

“Lost in Austen,” Found in Regency “Austen’da Kaybolan,” Regency’de Bulunan¹

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Abstract

The charm of Jane Austen’s writing and the historical context of the Regency era are so appealing that even in the 21st century, Austen texts and contents have continued to be produced through adaptations. These adaptations that function as re-visitations of the Austenian Regency have presented visual realms where we voyeuristically gaze and miss the Austenian past with nostalgic feelings. Austen, as a keen observer and social critic of her time, occupies such a place at the heart of the cultural heritage that she has become the symbol of Englishness whose works are the tools to remind longed notions of perfection and innocence lost after the Industrial Revolution. With the reflection of the romance plot, in these adaptations, the remote space of the Austenian Regency has become a “heterotopia” where past and present coexist simultaneously. In this article, I assert that the ITV mini-series *Lost in Austen* (2008), directed by Dan Zeff as an example of current adaptations, compares the Regency and the contemporary in such a way that it leads the forthcoming 21st-century adaptations to evolve into neo-Austenian phase that evokes a postmodern sense of nostalgia.

Keywords: Adaptation, *Lost in Austen*, neo-Austenian, heterotopia, Regency

“You never look at me from the place which I see you.”
“The Line and the Light,” Jacques Lacan²

The attraction of Jane Austen’s texts and their Regency-era contexts is so culturally irresistible that adaptations with a renewed interest related to her life and works have been produced continuously even now in the third decade of the 21st century. Despite the ongoing productions of Austen texts, one peculiar appropriation is the television series *Lost in Austen* (2008), directed by Dan Zeff, which is inspired by Jane Austen’s novel *Pride and Prejudice* that re-handles the Austenique and the 1990s adaptation of her novel nostalgically. Guy Andrews scripts this re-assessment and juxtaposes a modern world entrapping Amanda Price, a twenty-six-year-old young woman who is fond of reading Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* to escape her daily problems and the world of the Regency era that preserves its confinements that are known via Austen’s reflections in her fictional worlds that she had created. When her favourite character, Elisabeth Bennet, is seen in her bathroom from a door that would lead Amanda to reach the Austenian Regency, the moment of challenge happens for the spectators with the Foucauldian notion of “heterotopia” that leads people to experience different temporalities both at once. Re-focusing on the Austenian world of Regency, in this article, I propose that through this juxtaposition of the two historical sites via heterotopic lapse, *Lost in Austen* leads the

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² Lacan, Jacques. “The Line and the Light.” *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (1973, p. 103). The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis (Le séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Here XI: Les quatre concepts fondam entaux de la psychanalyse [1973]), ed. by Jacques-A lain Miller, tr. by Alan Sheridan, New York: W.W. Norton, 1981.

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ensuing Austen screen adaptations to evolve into neo-Austenian phase evoking a sense of postmodern nostalgia.

Through the continuing adaptations, we celebrate an Austenian past with a nostalgic gaze, utilising a visual reminiscence realm. These re-workings of Austenian, which are about her life, her texts, and her observations of the Regency era, are “appropriations” that appeal to the interests of modern audiences. Primarily through her work, we may evaluate and conceptualise Britain’s late 18th and early 19th century issues, which is why we continuously adapt her works. As an astute observer and a social critic of her times, Austen narrates largely country life in rural parts of England like Hampshire and her contemporary high society’s socialisation between classes via balls in Bath and London. Although Austen is known for reflecting the life of upper-class people, she was from a middle-class family within the rural gentry, which was itself in a time of change. Austen “drew upper-middle class life in the English provinces: the hopes and intrigues and pleasures and disappointments of the limited class which she knew. ... She described them with humour, compassion, occasional tartness, and with inevitable accuracy... Austen concerned herself with the present” (Richardson, 1973, p. 127). In other words, her works appeal to the interests of the people of her time but somehow continue to offer charm or enchantment for contemporary readers and audiences now, perhaps concerning the emerging changes in the class structure of those times. Her writing from 1811 to 1817 is also peculiar to the transition period of the extravagant Prince Regent’s reign between the French Revolution and before the Industrial Revolution, which transformed Britain as a nation into an unrivalled industrial global power. Thus, despite the existence of the lower class people and their tough life conditions, these are perhaps the last times before the ills of industrialisation, and an attraction to Austen’s world might inherently be the ways it can remind us of the good old times of British country life.

Being remembered via the Prince Regent’s excessive preferences for luxury, loose sexual life, fashion, and the upper middle class following him in drinking, gambling, and Dandyism, the Regency Era is a rich resource for a social observer like Austen, who monitors the changes within the society and utilises this for the advancement of the new literary form of the (romance) novel. As an attractive historical site for the contemporary audience, Austen’s world of Regency, deployed concurrently as remote and close in time through the renewed adaptations, leads the audience to find close associations, sometimes with a sense of admiration and longing and sometimes as a perplexing trophy. Since the 21st century, remembering the past is somewhat different, “diagnosed as a socio-cultural condition” (Higson, 2014, p. 123), which stands outside the differentiation between past and present by having a notion of simultaneity. Nevertheless, we cannot be sure if we want to be there by refraining from the present outcomes because we are directing our present concerns to a lost era we can never reach.

Another reason for this modern appeal of the Regency is its being the last period before the turmoil of the transformations within the society experienced through industrialisation, the tremendous metropolitan shifts of population and the expansive imperial project: as Roger Sales suggests, “[a] fantasy of total perfection is projected back onto the Regency period so that it becomes a safe haven that is completely uncontaminated by what are taken to be the vulgarities of the modern world” (1996, p. 20). Hence, using the Regency materials to assess the social ills of contemporary times, like class barriers, economic issues, gender divisions, and racial problems, becomes more accessible for modern perspectives: this is related to the temporal distance provided by the period drama. Thus, for either reason, we turn our faces to the past before the excesses of consuming and exhausting, when craftsmanship, originality, honesty, authenticity, and innocent gender relations were counted as virtuous

societal notions, which is why paradoxically, we proceed with consuming the inconsumable world of Regency with the newly produced Austenian adaptations.

Why do we evoke Austen when we recollect the reminiscences of the Regency era? Is it because of Austen's being accepted as a "thoroughly English" (Sales, 1996, p. 11) Regency figure and being "often used to symbolise a lost innocence" (p. 14) of the good old times, reminding us of the behaviours, social codes and identity of the rural spheres? This innocence might also be related to gender norms and the relations within close social circles. Through the courtships within the polite society, genteel words, and treatments of men towards women, women's waiting for the appropriate time for their responses about a possible match may indicate that "... modern Regency romances also represent a sexually innocent society" (p.14). This innocence is valid for the adaptations made before the 21st century, within which the physical intimacies of the protagonists are still not shown to maintain fidelity to Austen's texts. Within a close social circle, together with the respectable behaviours of the members within a stabilised small domestic world, is the sphere created by Austen. However, somehow, it also reminds us of the luxuriousness of the Regency (especially with the visual images of the television and cinema adaptations). Hence, these continuous Austen adaptations, on the one hand, may be accepted as "an effort to capitalise on people's desires for a stable, recognisable world – a cultured world – such as we associate with Austen, whose world was guided by rules for proper conduct and social structure determining people's relations..." (Bowles, 2003, p. 23). On the other hand, visually and romantically speaking, this remote land of charm sparks off a heterotopic space for the audience to simultaneously encounter the lost (past) and found (present). As Andrew Higson claims, these adaptations: "articulate a nostalgic and conservative celebration of the values and lifestyles of the privileged classes [and they imagine] an England that no longer existed ... as something fondly remembered and desirable" (2003, p. 12). Perhaps this is because of the desire to escape from the entanglements of the intertwined lives and relations of modern times in favour of the charms of a more simplified existence focused on individuals, families, and communities in which identity is more solid and less diffuse.

Nonetheless, despite the so-called coherence of the world that Austen reminds us of Englishness, as a social observer, in her works, she maintains her ironical tone about the English society of those times and her perception of the power mechanisms of society related to money. Her scrutinisation of the culture around her was meaningful because she had written at such a time that "England's social structure was changing in response to pressures from various historical factors, including the Industrial Revolution, developments within capitalism, and the French Revolution followed by the Napoleonic Wars" (Margolis, 2003, p. 35). For the followers of Austen, her work means tranquillity, kindness, familiarity and warmth, which is why "[t]o Janeites... her novels evoked a world before history blew up before manners were archaic" (Johnson, 2000, p. 33). The pastness of what she represents is not accepted as "old-fashioned" for the modern perceptions instead they prefer to continue reading her work, watching the innovations that the adaptations bring, visit the places she lived; they lost themselves in Austen. What is more, her collocutors are from different cultures, nations, times and those who are literate or fond of popular culture, which is why Austenmania incrementally continues: "... the cultural Jane Austen has been a crossover phenomenon and acknowledging that Austenmania straddles the divides between high and low culture, and between the canon and the cineplex can be humbling experiences" (Lynch, 2000, p. 5). We somehow insert Austenian Regency in our present time, as Reinhart Koselleck explains about situating the human beings over time by suggesting 'space of experience' as a category: "Experience is present past, whose events

have been incorporated and could be remembered” (qtd. in Boym, 2001, p. 10) and adaptations are the very entities that embrace this “present past.” In other words, through “space of experience,” we insert the past into the present and reach co-instantaneity.

The ambiguous classification of Austen’s works

Although Jane Austen was writing in the early 19th century, her works, which may be accepted as romances, are not categorised as a part of Romantic literature, nor are they - despite the inclination to position them otherwise- Victorian due to the historiographic differences between the two eras. Instead, Austen’s oeuvre is the representation of the fluctuation between the “dynamic, commercially expanding society” and the “vague notions of the Regency times” (Sales, 1996, p. xvi). Her minute observations depict life, characters, and circumstances accurately. However, this mode of realism is unique in its handling of the subject matters, variety of characters and being true to daily life:

In describing her heroines, or in self-consciously eschewing the full-blown tragic melodrama of Gothic or the seduction plot, Austen’s fiction signals its commitment to a new realism. But the imperative of the ending re-establishes fictionality. Austenian realism comes in the contradictory, and some would argue inherently conservative, form of comedy. (Jones, 2015, pp. 285-6)

When her ironical tone about society’s expectations of the two sexes and her free indirect narrative voice sometimes a clash between the rationality and genuine emotions of the characters, her novels become closer to “realist romance” (2015, p. 294), which is why, even though the tendency is to categorise Austen’s writing as works of “romance” about the emotional sides of her heroines, they are not solely about romance. Austen texts, classified as gothic, domestic, or courtship novels, become entities beyond romance but also has an affinity to the label regarding their “suffering heroines, along with their sailor brothers and lovers, to their safe harbor – that is, to the traditional happy marriage of the romantic and comic denouement” (Ross, 1991, p. 168). Even if her novels reflect the realities of her times, since it is inevitable to abstain from the romantic plot from a feminine perspective, romance is somehow associated with her work.

Austen’s work with several attributions is one thing, but romance as a novelistic genre is also a tricky entity in its essence since its meaning has changed with time. Romance as a fantasy quest genre presents the ideal object of attainment in terms of spiritual and material fulfilment, and the Regency romances, in particular, inevitably delve into the impossibility of accurately showing the past. An anachronistic attitude paves the way to create something new, so we recognise and misrecognise the past presented in romances all at once. In a way, it combines the real and the fantasy at the same time, and it achieves this duality by carrying the essentialist generic conventions and providing alternative dimensions by fantasising about the expected notions of life and by “remak[ing] the world in the image of desire” (Beer, 1970, p. 79). Primarily through the adapted versions of Austen’s novels, we associate them with Regency romances, but “[r]omance makes us in a word uncomfortable because we are never quite sure what romance may mean. Romance seems in excess of itself, stepping beyond the times which have always limited its definition” (Elam, 1992, p. 7). In romance novels, the conventions offered are known, and, interestingly, present-day readers continue to long for those relations, conflicts, and the expected happy endings: “In a romance novel, we know that, whatever the odds against them, the hero and heroine will come together in the end and live happily ever after ... So why read a novel when we already know how it is going to end? Because it is the process, not the conclusion, that we are reading for” (Krentz, 1992, p. 153). Likewise, the expected outcome in the adaptations of Austen novels is the heroine’s struggles to reach a happy ending with the hero, who both

undergo a transformation process. Why are romance readers and viewers stiff in expecting specific codes? Is it because of the inherent nature of the genre? Are there also particular criteria for the romance audiences as well? If "[g]enres are essentially contracts between a writer and his readers" (1975, p. 135), as Frederick Jameson claims, then there are some expected reactions from the readers and the audience as well. Lisa Fletcher explains this requirement inspired by Beer: "[I]n order to enjoy reading romance, in order to read it properly, we must 'surrender' to its demands by accepting first and foremost the fictional world it compels us to inhabit..." (2016, p. 14).

Austen-world adaptations that include Regency-era presentations may mean juxtaposing an alternative romantic world to the present for the contemporary audience. With these romances, "[t]hrough the lens of nostalgia, the past can pose a significant challenge to the present. This sense of romance [is seen] as an alternative to contemporary reality" (Fuchs, 2004, p. 7). With this kind of nostalgic appeal, the remoteness of time has become a resourceful notion in creating alternate worlds within the sphere of romance by maintaining the ambivalence of the past and present fluctuation, swinging among the gaps by preserving the distance from the realities. Whereas in the postmodern era, we have a different conceptualisation of nostalgia since we are conscious of the "textuality of history and the historicity of texts" (Montrose, 1992, p. 410). Namely, we are aware of the embeddedness of the textualised materials within the socio-political spheres and the fictionalisation of the historical sources, which is why what we long for in the past is no longer maintained by the juxtaposition between the so-called good old times and the negatively perceived present.

Although a concept of 'now' is necessary to determine a distinction between what follows and what has come before (what is post and what is pre) at the same moment such a 'now' is always vanishing. It is always 'both too late and too soon for grasping something like an identifiable 'now.' Temporality as presence is always deferred (as either coming or going) by the excesses of temporality itself. (Elam, 1992, p. 11)

We are also conscious of the inherent "belatedness" of the past, and romance as a sphere of fantasy paves the way for acclaiming that kind of indistinctness of the historical material inserted into the present. Regency-era romances pave the way to blur the lines by adding love and desire at the heart of their plots; in this way, while glimpsing the glamorous world of Regency, temporality simultaneously "vanishes." This kind of time perception creates such an effect on the audience that they wait for the expected moment as the outcomes of the struggles they have followed both with a nostalgic feeling and perhaps just for escapism. As Michel Foucault asserts: "The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. ... Our epoch is one in which space takes for us the form of relations among sites" (1986, pp. 22-3). That means we are into that kind of losing and longing for the past, remembering and repositioning the past by fantasising, fictionalising and adapting the past as the present.

Both the dual temporality and the longing for the past are achieved by the romance genre in the costume dramas that are inspired by Austen's oeuvre. When the romantic side of romances is concerned, it is related to the notion of "love." Loving somebody is a timeless, placeless, and irrevocable feeling, simultaneously complex and multi-dimensional, including the opposites of uncompromising. Perhaps this is why the romance genre maintains popularity and is beyond temporalities like a magical mirror. As Henri de Montherlant asserts: "We like someone *because* ... we love someone *although*" (Soble, 1990, p. 163). The question is: "What these romance narratives conceal/ reveal about romantic

love itself? Why is love experienced ‘as a story’ and why do we need to keep telling it?” (Pearce, 2007, p. 13). Still, the question is relevant: do we want to hear the phrase “I love you” from the idealised hero’s mouth and identify ourselves with the heroine in return, perhaps to escape or refrain from the everyday monotony or realities? In other words, despite the “banality” of the phrase, it is the most desired thing “we long to hear” (Fletcher, 2016, pp. 19, 76). Women do not read romances only to reach a compromise with the expectations of society; most probably, Austen did not aim to surrender to the norms. “To say that Austen’s novels are intelligent love stories is to risk bathos; however, ... they are intelligent about love as well as being about ‘intelligent love’” (Dow, Gillian and Hanson, 2012, p. 47), which is why we continue to consume her works that include love stories within and against the social confinements. If that is the case, we may deduce that romances provide “... a vision of another society than that of rationality. Romances depict a utopia of intimacy in which closeness and love are not identical with weakness and loss of self but with force and true self-esteem” (Larsson, 1994, p. 284). The charm of the romance stems from its own innately unique world, as Gillian Beer succinctly puts it: “The romance is essentially subjective. ... We have to depend entirely on the narrator of the romance: he remakes the rules of what is possible, what impossible. Our enjoyment depends on our willing surrender to his power. We are transported” (1970, p. 8).

Depiction of love that leads the characters and the readers to an unknown world of desires with the subjective path of the writer, romance creates an alternate world to the restricted sphere of reality and present. Also, we tend to relate romance immediately to the feminine sphere or “feminised love” (Giddens, 1992, p. 43); what is more, we presume that “[w]omen want love, men want sex!” (1992, p. 66). Yet, as a timeless and eternal essentialist requirement, men also fall in love, and women want sexual fulfilment. Despite the burial of that kind of intermingled notion of love and sex in the romance tradition, because of the contemporary romance novels and recent adaptations of Austen and Regency romances, seeking sexual pleasure as a part of love and relations is inserted into the genre. Contemporary romance adaptations are affected by the cultural productions that handled the romance genre previously. Harlequin³ romances, for instance, provide sole entertainment for women who follow the heroine who “turns against her own better self, the part of her which feels anger at men” (Modleski, 1982, p. 14). Within these Harlequinised versions of the female fantasy world, it is questioned why men ignore some necessities of the relations expected by women: “According to popular romances, it is possible really to be taken care of and to achieve that state of self-transcendence and self-forgetfulness promised by the ideology of love” (1982, p. 37). In Harlequin romances and the Mills and Boon as the English version of these contemporary romances, the hero treats the heroine harshly, and the heroine rejects him and her true desires; and then somehow,

³ “When Mary Bonnycastle noticed the popularity of their reprints of the romance novels of British publisher Mills and Boon, she suggested that Harlequin focus on romances alone. Her idea was so successful that by 1971 Harlequin had bought Mills and Boon and begun to amass its own stable of writers to churn out romances... In the 1970s, Larry Heisey, a marketing specialist ... developed the Harlequin Presents series with uniform trademark covers, differing only by the particular title, author, and racy cover art. Further, he marketed the books in the places where women already shopped: the grocery store, the drug store, and the variety store... In the years following the start of the women’s liberation movement, social critics had predicted the death of the pulp romance novel... The critics turned out to be wrong... By the 1990s, it had become the world’s largest publisher of romance fiction, releasing over 60 new titles per month and selling over 165 million books per year, in 23 languages and in over 100 countries.”

(<https://www.encyclopedia.com/media/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/harlequin-romances>).

through the voyage to find her own self, she also finds a way out, and they reach reconciliation. Both the hero and the heroine are doomed to a transformation process to achieve happiness, love and marriage; and it is proven in this adventure that while the heroine is powerful, the hero is vulnerable. It has been accepted that Harlequin and Mills and Boon novels are known as non-qualified novels compared to Austen books since “... they are mass-produced, formulaic, limited in scope, accepting of a patriarchal status quo, overly concerned with sex, almost exclusively concerned with heterosexual sex, an appealing only to an unintelligent readership incapable of appreciating better writing” (Margolis, 2003, p. 24). Yet, the familiarity of the Austen oeuvre’s settings, relations, and dialogues led the modern audience to follow the attractive sides of contemporary romances, which might be inspired by Harlequin or Mills and Boon. If we admit that there exists a sense of “romance nostalgia,” it is apt to claim that “(n)ostalgia (from nostos – return home, and algia – longing) is a longing for a home that no longer exists or has ever existed. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one’s own fantasy” (Boym, 2001, p. xiii). Throughout the generic voyage of romances, we have accompanied the fantasy worlds presented, and by adapting and re-adapting them, we keep our nostalgia for romances.

1990s Austen Adaptations

The continuous adaptations of Austenian romance, irrespective of culture, time, or space differences, have not been left deploying this good old story of the desire of woman and man to be united and live happily ever after. Thus, we long for the Austenian kind of Regency romances, which is why we want to continue fantasising about it. These fantasies are aptly satisfied via visual sensations created by the adapted versions of Austen texts: *Clueless* (1995), *Bridget Jones’s Diary* (2001), *Bride and Prejudice* (2004), *Kocan Kadar Konuş (Husband Factor)* (2015), *Pride, Prejudice and Zombies* (2016), are just some of the examples that both hint at Austenian world of Regency and deviate from the conventional by either playing with the generic conventions or applying the romance formula to different cultural landscapes. For J. C. Smith, “The romance heroine not only acts and wins, she discovers a new sense of self, a new sense of what it means to be female as she struggles through her story, and so does the romance reader as she reads it” (Crusie, 1998, n.p). Perhaps this struggle to gain a new sense of identity without sacrificing love is one of the indispensables of the audience’s preference for romances. Since Austen romances concisely provide this transformation story within the known domain of Regency, her work continues to appeal to the tastes of the current audience.

Interestingly, in the 1990s, several Austen adaptations in television and cinema were similar to what we have now in the cultural sphere. The 1990s re-visiting of Jane Austen novels is a known cultural adaptation trend. As Austen text adaptations or re-visiting, there were many productions: *Pride and Prejudice* (1995), *Persuasion* (1995), *Sense and Sensibility* (1995), *Clueless* (1995), *Emma* (1996), *Mansfield Park* (1999) and *Bridget Jones’s Diary* (1997-8). It seems there is again an enthusiasm to set forth the Austen world by reminding the sparkling sides of the Regency era. We inevitably remember the reminiscences of 1990s adaptations as well. The question is whether we have a nostalgic longing for the world of Austen or the 1990s adaptations of Austen, which seem more innocent compared to the current adaptations of the 21st century. As if every twenty or thirty years, we have a fracture in the time-lapse and re-exhibit the Austenian Regency romances. The renewed adaptations make sense because of our ambivalent feelings towards the Austenian Regency: “A cinematic image of nostalgia is a double exposure, or a superimposition of two images – of home and abroad, past and present, dream and everyday life. The moment we try to force it into a single image, it breaks the frame or burns

the surface" (Boym, 2001, p. xiv). Another point is whether the Regency or the 90ies are familiar to the contemporary audience is a question to be evaluated. In the 1990s, some critics believed that "Hollywood has 'harlequinized' Jane Austen" as a result of a retro-nostalgic" (Bowles, 2003, p. 15) impulse. In a way, those adaptations deviate from the classical adaptations, which tried to follow the Austen texts strictly. Andrew Davies, who adapted Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* in 1995 to BBC as a TV series, claims that adapting Austen's texts has its own boundaries:

'You can't change the actual story'... [Yet,] the scriptwriter must take 'a certain amount of liberty,' justifying this presumption as filling in 'little gaps,' especially where there are 'hidden scenes ... that Austen did not get around to writing herself. Since the film must be coherent to communicate successfully with a mass audience, improvising with the original materials is required.' (Macdonald and Macdonald, 2003, p. 5)

Thus, these adapted versions both trace the Austen texts and, in a way, transform them to the audience's expectations. Despite the existence of other productions and adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice*, Andrew Davies, who with his adaptation paved the way to a concept called "Darcymania" together with Colin Firth's acting that hinted at erotic feelings of sexual desire for female spectators, is the one which became an unforgettable phenomenon. As Davies comments:

We wanted lots of energy in the show, and the book justifies it, because Elizabeth is always running about and going on long country walks and getting all flushed and sweaty and getting the bottom of her petticoat muddy, which seems to be quite a turn-on for Darcy. So we thought, let's make it as physical as we can without being ridiculous about it. Let's remind the audience that this isn't just a social comedy – it's about desire and young people. (Barber, 2015, n.p.)

Together with Davies' adaptation, the question is: did the other adaptations in the '90s share several common points in their depictions of the source material? "Austen has been marketed as, at once, sexually restrained and sexually explicit, safely in the past and less safely in the present" (North, 1999, p. 40). One way or another, while adapting, "the past' is mobilized so that the meanings presented by the literary film adaptation for its contemporary audience are *rehistoricized*" (Sonnet, 1999, p. 54). As Higson asked: "Was there a good reason for so many Austen adaptations appearing at the same time? Several commentators argued that there was. It was a response to the loss of genuine social values, argued some, a response to the collapse of a caring, ordered society, a search for a more ethical stance in an increasingly unethical world" (2004, p. 38). Perhaps, in those times, they longed for the lost authenticity of romantic feelings and natural relations. Like gazing at one's image from a mirror, nearly after 30 years, we again have a similar tendency to re-create the Austenique. This time, we also remember the 90s.

Apart from being the re-presentations of the Austen world within which strict social codes existed for men and women, these adaptations were the more daring versions to invoke feelings of sexuality via implied eroticism. The core attributions of these adaptations were the acting of attractive and charming actors and actresses, along with good music, lightning and setting combined with the camera's movements, which regulate the viewers' gazes. The actors and actresses courageously inhabit the Austenian world via their own characteristics while portraying Austenique, including their charm and charisma. These productions, including famous names like Jennifer Ehle, Emma Thompson, Kate Winslet, Colin Firth, Hugh Grant and especially Andrew Davies' 1990s adaptations, became the standard by which Austen adaptations in the cultural sphere were judged. In the 1995 adaptation of

Austen's novel *Sense and Sensibility*, directed by Ang Lee with Emma Thompson as the scriptwriter,

[u]nlike many Jane Austen adaptations to the screen, the actors do not appear to be carrying the posthumous weight of the great Jane Austen... Sedately attired, her body language tightly controlled, Emma Thompson communicates the quiet burden of sense and restraint as effectively as Kate Winslet, with her bouncing curls, lush clothing, pastel shades, dramatic intonations, and rippling emotion, embodies sensibility... We get Jane Austen's characters directly living and breathing. (Preston, 2003, pp. 12-3)

Despite the depiction of the process of love affairs deciphered via inevitable struggles within the deployment of the romance genre in Austen novels, the unavoidable part of romantic love, physical intimacy, is absent as known. Still, the generic success of all these romance adaptations is that they are somehow able to visualise the un-represented sexual and erotic tension on screen.

As many film theorists would contend, film spectatorship is always a matter of visual pleasure – regardless of genre or narrative (Mulvey 1975). The historical costume adaptation, then, offers a distinctive organization of visual pleasure in which 'spectacular excess' of 'circumambiance' functions to incite visual pleasure through sensory overload. (Sonnet, 1999, p. 57)

In other words, because of not showing the explicit sexual intimacy scenes, the visual pleasure is maintained by the conventional depictions of "clothing, landscape, piano playing, letter-writing and conversation with a dispersed and diffuse form of sexuality" (1999, p. 57). The "repressed" arousals of sexuality on the side of the audience are achieved "through an over-investment in the 'look,' in gestures, fleeting glances, failed speech, clamped emotions and frustrated intentions" (1999, p. 57). With 90s adaptations, the scenes of erotic feelings are inserted, whereas, in 21st-century adaptations, we begin to see more daring *mise en scènes* that may evoke sexual desires. What is more, the repressed feelings that were once suppressed are ironically implied by the gazes of the actresses breaking the fourth wall convention.

Historical accuracy?

In the TV series *Lost in Austen*, Amanda Price's adventure to pass from the current London, which is full of dissatisfaction for her, appears a heterotopic escape space to Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice*. But this *Pride and Prejudice* is portrayed as a tribute to the 1995 BBC adaptation of Austen's novel. We witness some implications to that previous adaptation, even the music is the same. In this way, the presentist frame narrative recalls another cultural work using intertextual references, including some deviations that the latter adaptation employs, like portraying Amanda reading and dreaming about the world of *Pride and Prejudice* and imagining Colin Firth's version of Darcy, yet despite her role in the series turns out to be a new portrayal of Elizabeth Bennet, we have soon seen that there is another Elizabeth who will stay in the present day London. As John Wiltshire explains about adaptations of Austen: "The later films derive as much from the earlier films as they do from the novels: they are hybrid, or even miscegenated works, which derive only in part from the cinematic Austen" (2001, p. 170). The heterotopia that leads the exchange of Amanda and Elizabeth into each other's worlds simultaneously involves comparing and juxtaposing the contemporary and the Regency at first with Amanda's encounters. While we lose the trace of Elizabeth, Amanda becomes the postmodern heroine with romance nostalgia – especially for Darcy and Elizabeth's love.

We, as modern-day audiences, sympathise with Amanda's desire to lose herself in the *Pride and Prejudice* world because we are also missing those kinds of relations, including distance, respect and kindness; and thanks to the postmodern space that *Lost in Austen* exhibits, we experience a sense of being "beyond times." As Higson explains postmodern nostalgia: "The modern, temporal version of nostalgia is founded on the unattainable distance between the past and the present; the post-modern, atemporal version erases this sense of distance... for post-modern nostalgics, the irrecoverable is now attainable, the difference between past and present flattened out" (Higson, 2014, p. 1). The spectators are lucky to watch Amanda's story because their nostalgia could be both for the Regency and 90s adaptations of Austen's world, perhaps Amanda's, or even both. Since this current remembering is "atemporal," the past is no longer lost or found but represented simultaneously, as seen from the heterotopic passage in Amanda's bathroom. Since "[h]opeless longing for a lost past is replaced by celebration of the styles of the past which are still accessible today and eminently collectable and consumable" (Higson, 2014, p.126) in postmodernity, we can make sense of Amanda's passage into the fantasy world of *Pride and Prejudice* due to our own demand of visual satisfaction regarding romance and nostalgia and curiosity about Austen's world of Regency where we imagine falling in love with Colin Firth or Hugh Grant acting as Mr Darcy or Edward Ferrars. "The tension between two different times, and two sets of values and sentiments, seems then to have been released: one may not actually *inhabit* the past, but the culture of pastness is now displayed" (2014, p. 128). This heterotopic voyage is achieved via the fantasy world of romance, which blends reality and fantasy and postmodern nostalgia that merges the past and the present that embrace each other through "atemporality."

Despite the ongoing disputes about depicting the period works proper to the era they represent, they mostly have anachronistic presentations of setting, linguistic usage, and even body types and music. While *Lost in Austen* shows this by inserting the modern into the Regency and vice versa, the recent adaptations use the modernisation tools used in adaptations more explicitly. Nonetheless, it may not be wrong to say that *Lost in Austen* is a good example, after which we have seen the kind of postmodern techniques that emphasise presentism and self-conscious narrations more often. Anne Eliot of *Persuasion* (2022), acted by Dakota Johnson anachronistically, says: "We're worse than exes, we're friends."⁴ Nonetheless, these presentist usages are perhaps necessary for the renewal of the lost spheres of the past. Since we can never represent the past thoroughly, or in other words, "we can never fully come to terms with the past" (Elam, 1992, p. 15), we re-position and re-visualise the past to remember the faded ties that create a nostalgic reminder of our futile effort to re-insert what is lost. We know that even Austen was criticised by some critics for not depicting severe historical, political, or economic issues of her time, like the consequence of the Napoleonic wars or slave trades. Nevertheless, her novels are unique because they "suggest an understanding of the world, in terms of people's connections with each other. Most if not all of those connections are regulated by economic factors" (Margolis, 2003, p. 35). Yet, despite her implicitly evoking broader historical realities about politics, since her honesty about the social entanglements provoked the questioning about the function of class, gender, and race in society, her work is still valid as a mirror to show the blurred lines of social restrictions of Regency that remind us of our own. What makes Austen world inspiring is the harmonious complacency of the world that she had created: "In Austen's novels, domestic settings and the romantic entanglements of her principal protagonists become vehicles for the expression of values associated with good behaviour

⁴ <https://janeausten.co.uk/blogs/film-reviews-media-reviews/persuasion-2022-the-austen-blog-review>

and the promotion of happiness among members of intimate communities... 'decency, civility and common sense will be awarded'" (Margolis, 2003, p. 37). What is more, her novels create such "a world in which the individual and society are ultimately in harmony, in which they both share the same decent values, and in which the needs and desires of one are satisfied by the other" (Konigsberg, 1985, p. 214). Perhaps that kind of anachronism inspired by Austen better fits in the postmodern revisualisations that do not forget the previous adaptations and the novel itself. But the point is that we no longer demand the notion of fidelity to Austen's text. Instead, we remember several versions of adaptations that recreate Regency with a sense of "atemporal" and simultaneously provided material, together with the self-reflexive acting and narrative styles of the contemporary adaptations, we continue to celebrate the enigmatic Austenian charm.

Since the world Austen created handles the social interactions of the society she depicts, primarily via man and woman relations, inevitably, the issues of romance and gender become forefront. Yet, she still appeals to the modern tastes of the readers and audiences in her timeless handling of these issues. "There is room enough in the novels to swing the sword either way, cutting down male arrogance, duplicity, and outright chauvinism on one stroke yet also deftly drawing blood in the satire of women's ways and women's culture when the sword turns back" (Macdonald and Macdonald, 2003, p. 2). She portrays her male and female characters and traces the transformation processes of her characters in such a way that "[h]er narrative sophistication and irony suggested a stylistic compatibility between high literature and popular fiction..." (Benedict, 2000, p. 64), which is why the successful adaptations that may capture this essence proceed in the adaptation milieu.

***Lost in Austen* as an "Appropriation"**

It is still a relevant question to investigate what appealing sides Austen texts have for the adaptation to screen. One aspect would be that the stories in her novels emerge from the inner conflicts of a heroine who then shows the life and interactions of the members of the society in which she lives. While the readers witness the public scenes, they also have the chance to follow the inner turmoil the characters have sensation-wise and how they reflect them to others. These contradictive inner/outer intermingling regarding the characters' psychology become the intriguing aspect of the narrative, including the ironies that the narrator expresses –mostly used as internal monologues expressed to the spectators– which are also the fascinating features of these adaptations. Visual scenery and fascinating music ornamented with good figures of dancing or walking and chatting with others, thinking about the realities of themselves and other members of society, make up the other layers of that kind of romance. In this way, the audience accepts Austen adaptations as unique works via the visual pleasure obtained by the Regency era settings and the actors' costumes, together with the witty dialogues, which is the fundamental side of her work appropriated to the scene as a new medium. Generally speaking, despite the tendency to compare the source and the adapted production, since the adaptations from literary texts are creative entities themselves, following the criteria of fidelity is a futile effort since "the movement from literature to film is a translation from one medium to another, and, as with all translations, something is lost, and something gained" (Macdonald and Macdonald, 2003, p. 3). These re-handlings of the source materials contribute by inserting new dimensions, evaluations, and depictions into the new product. For instance, we may call *Lost in Austen* an "appropriation." As Julie Sanders explains, it "affects a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain... it may still require the intellectual juxtaposition of (at least) one text against another that we have suggested is central to the reading and spectating experience of adaptations" (2006, p. 26). This re-freshened attribution is necessary for the adaptation process because

Austen's times are unknown, and the time she is reflecting in her novels has passed. Still, despite the renovations, in one way or another, the filmmakers benefit from the conventional visioning that may remind the Regency times of Austen texts. Jane Austen's adaptations are intertextually new texts that advert to other texts that were previously created. The producers, directors, and scriptwriters re-create Austen texts by adapting them to make the subject matter eligible for the modern audience due to the remoteness of the period they represent.

21st-century adaptations use these adaptation techniques more explicitly in a self-reflexive way. In the British television series *Lost in Austen* (2008), Amanda says: "I'm having a bit of a postmodern moment."⁵ The Netflix adaptation of *Persuasion* (2022), directed by Carrie Cracknell, reveals a self-conscious text with Anna facing the audience and commenting about the traditional expectancies of society with presentist claims; and her contemporary hairstyle indicates that the movie handles the Austen material with a 21st-century consciousness. Not only the form but also the thematic depictions begin to change in the 21st-century adaptations. A mixed-race girl from the West Indies named Georgiana Lambe inherited a good fortune, and Arthur Parker declares his feelings for Lord Harry Montrose as a gay in the TV series *Sanditon* (2029-2023) created by Andrew Davies. There is also a possibility of incestuous relation between Sir Edward Denham and his step-sister Esther Denham, who kissed each other in *Sanditon*. Caroline Bingley in *Lost in Austen* is a lesbian character. Given these examples, can we qualify these works as "neo-Austenian," which re-interpret Austenian by mimicking her style simultaneously. The contributions of these works signify an "ironic coexistence of temporalities" (Elam, 1992, p. 13) by re-handling the Austen world, through which we have both continued to long for the lost in Austen Regency and trace in the contemporary via romance.

Regency romances are also apt for creating spheres for nostalgic longing on the side of the audience as Sarah Cardwell explains that these kinds of historical works "may design a mise en scène and a soundscape that can signify pastness but still seem modern, and therefore within reach, attainable to the nostalgic gaze" (2002, pp. 142-9). In modern adaptations, we can follow different acting styles and directorial methods blended with the visual material through which the Austen world is reminded, but every time in a freshened way, which is why these newly re-created versions may be regarded as "neo-Austenian" works. In that respect, *Lost in Austen* provides both this "modern pastness" that Cardwell mentions, and since it has a contemporary framework presented by Amanda's London, it directs the audience to a feeling of postmodern nostalgia through which they experience familiarity and unfamiliarity accordingly.

At the beginning of the series *Lost in Austen*, Amanda, with modern clothes, thinks that even a contemporary woman would be happier living in Regency London when she passes to Bennet's house (in Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice*) and wanders around all the other scenes. This passage from the modern to the Austenian Regency represents the voyeuristic experience of the modern-day audience in gazing at the era which is unknown but desired and also in following how the predecessor adaptations had functioned in the cultural landscape. At first, we, as the spectators, begin to perceive what is happening to Amanda in her daily life. While witnessing this, she begins to reveal her inner struggles (as we may expect to have that kind of inner turmoil from an Austen heroine, too), directing her un-lived desires and romantic appeals to the act of reading *Pride and Prejudice*, preferring it to going out or being with her boyfriend who looks quite disinterested and unromantic in his

⁵ <https://obstinateheadstronggirl.wordpress.com/im-having-a-bit-of-a-postmodern-moment-lost-in-austen/>

marriage proposal. Similar to the concerns of the Regency era mothers, we see Amanda's mother worrying about her being lonely in the future, saying: "I hope they help you on with your coat when you are 70," when Amanda insists on her desire to have a romantic affair: "I'm not hung up about Darcy. I do not sit at home with the pause button on Colin Firth in clingy pants, okay? I love the love story. I love Elizabeth. I love the manners and language and the courtesy. It's become part of who I am and what I want. I'm saying that I have standards."⁶ In this dialogue, with the hints of postmodern nostalgia, the spectators both realise that even in 21st-century modern London, a mother may be worried about her daughter's emotional ties with a possible suitor, as in the case of Elizabeth's mother in the Austenian world of Regency and the foreshadowing about the "atemporality" of the heterotopic journey of Amanda to the world which she passionately desires to be. As one might expect, this transition and the fulfilment of this universal and timeless desire is carried out by the romance of Austen.

Geoffrey Wagner identifies three types of adaptations as "transposition," "commentary," and "analogy," among which "analogy" is the one within which, for instance, "a film that shifts the action of the fiction forward in time or otherwise changes its essential context; analogy goes further than shifting a scene or playing with the end, and must transplant the whole scenario so that little of the original is identifiable" (1975, p. 223). In other words, Guy Andrews appropriates *Lost in Austen* by going back and forth in time, from contemporary to Regency, yet despite the series hinting at providing the mainstems of the *Pride and Prejudice* plot, the sole aim is not re-adapting it; instead, both with the frame narrative of the 21st century and the reminiscences of the 1995 BBC production of *Pride and Prejudice*, the series is able to achieve its originality from a postmodern perspective.

Amanda can pass to the place she dreams of because she is a conscious reader of Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice*, and somehow, she becomes the protagonist of her life story. She is the only person who could pass from the heterotopic portal to the Regency. The portal is in her bathroom, and thanks to Amanda, she and Elizabeth interchangeably pass from it: "Heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable... To get in one must have a certain permission and make certain gestures" (Foucault, 1986, p. 26). Through this kind of heterotopia, like the heroines of Austen, who achieve a sense of transformation via self-realisation, Amanda reaches a point of reconciliation between her dreams and reality. When she first becomes involved in the Bennet family's daily routines, everything seems strange both to Amanda and to the viewers: while the English they use, their politeness, the costumes they wear, and the hairstyles shock her, she also finds similarities with these people regarding humane interactions and family matters. Yet, the series is not devoid of postmodern playfulness: When Jane becomes ill and has to stay at Bingley's house, she expresses that she has given her a "paracetamol" for her illness or when she tries to avoid Bingley's being affected by her (and knows that this would not be the case for the development of the plot of the novel which is indeed an indication of the self-consciousness of the series), she declares to him that she is a "lesbian." These are some of the intriguing presentist signs that show how the series will proceed with a postmodern outlook.

The fragmented postmodern world that creates an effect of entrapment of meaninglessness is also felt even in the beginning when Amanda first "discover[s] Lydia Bennet in bed alongside her, ... immediately assum[ing] that she has been part of a reality TV trick and that the producer will want some kind of sexual action from the two women. 'What are you

⁶ "Lost in Austen Quotes." Quotes.net. STANDS4 LLC, 2024. Web. 17 Jan. 2024. <https://www.quotes.net/mquote/788257>

after, guys?’ she asks the invisible cameras she assumes are hidden in the room” (Ridou, 2010, p. 129). This “Truman Show-like”⁷ scene that involves Amanda’s being a part of postmodernity reveals how 21st-century readers/ audiences cannot refrain from the artificiality that the technological developments led individuals to experience, which is why, it becomes very challenging for her to adapt herself to the conditions, feelings, manners and attitudes of the Regency world. Still, as an Austen fan, at least she is knowledgeable about the Austenian Regency, especially *Pride and Prejudice*.

The juxtaposed Regency world that is shown in the series is not the ultimate reflection of Austen’s representation nor the 1995 *Pride and Prejudice* version; instead, it fragmentedly displays specific settings like: “Jane’s enforced stay at Netherfield and Miss Bingley’s bitchery; the Netherfield ball; Mr. Collins’ proposals; the entertainments at Rosings; the visit to Pemberley; the scandalous elopement; and the ultimatum of Lady Catherine ... Just not exactly as you remember them” (Starke, 2009, p. 2). The comparison of the two worlds with some seemingly minute details exemplified by objects like the absence of a toothbrush, her use of lipstick or cellphone, her hairstyle and clothes and also her manners like kissing Bingley, and Amanda expressing: “[after Mr. Darcy emerges from the water] I am having a bit of a strange post-modern moment here,”⁸ all serve to create a playful effect on the audience who are in search for the authentic love Amanda possibly may have. Yet, soon enough, it will be delivered that despite being the space of fantasy for Amanda, the Regency era is not so easy to go on with your life, it includes lots of hardships: like the difficulties of daily life, the absence of electricity, plumbing, and sanitary facilities, including horse-drawn carriages and time-consuming letter writing.

In addition, although Amanda idealises the Austenian Regency, she realises the fact that social codes and gender norms are not easy to compete with. For instance, despite their love, Darcy says that he cannot marry her since she is not a virgin. This hindrance is related to her own history – another condition of the modern times she is living. Amanda fails to find a way out to get rid of this insurmountable abyss. Despite the explicit difference between the two historical eras, since heterotopias “have a function in relation to all the space that remains,” in the series, the Regency, the places, and relations Amanda experiences are also related to her modern life and self. When she passes from the portal, the fantasy world of Regency becomes her reality and the real contemporariness of the current times becomes synchronically blurred. We understand this blurriness, especially when Amanda chooses to be with Darcy in the Regency period as a sign of heterotopia.

This function unfolds between two extreme poles. Either their role is to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned as still more illusory. Or else, on the contrary, their role is to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed and jumbled. (Foucault, 1986, p. 27)

The illusion of the *Pride and Prejudice* world of Regency is also maintained by Amanda’s being a meticulous reader of Austen’s novel when she demands to stick to the text of the

⁷ “Released in 1998, Peter Weir’s *The Truman Show* follows the life of Truman Burbank on Seahaven Island, a seemingly perfect little town. The only catch: everyone is an actor, and everything is perfectly staged. Everything but Truman. He is the unknowing star of this absurd reality show. People from all around the world watch Truman thanks to the cameras hidden everywhere from the ring his father gave him to the dashboard of his car.”

(<https://blogs.iu.edu/establishingshot/2023/09/14/lies-and-truth-in-the-truman-show/>)

⁸ “Lost in Austen Quotes.” Quotes.net. STANDS4 LLC, 2024. Web. 18 Jan. 2024.
<https://www.quotes.net/mquote/788273>

novel, which is why, when things become out of order when the plot develops, she tries to persuade the other characters otherwise: Jane has to marry Mr. Collins, Charlotte becomes a lonely missionary who went to Africa, Bingley is charmed by Amanda, then becomes a drunken man and elopes with Lydia, and Georgiana seduces Wickham (the opposite of what we know from the novel). In this way, the fragmented nature of the adapted series in terms of the selected settings is blended with these deviations, which Amanda has tried to change throughout the series, which adds both the aspect of intertextuality and parody of the source materials. This postmodern multi-layeredness is also achieved by the very ironic usage of Austen herself in her novel that Amanda utters: "You people. If just one of you actually said or did something you actually meant, that had any kind of emotional integrity, the rest of you would die of fright" (qtd. in Tigges, 2018, p. 5).

In the 21st century, we still nostalgically remember Austen by focusing on the Regency with its confinements and luxuries, sometimes to escape from the modern meaninglessness and sometimes to feel at ease thinking that we do not have that kind of societal restrictions. *Lost in Austen* offers us an "(o)ff-modernism offered a critique of both the modern fascination with newness and no less modern reinvention of tradition in the off-modern tradition, reflection and longing, estrangement and affection go together" (Boym, 2001, p. xvii). This mixture of different sensations diverts the audience to have the chance to see the simultaneous existence of two different periods through the re-handling of the adaptors who mimic some aspects of Austenian style that may be called "neo-Austenian" through which we know we cannot reach the authentic but the counter-existence of these lost and found issues via romance paves the way to the notion of enriching the Austenian cultural milieu. As a neo-Austenian work of Regency romance, *Lost in Austen* presents "atemporality" of the heterotopic journey of Amanda to the world that we, as contemporary people, want to be in. Despite the complications regarding the gap between two distinct time periods, through the romantic story ornamented by the playful dialogues of the characters, Amanda's transformation as a heroine, the expected sentimental fulfilment of the audience is ensured by the timeless notion: love.

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