In *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, Seth Grahame-Smith weaves a zombie-killing plotline into Austen's classic novel, retaining eighty-five percent of the original work. I categorize this work as a parody, based on Breuer's definition. However, it's difficult at times to decide whether it is a parody or what Breuer calls a travesty, the difference being that "a parody keeps the formal structures of the original but changes its contents... whereas a travesty keeps the contents and changes style and form" (Breuer Sec. I). In any case, this novel has that dose of playfulness that Breuer has allowed for contemporary parodies, rather than the tone of ridicule. This novel set off a string of popular monster plus classics mash ups.

Plot

Amazon reviewer, Kara, claims she enjoyed the original *Pride and Prejudice*, but found there to be many questions left unanswered by the end. She says, "With the addition of Zombies,

everything in *Pride and Prejudice* falls into place. Miss Lucas's marriage⁷, Lady Catharine's⁸ widely held respect, even Elizabeth's remarkable self-control and discipline makes more sense now that I know of her training in the Orient" (n. pag.). However, LibraryThing reader Alana_leigh is critical of the novel for its lack of plot: "if it was going to do something truly interesting, the plot would have needed to change a bit...it was a funny idea, even I must admit. But that's where it ends. Nothing truly unique was done with the story beyond some small revenges on irritating and wicked characters that didn't receive what was coming to them in the real novel" (n. pag.).

Theme

Although the themes of *Pride and Prejudice* are present, they exist by default, being part of the unchanged eighty-five percent of the original text. They do not exist as an original construct of Grahame-Smith, nor does he add to them or address them specifically.

Characterization

The characterization left something to be desired for one reviewer: "Elizabeth Bennet would make a great 'unmentionable' slayer. She has the confidence, humour and sass to pull that off. But the book was brought down, in my opinion, by straying too far from the text and forgetting who the characters are and what they represent in the story" (Woodley). While Grahame-Smith retained eighty-five percent of Austen's original words, he managed to alter

⁷ Charlotte Lucas is Elizabeth's best friend who marries the Bennets' cousin, Mr. Collins, in both *Pride and Prejudice* and *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*.

⁸ Lady Catherine De Bourgh is Mr. Darcy's aunt who treats Elizabeth with condescension, at best, and outright rudeness and insult, at worst. She is, however, highly regarded by Mr. Collins and by society in general.

every character to the point where many were unrecognizable, for example Lady Catherine DeBourgh becomes a ninja zombie-killer, and her distaste for Elizabeth is due to Elizabeth's training rather than her upbringing. C. Williamson states, "the depth of character that makes Austen such a great read is seriously damaged here. The first warning sign comes when Elizabeth seriously intends to cut Darcy's throat for insulting her, something which Austen's Elizabeth, zombie-killer or not, would never have considered" (n. pag.).

Style

"It is a truth universally acknowledged that a zombie in possession of brains must be in want of more brains" (Grahame-Smith 7). Amazon reviewer, Beth, claims, "The literary community should never be too proud to laugh at itself... Fans need to read this book tongue-in-cheek and prepare to laugh WITH it. If you don't like zombies or consider yourself a Jane Austen purist, if you admire only the most intricate writing and consider this sort of work irreverent, then you'll be appalled more than amused. The level of writing IS degenerated from [*Pride and Prejudice*] but, considering the subject matter, I don't think 'quality' was the forethought of the day" (n. pag.).

On the other hand, C. Williamson critiques, "For a parody to work, the parody really has to read like the original, and the author's prose can't touch Austen's effortless, elegant, and, most of all, witty style. (Admittedly, there's a lot of actual Austen here, but it's always pretty obvious when the 21st century collaborator's voice enters,)" not to mention, "the new dialogue is bland rather than charming" (n. pag.).

Consider this scene where Mr. Collins proposes marriage to Elizabeth:

‘You can hardly doubt the purport of my discourse, for however preoccupied you might be with hastening the Devil’s retreat – for which I earnestly applaud you – my attentions have been too marked to be mistaken. Almost as soon as I entered the house, I singled you out as the companion of my future life.’ (Grahame-Smith 84)

Because of the minimal changes to the original text, aside from the occasional insertions of zombie fights, the textual data (see Table 3) displays little difference between the two works. The fact that Grahame-Smith left eighty-five percent of the original text intact is supported, however, by both works’ having the same most used ‘ly adverbs.

Table 3

Textual Comparison of *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* to *Pride and Prejudice*

	<i>Pride & Prejudice</i>	<i>Pride and Prejudice and Zombies</i>
Word count:	121,562	102,635
Average Sentence Length	20.3 words*/16.5 words**	24.2*/13.6**
Average Paragraph Length	3 sentences*	3.5*
Average Word Length	4.4 characters*/4.6 characters**	4.5*/4.6**
Foreign words:	2 (French)	2 (French)
No. of Unique Dialog Tags:	78	76
Instances of Profanity	0	6
Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level*	7.8	9.8
Dale-Chall Readability**	7.8	7.9
10 Most Used -ly Adverbs	Only Really Immediately Certainly Scarcely Perfectly Likely Instantly Merely Particularly	Only Really Immediately Scarcely Certainly Perfectly Particularly Merely Likely Instantly

Unless noted, the information found in Table 4 is from the SmartEdit software results.

*Results from Microsoft Word's Readability Statistics function

**Results from WordCountTools.com

Authorial Intent

Grahame-Smith's reverence for, and attempt at faithfulness to, the classic is apparent in his interview with Lev Grossman: "I didn't want to mess with Jane Austen's overall structure, because it's a masterpiece. Who am I to screw with one of the most brilliantly plotted novels of all time?... So the first thing I did was to read it all over again, straight through, just to refamiliarize myself with it. Then I read it again very carefully, marking up the margins, underlining things, making notes, sort of working out the logistics" (Collins). In attribution to the author, Grahame-Smith states "it's almost as if, subconsciously, Jane Austen is laying out the perfect groundwork for an ultraviolent bone-crushing zombie massacre to take place. For instance, there's a regiment of soldiers camped out near the Bennett household. In the book, they're just there for characters to flirt with. But it's not that big a leap to say, Okay, they're there because the countryside has been overrun with what they call the 'unmentionable menace'" (Collins). Grahame-Smith also claims that the response from Austen fans was the most surprising: "I expected to be burnt at the stake; even to me it seemed slightly sacrilegious to rework one of the English language's greatest authors, but Austen lovers seem to have embraced it. I've had a lot of them tell me it's a great way to bring people in to the Austen tent" (Sharkey).

Additional Comments

Some other criticisms of the mash-up referred to its placing too much focus on the gimmick and not putting enough effort into making the rest of it work. S.M. Pace states, "I love a good parody and the mark of a good parody is a strong plot, enjoyable characters, and well woven comedy. In my opinion, this story has none of that. The inclusion of zombies should add

something to the original story rather than reduce it to a B-movie.” One-horse.library notes that “while reading [Grahame-Smith’s] updated version, the zombies and ninjas started to get annoying as I became absorbed in Jane Austen’s original story,” but he finds some merit in the novels’s “ingenious attempt to get guys to read Jane Austen” (n. pag.). A common thread running through the titles of fan reviews on Amazon and LibraryThing are variations of the criticism: “good concept, poorly executed” (n. pag.). Alana_leigh explained, “I’m pleased that someone brought the idea into being, but I’m not sure it merited a full novel. A short excerpt in a magazine would have been sufficient” (n. pag.).

Despite criticisms such as the one above, there is a major audience for works such as this, as evidenced by the fact that *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* spent forty-one weeks in the Top 20 category for Trade Paperback Fiction on the New York Times Best Seller List (“Best Sellers”). Stephanie Merritt claims that “the surprisingly wide appeal of the book...must be based primarily on the comedy of incongruity, which itself depends on familiarity with the original. Austen’s characters – their pursuits, their language, their careful mannerisms – are so instantly recognizable either from the books or their film versions that they lend themselves beautifully to absurd juxtapositions.” This is a delightfully twisted version of Burke’s identification⁹. Meanwhile, she notes, “Mrs. Bennet remains reassuringly obsessed with finding husbands [for her daughters]” (Merritt).

This parody is a huge hit among readers. While it is a definite “miss” for many Austen or zombie purists, the general consensus rates it highly, appreciating the way Grahame-Smith almost seamlessly weaves a zombie-killing plotline into Austen’s classic novel, retaining eighty-

⁹ Recall that persuasion of enjoyment of a work can be accomplished by provided identifiable characters or tropes (see Chapter 5).

five percent of the original work. Most readers agree that Grahame-Smith adds a fresh spin to the classic that is witty, fun, and so greatly appealing that it has inspired the creation of a whole new monster-classic genre, including such titles as *Jane and the Damned*, *Jane Bites Back*, *Dawn of the Dreadfuls* (a prequel to *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*) and *Mr. Darcy, Vampyre*.

Jo Baker's *Longbourn*

Longbourn, by Jo Baker, is among the most recent *Pride and Prejudice* sequels. In it, Jo Baker tells the below-stairs version of *Pride and Prejudice*. The protagonist is Sarah, a young housemaid, who spends her days in drudgery, washing clothing, scrubbing stains, stoking fires, fetching water, milking cows, cooking and generally cleaning up after the Bennets. Her simple existence gets a little more interesting, however, with the arrivals of the Bingleys, accompanied by their exotic and charismatic manservant, as well as a mysterious newcomer, James, who is employed by Mr. Bennet.

The narrative alternates points of view between Sarah, Mrs. Hill, the housekeeper, James, and flashbacks from James's time in the Napoleonic War. "Baker includes enough of the plot of *Pride and Prejudice* so that an Austen novice will not get lost, and an Austen lover has the satisfaction of matching the novels chapter for chapter. The parallels between the two are not subtle, but they illuminate both Austen's novel and the precarious and circumscribed lives of 19th-century servants" (Rosefield).

This work would be considered a sequel, by Breuer's definitions (see Chapter 2), though it is not a continuation of events, but instead a retelling of some of the same events from a different perspective. LibraryThing reviewer jnwelch calls it a "complementary story to *Pride*

and Prejudice” (n. pag.) and Amazon reviewer, Brendan Moody describes the novel as “less a companion to *Pride and Prejudice* than a distant cousin, one that interacts with its relative rarely and in unrevealing ways. Fortunately, the story it tells is interesting enough in its own right to make a rewarding experience, albeit one that won't surprise readers who have more than a superficial knowledge of the period” (n. pag.).

Plot

The protagonist of *Longbourn*, is Sarah, a housemaid to the Bennets who is first enamored by the exotic footman of Bingley's, the first black man Sarah has ever seen, only to later fall in love with the Bennets' own footman, James. This novel tells of the seedier underbelly of Austen's “light and bright and sparkling¹⁰” world, displaying the cruelties of the slave trade and the harsh practices of the regiment, not to mention the difficulties of living for the lesser privileged of the era.

The common criticism throughout the fan reviews on Amazon and LibraryThing seem to center around distaste for certain plot elements. “Some parts of the story were less successful for me than others - the extended detour into the footman's mysterious past in particular did not work for me and seemed at odds with the rest of the book. Baker seemed at her best when she focused on the meaning in everyday life and the transition to the war setting was too melodramatic for me” (fannyprice). Generalkala argues, “I really don't think it could stand up as a story in its own right - only the ties to the original kept this afloat and that was a near thing” (n. pag.).

¹⁰ In a letter to her sister, Cassandra, upon completion of *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane critiques her own work as “rather too light & bright & sparkling; - it wants shade; - it wants to be stretched out here & there with a long Chapter of sense, if it could be had, if not of solemn specious nonsense” (Austen, Faye 212).

Other issues with the plot were continuity errors between this novel and *Pride and Prejudice*, as well as contextual errors for the time period. “There are scenes with Wickham at the Bennet house for dinners after Elizabeth has learned the truth about him. These never happen in the original story and they gauge the entire tone of what happens between Elizabeth, Wickham, and Lydia” (librarygurl n. pag.). Another reviewer also finds fault with the way Baker depicts the Bennet estate:

Jo Baker has obviously done loads of research into domestic life of the period and so she must certainly know that she has given the Bennets an impossibly small household of servants. It's canon that Mr. Bennet has £2000 a year plus the interest of his wife's fortune; that they don't save any of it; that they keep a carriage and carriage horses plus at least one riding horse, they have a large garden including fashionable 'wilderness' and they have coverts of game birds. A household of that size, with that kind of income, would have had - would have needed - at least eleven servants. (Syntinen n. pag.)

Theme

Critic Diane Johnson argues that, “Baker deploys [the sordid details of daily life] to good effect not only for their intrinsic interest but as a moral corrective.” Johnson argues for Baker’s appeal to the readers’ pathos as she “gives us a sobering look at the underside — or the practical side — of daily life circa 1812.” Claire Hopley, of the *Washington Times*, elaborates: “Jo Baker’s thoroughly researched description of the servants’ toil expands the tiny piece of ivory that Jane Austen worked on by showing how the lives of the middle and upper classes depended on work that’s now hard to imagine.”

Characterization

This retelling shows all of the Bennet girls, not excluding the revered Elizabeth, as being frivolous and naïve, and the patriarch of the family as uncaring, irresponsible, and prideful. In an interview with NPR, Jo Baker explains her characterization:

[Mr. Bennet is] very partial, and very jaded, has a sour sense of humour. Actually I don't think I stray far from Austen's depiction – I just push it along a little further...I think Austen shows his laziness as seriously problematic and neglectful: he should have taken Lydia in hand years ago. (Mayer)

Reviewer fannyprice says, “I was fascinated by how Baker took familiar characters and refracted them through new eyes - Mrs. Bennet is still the same silly woman as before, but her foibles and neediness are not just amusing, they are work-making; Elizabeth's outdoorsiness is less charming to those who are forced to do her laundry; Jane is beloved because she never requires anything extra of the servants” (n. pag.). Brendan Moody points out that Mr. Collins and Mary Bennet are shown more favorably than Austen's depiction of them, but cautions readers that they “won't find much new here” (n. pag.).

As Baker's appeal to pathos goes, Moody states, “the characters may not be that complex, but they're human enough to engage our sympathy all the same.” Molly P. says that, “[Baker] has created characters with pasts and passions. But these characters do not leap off the pages” (n. pag.).

Style

Moody describes Baker's style as making “no attempt to imitate Austen's prose, opting instead for a more modern and immediate tone that captures the grim fatalism of the servants' day-to-day existence.” Take this passage from the first chapter, for example:

Next door, down the stop into the scullery, Sarah leaned over the washboard, rubbing at a stained hem. The petticoat had been three inches deep in mud when she'd retrieved it from the girls' bedroom floor and had had a night's soaking in lye already; the soap was not shifting the mark, but it was biting into her hands, already cracked and chapped and chilblained, making them sting. If Elizabeth had the washing of her own petticoats, Sarah often thought, she'd most likely be a sight more careful with them. (Baker 5)

According to Moody, "it works quite well, conjuring for the reader the pain of constant labor, the loneliness of lives confined to a radius of a few miles, and the small pleasures that are all servants can hope for" (n. pag.). Molly P. says that "the tone of Longbourn is very different from that of P&P. You won't find humor and witticisms here. You WILL find pain, passion, blood, suffering, intrigue, and dirty linen" (n. pag.). Generalkala, on the other hand, claims that, "the prose could have been Austen herself it's so descriptive and lovely. It flows; unlike some other spin-offs I've read with their clunky language and anachronisms" (n. pag.). For librarygurl, however, "it didn't have that succinct and witty Austen style that I love from the original" (n. pag.). Of course, for a book about the grimmer side of life, the light and witty style of Austen wouldn't be appropriate.

Table 4 shows the textual comparison of the two novels. The high number of instances of profanity in sharp contrast with Austen's none can easily be attributed to the understandably different language of the lower class, as well as an allowance for different rules applied to private thoughts. The rest of the data collected show no major differences in language usage and readability between the two works.

Table 4

Textual Comparison between *Longbourn* and *Pride and Prejudice*

	<i>Pride & Prejudice</i>	<i>Longbourn</i>
Word count:	121,562	115,249
Average Sentence Length	20.3 words*/16.5 words**	15.1*/12.9**
Average Paragraph Length	3 sentences*	2.8*
Average Word Length	4.4 characters*/4.6 characters**	4.3*/4.4**
Foreign words:	2 (French)	4 (French)
No. of Unique Dialog Tags:	78	86
Instances of Profanity	0	24
Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level*	7.8	5.1
Dale-Chall Readability**	7.8	7.7
10 Most Used -ly Adverbs	Only Really Immediately Certainly Scarcely Perfectly Likely Instantly Merely Particularly	Only Really Entirely Simply Actually Perfectly Suddenly Carefully Quietly Certainly

Unless noted, the information found in Table 6 is from the SmartEdit software results.

*Results from Microsoft Word's Readability Statistics function

**Results from WordCountTools.com

Authorial Intent

When the term “fan fiction” comes up in reference to her novel, Baker says, “I think of *Longbourn* – if this is not too much of an aspiration – as being in the same tradition as *Wide Sargasso Sea* or *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. It’s a book that engages with Austen’s novel in a similar way to Jean Rhys’s response to *Jane Eyre* and Tom Stoppard’s to *Hamlet*” (Mayer).

On her motivation for writing, she says, “I found something in the existing text that niggled me, that felt unresolved, and wanted to explore it further” (Mayer).

Additional Comments

The characterization and style of *Longbourn* is understandably different from that of *Pride and Prejudice*, as pointed out by *Washington Times* writer, Claire Hopley: “The author makes no attempt to imitate Austen’s style, and pays relatively little attention to Austen’s major characters” (Hopley). Instead, *Longbourn* changes the context to the perspective of the servants, who are bound to demonstrate different values, language, and mannerisms than the society of Austen’s focus. As far as the familiar characters from *Pride and Prejudice* are concerned, the servants are likely to see them in a different light than their peers (i.e.. the society for which Austen wrote).

As far as length of the book goes, it makes a good companion piece to *Pride and Prejudice*, containing close to the same amount of words. The words chosen are consistent with Austen's save for the instances of profanity, but because the tone of the story is more cynical and

the characters from whom the point of view comes are of a lower class with more difficulties in life, this can be explained.

CHAPTER 7

OVERALL COMPARISON

Using Aaron Schwabach's definitions of derivative and transformative (see Chapter 3), all four works examined in this study would be considered transformative, meaning that they all, to some degree, transform or add on to the original from which they derive. However, the degree of transformation varies among the works. For example, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* adds the zombies, but little else, whereas *Bridget Jones's Diary* changes the context of the story, adding new themes and plot elements that would make more sense in the contemporary setting.

In the evaluation of faithfulness, I found style and characterization to be more critical for a fan fiction work that attempts to establish itself as canonical, such as *Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife*. Because Berdoll's sequel follows *Pride and Prejudice* as a continuation of events, it makes sense that a reader might expect the characters and language to resemble those with which they are familiar from Austen's pen. However, for fan fiction works that change the context of the story, thus having a higher degree of transformation, such as Fielding's modern retelling, characterization and style is expected to be different. Even Baker's *Longbourn*, which takes place during the same time as Austen's novel, does not impose a need for imitation, and the deviation of characterization is acceptable because the perception of the characters is from an entirely different perspective, that of the servants, who are bound to have different opinions of those they serve than of the members of that elite class. In Table 5, I have compiled my

summarizing table comparing my analysis of each work's faithfulness to *Pride and Prejudice*.

This analysis is based on a mixture of my evaluation of each work and the reader response as demonstrated in Chapter 6. Of course, there are aspects of faithfulness that cannot be quantified, and the overall judgment is subjective.

Table 5

Faithfulness to *Pride and Prejudice*

	Plot/Timeline	Themes	Characterization	Style/Language	Overall
<i>Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife</i>	No	No	No	No	No
<i>Bridget Jones's Diary</i>	Yes	Yes	No	No	Reasonably Faithful
<i>Pride and Prejudice and Zombies</i>	Yes	No	No	Yes	Reasonably Faithful
<i>Longbourn</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Reasonably Faithful

Another major difference in these fan works is proclivities of their genre. *Longbourn* and *Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife* are both sequels; they use the same characters in the same setting as *Pride and Prejudice*. These works are intended primarily for readers of Austen and so their audience is more likely to be familiar with the source material and less likely to be able to dismiss any flaws. *Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife* was written "in fun," as the author claimed, yet because of its proximity to the original, many die-hard Austen aficionados will have a hard time removing it from Austen in order to appreciate it for only its light entertainment value. As a parody, readers tend to understand at the offset that the primary purpose of *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* is entertainment.

The following tables (Tables 6, 7, and 8) display the rankings and number of reviewers of the four commercially published fan fiction novels as ranked and rated on *Amazon.com*, *LibraryThing*, and *Goodreads*.

Table 6
Amazon Rankings

Title	Best Sellers Rank	Average Rating (Out of 5, with 5 being the highest)	No. of Reviews Posted on Website	Time Since Publication
<i>Bridget Jones's Diary</i> (1996)	#181,021	4.1 out of 5	1,108	19 years
<i>Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife</i> (1999/2004)	#92,354	3 out of 5 stars	620	16 years
<i>Pride and Prejudice and Zombies</i> (2009)	#41,484	3.3 out of 5	604	6 years
<i>Longbourn</i> (2013)	#142,357	4 out of 5 stars	362	2 years

Table 7
Goodreads Ratings

Title	Average Rating (Out of 5, with 5 being the highest)	# of Reviews Posted on Website	Time Since Publication
<i>Bridget Jones's Diary</i> (1996)	3.7	547,392	19 years
<i>Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife</i> (1999/2004)	3.36	8197	16 years
<i>Pride and Prejudice and Zombies</i> (2009)	3.25	76,783	6 years
<i>Longbourn</i> (2013)	3.62	18,477	2 years

Table 8
LibraryThing Ratings

Title	Average Rating (Out of 5, with 5 being the highest)	# of Reviews Posted on Website	Time Since Publication
<i>Bridget Jones's Diary</i> (1996)	3.64	188	19 years
<i>Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife</i> (1999/2004)	3.32	54	16 years
<i>Pride and Prejudice and Zombies</i> (2009)	3.26	343	6 years
<i>Longbourn</i> (2013)	3.9	72	2 years

An analysis of the rankings and reviews of these four novels suggests that, although many readers enjoy sequels that continue Austen's stories past her endings, the more popular books are the ones that provide an original and enticing twist on the classic novel. The number of reviews compared to the time since publication, however, shows that the readership for *Mr. Darcy Takes a Wife* is rather small for the amount of time it has been available.

A_Reader_of_Fictions says, "I have found that the best of the Austen-inspired works do not try too hard to capture her style of language and merely do right by the characters" (n. pag.). This comment rings true. While there is a wide audience for commercial fan fiction that simply feeds readers' appetites for more – these readers are able to take the fluff at face value – the books that will likely stand the test of time are those that take an original approach and can stand alone, apart from the source of their derivation. For example, *Longbourn*, despite the various criticisms against it, connects with the reader with its social and moral commentary that will ring true whether it's the 19th century, 21st century, or 23rd century. And while Fielding's modern

context and cultural references may eventually require footnotes, the book's subtle wit and its 55 appeal to its readers' pathos by depicting an "every woman" protagonist will remain timeless. Additionally, its recognition as the birth of the "chick lit" genre will keep it on the bookshelves for many years to come.

Based on my analysis of reader response, I find that readers are less critical of the counterfeit sequels and the traditional sequels from alternate points of view. Additionally, I stand by my initial hypothesis that the more transformative a work is, the more likely it is to stand the test of time.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

I began this work with a bias against fan fiction. To be frank, I felt that fan fiction was superficial and that its writers were lazy to rely on someone else's characters and constructs. What I found instead is that in a successful, well-written fan fiction work, a lot of effort goes into transforming the text to create something new and meaningful while remaining faithful to the original.

Additionally, I realized that in writing fan fiction, these writers, no matter their motives, are doing a service to the eager fans that read their works and others like them. In the case of Jane Austen fan fiction, as Stephanie Merritt, of *The Observer*, points out, "while the public appetite for Austen remains unsated, she herself remains stubbornly unable to produce any more in the series" (Merritt n. pag.) Therefore, the fan fiction writers are catering to the needs of Jane Austen's fans as well as their own. They are engaging in a conversation and contributing to a community.

The most valuable part of this study turned out not to be the works themselves, but the fans reading and reviewing them. This is the case for two reasons: the effect the reader response has on the popularity and success of a work and the nature of fandom itself. In a time where books are plenty and have to compete for our attention with movies, television, music, and the ever expanding internet – all of which have become increasingly readily available to use – the fans and their recommendations drive a book's success. For the Jane Austen fan community

alone, there are over four hundred documented sequels and spin offs on Goodreads.com and probably countless undocumented works. Something is happening in fandom. Readers are taking ownership over the books they read and love. This response has likely been there since reading became a pastime, but it has become more prevalent, more overt, with the visibility of the internet. It is the fan communities that keep a work alive and give it new meaning – their love and desire to engage – thus, even works with low degrees of transformation are made transformative in the conversations between fans.

I did not set out to de-stigmatize fan fiction but, at least for myself, and hopefully for others, I have done just that. As long as fan fiction continues to build community, transform works and feed the desire to engage, it can't be bad.

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APPENDIX

ADDITIONAL TITLES

Once I began this project of selecting titles to focus my study on, it was only natural for me to continue with my Jane Austen fan fiction consumption. In fact, it became a bit of an addiction. To include in my study all of the titles I have so far read, not to mention the many more still waiting to be opened on my bookshelf, would have proved to be a hefty task, and so I limited the analysis to the four previously discussed titles. However, it would pain me to conclude this project – that I’ve put so much blood, sweat, and tears into – without at least mentioning the other titles that I’ve enjoyed and some that I have not. And so, if after reading this entire thesis (bless you for that), you find yourself likewise afflicted with Austen-fever, might I suggest the following titles to read, watch, and enjoy.

Recommended:

James, P. D., and Jane Austen. *Death Comes to Pemberley*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011. Print.

Okay, you caught me. This is the very title that first disgusted me and which provided the fuel to ignite this project. I’ll be the first to admit that I judged it prematurely. *Death Comes to Pemberley* is a sequel that picks up a few years after the marriage of Elizabeth and Darcy. They reside at Pemberley with Darcy’s sister, Georgiana, as well as their young son. The Darcy’s are frequently visited by Colonel Fitzwilliam, as well as a young lawyer, Mr. Alveston, who are both interested in courting Georgiana. When Lydia and Wickham attempt to gatecrash, a traveling companion of theirs is found murdered and Wickham is blamed. It is now up to Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth to discover the truth and set an innocent man free, if he is, indeed, innocent. This novel was recently adapted into a Masterpiece Mystery TV mini-series starring Matthew Rhys (from “The Americans”) as Mr. Darcy, and Anna Maxwell Martin (from “The Bletchley Circle”) as Elizabeth.

Connelly, Victoria. *A Weekend with Mr. Darcy*. Naperville: Source Landmark, 2011. Print.

In this Jane Austen homage, Victoria Connelly combines the scholarly and the fanatic in a weekend Jane Austen conference. Dr. Katherine Roberts is a Jane Austen scholar and

lecturer who is asked to speak at a conference, but is also a secretly avid reader of racy Regency romances written by the elusive Lorna Warwick.

The Lizzie Bennet Diaries. Green, Hank, and Bernie Su. YouTube. 2012. Television.

In this award winning YouTube web-series, Lizzie Bennet is a modern-day graduate student completing her Master's Thesis project for a degree in Mass Communication. Her best friend, Charlotte, is her co-producer, and she has frequent guest visits to her video blog from her sisters, Jane and Lydia. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* is cleverly adapted, bringing it seamlessly into the modern world, well-acted, and highly entertaining. Its companion novel, *The Secret Diary of Lizzie Bennet*, was released last year.

Horrocks, Heather. *Pride and Precipitation*. Taylorsville: Word Garden, 2014. Kindle file.

While this novella would never be considered fine literature, it is a quick read, fun, and not at all poorly written. A young meteorologist, Breezy Jones, is snubbed when arrogant new producer, Noah Drake, takes over management of the news station where she works and gives away her job to a less competent, but busty, weathergirl. The community stands behind Breezy, but Noah stands firm in his decision. That is, until he gets to know her.

Lovett, Charlie. *First Impressions: A Novel of Old Books, Unexpected Love, and Jane Austen*. New York: Viking Penguin, 2014. Print.

First Impressions is, in part, a fictionalization of Jane Austen's life. The novel alternates between Jane Austen's time period, where she befriends an elderly reverend and fellow writer called Mr. Mansfield, and the present time, where an Oxford graduate and lover of Jane Austen stumbles upon a scandalous mystery that might reveal a different origin for the novel *Pride and Prejudice*.

Mingle, Pamela. *The Pursuit of Mary Bennet: A Pride and Prejudice Novel*. New York: HarperCollins, 2013. Print.

This spin-off partly retells bits of *Pride and Prejudice* from the perspective of the least favored Bennet daughter, Mary. For example, in the scene of Mr. Collins's visit and proposal to Elizabeth, the reader learns that Mary, in fact, made an effort to catch his attentions for herself. However, this novel's greatest strength is where it veers off after the events of original Austen work and shows Mary's character growth, troubles and triumphs, as she visits her married sisters, falls in love, and finds purpose and fulfillment in an unexpected place.

You've Got Mail. Warner Bros, 1999. Film.

This movie is a timeless chick-flick about a small children's bookstore owner who fears being put out of business by the new, Barnes and Noble-esque Fox Books. Her interactions with Fox, in person, re-establish her poor opinions of him. However her interactions with his online alter ego, unbeknownst to her, show that the two have a lot more in common than they initially think. This film pays homage to *Pride and Prejudice*,

both with a plot that is reminiscent of the novel, indicating its influence, and with the inclusion of the novel as our heroine's favorite book.

Bride & Prejudice. Miramax, 2004. Film.

A modern Bollywood adaption of *Pride and Prejudice*

12 Men of Christmas. 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2009. Film.

A Lifetime Christmas movie adaption about a PR executive that relocates to a small town in Montana and tries to organize a fundraising calendar for the Search and Rescue Squad.

Hale, Shannon. *Austenland: A Novel*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2007. Print.

Austenland is a spin-off, but also homage to Jane Austen. In it, Jane, a single American woman, takes a vacation at an Austen-themed estate in the English countryside. The vacation is supposed to give her a complete Regency experience, complete with the banishment of cell-phones, the wearing of Regency garb, a ball, and hired actors to portray Regency suitors. Jane is, however, swept off her feet by a servant, and her reluctance to play by the rules gets her into trouble. The novel was recently adapted to film and stars Keri Russell. Though the book is enjoyable, the movie is better, and it is one of the few cases where I might recommend skipping the book in favor of the movie.

Heyer, Georgette. *The Reluctant Widow*. Naperville: Source Casablanca, 2008. Print.

(Or any of her other Regency romances). While Ms. Heyer doesn't exactly fall under the Jane Austen fan fiction umbrella, I would like to consider her writings as pastiche. Though she lived and wrote during the middle of the Twentieth Century, her novels take place during the same period as Austen's works and contain similar uses of customs and manners to demonstrate human folly. Her wit is likewise reminiscent of our esteemed Ms. Austen, and since Jane left us with so few novels, Ms. Heyer is generally agreed among readers to be the next best thing. *The Reluctant Widow* is about a governess, the daughter of a disgraced gentleman, who finds herself tricked into marriage with a sickly drunk who dies shortly after their marriage. She is left with his debts, his decrepit estate, and a surprising murder plot to keep her on her toes. The ending is predictable, but the journey to it is a delight.

Proceed With Caution:

Potter, Alexandra. *Me and Mr. Darcy: A Novel*. New York: Ballantine, 2007. Print.

While this novel wasn't exactly bad, it wasn't very good either. It kind of reminded me of the TV miniseries, "Lost in Austen," which is another I'd avoid. These are, of course, personal preferences, but both of the titles I've just mentioned have characters who somewhat travel through time and interact with the characters of *Pride and Prejudice*, and the changes that they do, or might, cause to the original story caused me anxiety. In

the novel, too, the use of the time travel plot device falls short, as the story would have actually been better without it.

Berdoll, Linda. *Darcy & Elizabeth: Nights and Days at Pemberley: Pride and Prejudice Continues*. Naperville: Source Landmark, 2006. Print.

and

--- *The Ruling Passion: Pride and Prejudice Continues*. Austin: Well, There It Is, 2011. Print.

The additional installments of Linda Berdoll's sequels (yes, there are more). I strongly do not recommend these, unless, you know, you are into that sort of thing.