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SERENA BAIESI

**REMEDIANING JANE AUSTEN THROUGH THE
GOTHIC: “PRIDE AND PREJUDICE AND
ZOMBIES”**

Since the end of nineteenth century, Jane Austen has held celebrity status not just in England but also throughout Europe. While her life and novels have been subject to intense scholarly study, she also has attracted fans from all around the world in what could be described as a cult following:

“Jane Austen has occupied a position within English-speaking culture that is both popular and canonical, accessible and complexly inaccessible, fixed and certain yet wonderfully amenable to shifts of sensibility and cultural assumptions.”¹

Austen has accordingly been acknowledged as cultural commodity, one bound to produce expectations even in those who have not read her novels. Her success as an infinitely exploitable global brand, or conceptual

¹ K. Sutherland, *Jane Austen’s Textual Lives. From Aeschylus to Bollywood*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, backcover.

product, has everything to do with recognition and little to do with critical understanding. As a consequence, her appeal has been powerful enough to distort interpretations of her life and works, and to inspire many kinds of adaptations. A global celebrity as well as a popular novelist, Austen's plots prove complex as they simultaneously meet the requirements of satirical, gothic, romance and erotic fantasy literature, offering meditations on personal and gender relations as well as social interactions.

In conjunction with worldwide celebrations of *Pride and Prejudice's* 2013 bicentennial, we have witnessed a surge of adaptations of its plot, characters, and settings across several new media. In response to these proliferating works, this article investigates transformations of Austen brought about by those new adaptations, focusing specifically on the well-known mash-up, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2009), a gothic story based on Austen's most famous novel by the American writer Seth Grahame-Smith. Before analysing this work's content and relation to Austen's novel, I first want to examine the role of the gothic in nineteenth-century sentimental novels, including the prevalence of figures such as zombies, monsters and vampires, and topics such as plague, tyranny, slavery and revolution. By no means a modern invention, the gothic has its roots in the literature of Austen's time.

1. *The Gothic tradition*

In contrast with eighteenth-century neoclassicism, the gothic traditionally has been associated with the primitive, the barbarous, and the savage.² Gothic literature was partly the product of a growing interest in the

² See D. Punter, *The Literature of Terror, a History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day*, London, Longman, 1996.

transformative power of the sublime, that aesthetic category Edmund Burke defined as the experience and recognition of pleasure derived from objects of terrors,³ and to which Anna Laetitia Barbauld *née* Aikin included passion and imagination as the genre's key elements. In *On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terrors* (1773) she describes how

“a strange and unexpected event awakens the mind, and keeps it on the stretch; and where the agency of invisible beings is introduced, of ‘forms unseen, and mightier far than we,’ our imagination, darting forth, explores with rapture the new world which is laid open to its view, and rejoices in the expansion of its powers. Passion and fancy cooperating elevate the soul to its highest pitch; and the pain of terror is lost in amazement. Hence the more wild, fanciful, and extraordinary are the circumstance of a scene of horror, the more pleasure we receive from it; and where they are too near common nature, though violently borne by curiosity through the adventure, we cannot repeat it or reflect on it, without an overbalance of pain. *The Castle of Otranto* is a very spirited modern attempt upon the same plan of mixed terror, adapted to the model of Gothic romance.”⁴

This popular literature was transformed and reshaped from the end of eighteenth century through the Victorian period, culminating with Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), the ultimate embodiment of gothic monstrosity. Indeed, the English gothic tradition is rooted in a preoccupation with the inherited power and corruption of the feudal aristocracy, as well as the regressive and unequal dynamics of archaic authority, including the hierarchies of the Roman Catholic Church.⁵ Ann Radcliffe's romances written at the end of eighteenth century, for example, share with the subsequent gothic novels of the Romantic and Victorian periods the desire to stage social and political conflicts, such as unequal gender relations,

³ See E. Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful...*, in Id., *The Works*, with a general introduction by the late Judge Willis and a preface by F. W. Raffety, Oxford, Humphrey Milford – Oxford University Press, 1925, vol. I, pp. 65-219.

⁴ A. L. Aikin, *On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terrors*, in Id. and J. Aikin, *Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose*, London, J. Johnson, 1773, p. 125.

⁵ See C. Baldick, *Introduction*, in *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales*, edited by C. Baldick, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009, p. XX.

corrupt aristocratic powers, and middle class anxieties about historical revision.

Transformed and adapted by new media, the gothic tradition of the present is still very much in fashion, proliferating in a wide range of forms: from novels to graphic novels, from films to TV shows, and from videogames to mobile phone applications. Though long considered popular entertainment for newly enlarged reading publics, the gothic continues to be a site where rationality and unexplainable mysteries of the mind conflict and confront one another. As I stated above, the genre originated at the end of eighteenth century with the aim of undermining, manipulating, and critiquing Enlightenment rationalism; our modern gothic forms still embody and give voice to contentious issues like undefined identities, confrontations with otherness, and social struggles. Nowadays many artists employ the genre to engage a large audience of both adults and young adults, expanding canonical tropes and figures like vampires, werewolves, ghosts, zombies, and other monsters into new media such TV, movies, and the Web.

How, then, do Jane Austen's canonical 'novels of manners' fit into this long tradition of gothic fiction? Indeed, it was long before Austen began publishing her works that Radcliffe inaugurated a tradition of female heroines searching for happiness and fulfilment in dangerous gothic settings. In Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), for example, the protagonist, Emily, faces the villainous Montoni in order to save her lover's life and keep possession of her inherited estates. The romance repeatedly depicts the stereotypical scenario of men abusing, torturing, and kidnapping women in order to wield power over them. Thus, Radcliffe's work succinctly represents the fraught gender politics of late eighteenth-century Britain. Though set in a distant past, the story remains "both profoundly realistic – that is, its plots speak the realities of the culture from which they

emerge – and consistently daring in its exploration of formal, psychological, and social possibility”.⁶ The Gothic here is manifested not only in settings like the mysterious castle of Udolpho, but also in the societal architecture in which women live and act. Moreover, the author demonstrates how “the mind has an unlimited power over external reality” so much so that “many readers found this an intoxicating and revelatory experience”.⁷ The gothic aptly represents the patriarchal system in which Radcliffe, as well as Austen after her, wrote and sought literary fame. Together with Radcliffe, between the 1790s and the 1820s more than fifty women writers engaged what we now call now the female gothic, following “the dynamic argument that Radcliffe proposes in her fiction concerning sexuality and political morality”.⁸

Of her six published works, Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* (whose first draft is dated back to 1798-9 but the publication came out only in 1817) is the most indebted to Radcliffe’s gothic innovations; it examines both the aesthetic of the rationalized supernatural and the discourse of sensibility and sexuality. Satirizing the popular gothic, Austen deploys the tropes of sentimental fiction and female education in depicting her heroine. In accordance with the traditional manners and social dynamics of the time, Catherine Morland enters the fashionable society of Bath, England. Though an avid reader of gothic novels, she reads them with an uncritical eye and engages in the self-indulgent interpretation of reality through the lens of fantasy. She soon discovers, however, that what is truly frightening is not the books she reads but the patriarchal society that imposes strict rules on her life preventing her from marrying above her station or from transcending

⁶ P. Meyer Spacks, *Desire and Truth: Function of Plot in Eighteenth-Century English Novel*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1990, p. 3.

⁷ M. Ellis, *The History of Gothic Fiction*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2000, p. 68.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

her class status. In this novel, Austen both parodies and defends novels and novel-reading, that genre of fiction in which

“ [...] the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most through knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusion of wit and humour are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language.”⁹

She neutralizes the more sensational conventions of the gothic and sentimental novel, and, in the process, exposes a tyrannical and cruel society that takes advantage of a young girl’s lively imagination but especially because she belongs to a lower social class. While Catherine never faces zombies or vampires, the novel casts the villain – General Tilney – as a controlling tyrant who greatly resembles the malicious criminals of Radcliffe’s gothic romances that Austen greatly admired: “domestic tranquillity and fashionable modernity, Austen argues, are the true location of modern terror”.¹⁰

In their novels, both Radcliffe and Austen depict male and especially female characters preoccupied with social and economic issues, including estates, incomes, and class statuses. Such concerns crop up in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), for instance, where Austen takes overt stances on a number of political and social issues connected to gender and class relations. Even in an enclosed setting of just “3 or 4 Families in a Country Village,”¹¹ the writer speaks about major moments of social and political unrest in England during the Georgian period. Through her treatment of the issue of the entail, for example, Austen challenges and condemns the period’s legal conventions of inheritance, advocating for a freer dimension

⁹ J. Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, edited by B. M. Benedict and D. Le Faye, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 31 (I, 5).

¹⁰ M. Ellis, *The History of Gothic Fiction*, cit., p. 69.

¹¹ J. Austen, *Letters*, Collected and Edited by D. Le Faye, Oxford – New York, Oxford University Press, 2011⁴, p. 275 (letter to Anna Austen, 9-18 September 1814).

of courtship and marriage. The main character, Elizabeth Bennet, openly diverges from the model of conduct-books and sentimental heroines, just as Catherine Morland did before her. However, contrary to her predecessor, Elizabeth is an accomplished and rational reader; she openly affirms her will and displays her complex personality through her satirical conversation, sense of humour, and sharp intelligence. Thanks to her wit and outspokenness, she embodies a kind of femininity different from the typically passive, vulnerable, and child-like romantic characters. Austen called her independent and open-minded heroine “as delightful a creature as ever appeared in print”.¹² The qualities that distinguished Elizabeth from common heroines familiar to Austen’s contemporary audiences continue to appeal modern readers, making her the most immediately attractive of all Austen’s heroines.

2. *Re-adapting the tradition: the Jane Austen mania*

This explains why the majority of Austen adaptations and rewritings have taken up *Pride and Prejudice*, which has been seen as the ‘flexible’ and modern of Austen’s novels. Rewriting this sentimental novel within a gothic framework allows for the re-contextualisation of two genres in one: it accommodates both the gothic’s central theme “of female constraint and persecution, its fictive indulgence in forbidden lusts and passions”, and the sentimental novel, “with its ideal of ‘romantic’ picture of life and its over-valuation of erotic love as the key to female happiness”.¹³ This is what contemporary reading publics desire:

¹² Ibidem, p. 201 (letter to Cassandra Austen, 29 January 1813).

¹³ A. Richardson, *Reading Practices*, in *Jane Austen in Context*, edited by J. Todd, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 399.

“ [...] unique to our era is the impulse to infiltrate Austen’s novels with – or, depending on your point of view, open them up to – sex and erotica, as well as horror and paranormal content that is equally out of place in her realistic fictional world. [...] Elements absent in Austen’s writings or kept to a minimum by her are made explicit and expanded to suit the taste of a particular group of present-day readers.”¹⁴

The so-called Austen mania has created addictive readers who crave anything about her life and work, as well as those works celebrating Austen as public icon, no matter the authenticity, vehicle, or literary merit. As a consequence, every reader has his – but most of all, her – own version of Austen from primary or secondary sources, whether they be original novels, modern sequels, television or film adaptations, blogs or video games. There are no limits to what this mania can produce in terms of literary and media adaptations and genre contaminations.

Readers’ appetites for Austen-inspired fiction seems insatiable, as does their enthusiasm for attempting to recreate the worlds of her novels. Austen’s many devotees, including fans of screen adaptations of her novels, have voiced their enthusiasm in fiction and non-fiction, in genres ranging from advice guides, cookbooks, blogs, memoirs and horror novels. Such works shed light on Austen’s present-day popularity, a phenomenon undoubtedly of concern to all Austen scholars. Many of these works actively, even gleefully, challenge our scholarly practices concerning how texts should be read, discussed, and responded to in writing.¹⁵ Moreover, in recent years Austen spin-offs have overlapped with other cultural fields, such as the gothic. North-American writers are evidently less affected than English ones by reverence of Austen as a cultural figure, while US publishers and filmmakers have demonstrated a readiness to invest in ever

¹⁴ J. Wells, *Everybody’s Jane. Austen in the Popular Imagination*, London, Continuum, 2011, pp. 177-178.

¹⁵ See Id., *New Approaches to Austen and the Popular Reader*, in *Uses of Austen: Jane’s Afterlives*, edited by G. Dow and C. Hanson, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2012, p. 78.

more audacious reworkings of the Austen brand.¹⁶ These kinds of Austen hybrids are mostly an American phenomenon, although some works, like Seth Grahame-Smith's *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, have reached an enthusiastic international audience.

Individual Austen hybrids differ in their degrees of distance from the original world and works of Jane Austen; these popular romances are some of the best-known examples of what might be called an extreme intervention into Austen's literary field. Nevertheless, Grahame-Smith's gothic rewriting of the novel should not be reduced to a mere marketing scheme; rather, the gothic themes and tropes directly relate to the original as well as gothic traditions of the Romantic period. Indeed, for the most part *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* consists of Austen's original prose: according to the author, "some 85% of the text is from Austen's bookshelf classic," while "rotting-flesh monsters seem to fit naturally in the Austen's world of ritual and melodrama."¹⁷ As the American writer suggests, Austen's polished novel of manners already contains inklings of gothic horror; the novel addresses conflicts of culture and identity and, more specifically, themes like nationalism, displacement, otherness, masked repulsion and attraction for the unknown, as well as combined feelings of passion and pleasure, fear and torment. Testing the boundaries of gothic parody, Grahame-Smith's adaptation brings these gothic themes and issues to the fore, subsequently revealing their presence in Austen's original text.

This gothic mash-up – famously adapted into a movie and an interactive mobile application – features the Bennet sisters living in a Regency England overrun by zombies and forced to become fighters and

¹⁶ See Id., *Everybody's Jane. Austen in the Popular Imagination*, cit., p. 178.

¹⁷ G. Boucher, "Pride & Prejudice & Zombies" to be "incredible true" to Austen, in "Los Angeles Times", insert *Hero Complex. Pop Culture Unmasked*, August 22, 2011, web address www.herocomplex.latimes.com/books/pride-prejudice-zombies-to-be-incredibly-true-to-austen/.

masters of eastern weapons but still in search for suitable husbands. Similar in context, but unlike in content, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* introduces us to the well-known world of the Bennet family with the key difference that horrible monsters populate the countryside at Netherfield Park. The invasion of monsters that spread death and plague metaphorically represents the British Empire's dark history of colonization and slavery. Emerging from a postcolonial reading of the original, these zombies, like slaves, arrive in England from the colonies in order to exact revenge for their sufferings. As a consequence, in Austen's time "zombies" stood as a marker for central issues of slavery and colonialism. More specifically, these monsters occasioned the remembrance of slavery in the American colonies, evoking moments of resistance and rebellion on the part of enslaved Africans. Indeed, the first accounts of zombies appeared in eighteenth-century histories of West Indian sugar colonies, where slaves' degraded living and working conditions were reimagined as a kind of living death. Significantly, these accounts appeared most frequently during moments of cultural and political tension in the colonies, instances of brutal violence narrated by newspapers and travel reports. Such events included numerous rebellions, the abolition of the slave trade, and slaves' subsequent emancipation and independence. Zombies were also considered cannibals, a label used to evidence the civilised authorities' moral superiority over the supposedly barbarous slaves.¹⁸

¹⁸ M. Ellis, *The History of Gothic Fiction*, cit., p. 218: "In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the term 'zombie' referred to a constellation of gothic prosperities related to slave culture in the Caribbean: the leader of maroon rebels, a ghost or revenant, or a demon-lover in the shape of an impossibility seductive young woman. In the first decade of the twentieth century, the figure of the zombie is revived and rewritten, remade in new circumstances. The new zombie of the modern era, nonetheless, does not forget its slave heritage, the status of the revenant, or its role in colonial desire".

3. *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*

Graham-Smith's zombie insertions in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* are particularly striking against the backdrop of the original novel's familiar prose; in particular, they highlight parallels between Austen's Regency England and Graham-Smith's cosmopolitan twenty-first century. Specifically, they illuminate women's roles in both societies, as well as disease's ability to represent issues of alterity that arise from contact with otherness.

Of these issues, women's societal roles are central to both original text and modern mash-up. In Graham-Smith's version, the opening chapter mimics the original in terms of characters, dialogue and social dynamics, as Mr. and Mrs. Bennet discuss Mr. Bingley's arrival at Netherfield Park. The fact that he is "a single man of four or five thousand a year" attracts Mrs. Bennet's attention as "a fine thing for our girls!" When Mr. Bennet replies with a sceptical "how so?" he does not ask the original version's question of "how can it affect them?" but rather, "Can he train them in the ways of swordmanship and musketry?"¹⁹ Following Austen's original dialogue, Mrs. Bennet responds, "How can you be so tiresome! You must know that I am thinking of his marrying one of them".²⁰ If it is Mrs. Bennet's goal to marry off her daughters, it is Mr. Bennet's to keep them safe from dangerous zombies. Indeed, navigating the marriage market remains the primary concern for Regency women even in a world inhabited by the undead.

In Graham-Smith's adaptation, the Bennet sisters are empowered modern women; active rather than passive, they undertake physical training to fortify their bodies and minds. Their education consists not of lessons on

¹⁹ J. Austen and S. Grahame-Smith, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, cit., p. 7.

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

embroidery and music but on war tactics and combat training. Elizabeth is “a warrior first, and a woman second,” and her sisters “servants of His Majesty, protectors of Hertfordshire” who resist invasion and constant attacks from the “unmentionables.”

Just as in the original, societal roles form the basis of human relationships even when zombies are involved. “Although zombies are restored to life, they do not reoccupy their previous place in society”,²¹ indeed, in this modern novel they pose a serious threat to the British nation’s stability. Even though these creatures belonged to the gentry, middle or upper classes when they were humans, once they became zombies, they were banned from any kind of interaction with members of those classes. In a world where Englishness and zombiness oppose one another, zombies are excluded not only because of their non-human status but also because of their non-social position.

The plague is another important theme of Graham-Smith’s novel as well as a recurring motif in Romantic literature. Mary Shelley’s apocalyptic science-fiction novel *The Last Man* (1826), for instance, stages the plague as an epidemic that emerges from the Orient and destroys the United Kingdom, leaving a single man alive on the entire planet. Similarly, in Graham-Smith’s adaptation, Mr. Collins contaminates Charlotte Lucas on their wedding night and her contamination could be interpreted as punishment for choosing marriage instead of serving the country in battle:

“Charlotte was already showing the earliest signs of transformation, though she took great care to hide them from all but the trained eye. Her skin had taken on a slight pallor, and her speech seemed a trifle laboured.”²²

²¹ M. Ellis, *The History of Gothic Fiction*, cit., p. 206.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 110.

The theme of orientalism also plays a role in the mash-up, not only in terms of aesthetic description but also in reference to the girls' education and training. At the beginning, we learn that the Bennet sisters' training took place in both England and "during their trips to the Orient"²³. Moreover, Darcy's residence at Pemberley is designed in a Japanese style, where "the natural beauty of the Orient had been so little counteracted by English taste".²⁴ Darcy's housekeeper, "a respectable-looking English woman, dressed in a kimono and shuffling about on bound feet", introduces guests into the dining-parlour, "a large, well proportionated room, handsomely fitted up with art and furniture from Darcy's beloved Japan".²⁵

Oriental influence plays an even more prominent role in the novel's description of the differences between Chinese and Japanese martial arts. The dichotomy between the two becomes a way to articulate the disparity in class and social status between the middle-class Bennet family and the upper class Lady Catherine de Bourgh and Mr. Darcy. Where Lady Catherine trains in a sophisticated Japanese studio imported from Kyoto and employs private ninjas, Elizabeth wields a Katana sword from China. For Lady Catherine, the sword is a marker of Elizabeth's poor education; she regards Elizabeth as inferior because of her fighting abilities that metaphorically stand for her social class. Just as in the original novel, women's position in society depends on the quality of their education and family income, markers Graham-Smith translates into talent in combat and martial training. Lady Catherine reminds Elizabeth of her inadequate martial arts education, which was carried out by a Chinese monk. As evening entertainment, she challenges Elizabeth to fight three ninjas whom the heroine easily overcomes:

²³ Ibidem, p. 17.

²⁴ Ibidem, p. 194.

²⁵ Ibidem, p. 195.

“She delivered a vicious blow, penetrating his rib cage, and withdrew her hand – with the ninja’s still-beating heart in it. As all but Lady Catherine turned away in disgust, Elizabeth took a bite, letting the blood run down her chin and onto her sparring gown”.²⁶

Elizabeth’s vampirism symbolizes her desire to elevate herself from the middle class to aristocracy. Elsewhere in the novel, the gentry and upper classes are portrayed as vampires who increase their income by sucking the blood of the labouring classes, a trope that persists from John William Polidori’s short story to Stoker’s *Dracula*.

Graham-Smith similarly transforms the scene in which Mr. Darcy’s declares his love to Elizabeth, a key moment in the novel. In this rewriting, Elizabeth responds not only with anger but also with violence towards Darcy; she is a warrior in both domestic and public spheres. While the dialogue remains generally unchanged, the description of her body language suits her dynamic female temper. After Darcy professes his feelings, she violently kicks him:

“Elisabeth presently attacked with a series of kicks, forcing him to counter with the drunken washwoman defence. She spoke as they battled. [...] One of her kicks found its mark, and Darcy was sent into the mantelpiece with some force as to shatter its edge. Wiping the blood from his mouth, he looked at her with a smile of affected incredulity”.²⁷

Surprisingly, Elizabeth’s violent reaction increases Darcy’s esteem for her; through her display of skilful combat and physical strength, she asserts superiority over him. Yet, as in the original, Elizabeth discloses weakness that casts her as a truly feminine warrior:

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 132.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 151.

“The tumult of her mind was now painfully great. She knew not how to support herself, and from the feminine weakness which she had so struggled to exercise from her nature, sat down and cried for half an hour.”²⁸

The gothic mash-up concludes with a happy ending and the possibility of a sequel, which, the narrative suggests, might follow the happy couple’s future adventures after their marriage takes place surrounded by zombies. Indeed, every character receives his or her own unique ending: Charlotte dies after Lady Catherine cuts off her head, while Mr. Collins kills himself by “hanging from a branch of Charlotte’s favourite tree”.²⁹ Mr Wickham, meanwhile, suffers a carriage accident that confines him to a wheelchair where he is “unable to move his limbs, or control his personal business”,³⁰ and moves to Ireland with Lydia. Even as England “remained in the shadow of Satan” while “the dead continued to claw their way through crypt and coffin like, feasting on British brains”, we are told that “Victories were celebrated, defeats lamented”³¹ while

“ [...] the sisters Bennet – servants of His Majesty, protectors of Hertfordshire, beholders of the secrets of Shaolin, and brides of death – were now, three of them, brides of man, their swords quieted by the only force more powerful than any warrior.”³²

Not long after its publication, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* was a enormous success thanks in part to its effective marketing by American publisher Quirk Books, a company that publishes innovative and “buzzworthy” print and digital books that “entertain, amuse, and inform”³³ readers. The company also released an application for phones and tablets

²⁸ Ibidem, p. 153.

²⁹ Ibidem, p. 238.

³⁰ Ibidem, p. 242.

³¹ Ibidem, p. 317.

³² Ibidem.

³³ *Quirk Books – Who’s Who*, web address www.quirkbooks.com/page/whos-who#.

entitled *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies: The Interactive eBook App*, which includes hundreds of pages of illustrated, interactive zombie mayhem, the complete respective texts of both Jane Austen and Grahame-Smith, and an original musical score and sound effects.

Both gothic rewritings of Austen's novel – *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* and its interactive eBook application – are not only inspired by the original but also maintain a dialogue with it; in this way, these works captivate readers and players through a continuous cycling of past and present, tradition and innovation, convention and subversion, seriousness and satire. *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* also spawned a graphic novel, prequel and sequel, as well as a 2016 film of the same name directed by Burr Steers.³⁴ The last of these has been moderately received by the box office and had an unenthusiastic critical reception. Acknowledging that “in Austen's novel, the mutually hostile Elizabeth and Darcy are already combatants of a kind whose primary weapons are their witty, wounding, deeply meaningful words”, the critic recognizes how Austen employed subversive narrative strategies without staging zombies: “the larger problem is that each moment spent on this movie is another spent away from Austen's novel”.³⁵ Discussion of the mash-up persists on blogs and forums dedicated to Jane Austen, where fans enjoy the challenge of unearthing the original Austen between additions of zombies and bloody battles. These modern rewritings can indeed be read and interpreted in several ways: as sterile exploitations of a popular brand for profit – as seems to be the case with most Austen spin-offs – or as fascinating

³⁴ See B. Steers, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, Cross Creek Pictures – Sierra Pictures, USA – UK, 2016.

³⁵ M. Dargis, “*Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*”; *More Tea, Dear?*, in “The New York Times”, February 4, 2016, web address www.nytimes.com/2016/02/05/movies/pride-and-prejudice-and-zombies-review.html?_r=0.

multimedia interpretations of canonical novels. Indeed, Grahame-Smith's adaptation sheds light on the significant parallels between Austen's world and ours. New revisions of old novels can actually offer modes of expression for contemporary audiences to cope with the pressures of modern society, which, like Austen's Regency England, is often frightening and mysterious rather than stable and rational: in this way, the zombie personifies an imperial critique of modernity itself.

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