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Zásady pro vypracování:

Cílem bakalářské práce je prozkoumat recepci a obraz Jane Austen v současné kultuře. Autor se zaměří na skupinu nedávných filmových a literárních zpracování života Jane Austen (*Miss Austen Regrets*, *Becoming Jane*, *Austenland*, *The Mysterious Death of Miss Austen*, *Antipodes Jane*). Zabývat se bude i zobrazováním její osobnosti v digitálních mediích (např. blogy). Jeho cílem bude zmapovat, jakým způsobem je tato autorka v současné kultuře prezentována, na jaké aspekty její osobnosti se autoři zaměřují a jak vyobrazují prolínání života Austenové s literárními postavami v její próze. Na základě vhodných sekundárních zdrojů z oblasti literární kritiky se zaměřením na recepci a populární kulturu autor provede detailní analýzu vybraných děl. Práci završí kapitola, která z předchozích srovnávacích analýz vyvodí obecnější závěry.

Seznam doporučené literatury:

Primární zdroje:

Ashford, Lindsay Jane. *The Mysterious Death of Miss Austen* (Naperville: Sourcebooks Landmark, 2011).
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Todd, Janet. *Jane Austen* (London: Welbeck Publishing Group, 2019).

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Martin Felkel

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ANNOTATION

This bachelor thesis aims at the depiction of Jane Austen in contemporary culture. It primarily concentrates on Austen's life and her image in contemporary culture. The theoretical part of the thesis presents the general perception of Austen's image of a phenomenon. The analytic part concerns Jane Austen's portrayal in chosen genres of popular culture and their adaptations. Therefore, the practical part examines the image of Austen by analysing the most resonant themes the genres focus on.

KEY WORDS

Jane Austen, contemporary culture, phenomenon, image, life

NÁZEV

Jane Austen a její dílo v současné kultuře

ANOTACE

Tato bakalářská práce cílí na vyobrazení Jane Austen v současné kultuře. Primárně se soustředí na život Austenové a její obraz v současné kultuře. Teoretická část práce prezentuje obecné vnímání obrazu Austenové jakožto fenoménu. Analytická část se zabývá ztvárněním obrazu Jane Austen ve vybraných žánrech populární kultury a jejich adaptacemi. Praktická část práce tedy zkoumá vyobrazení Austenové skrze analýzu nejvíce rezonantních témat, na která se tyto žánry zaměřují.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Jane Austen, současná kultura, fenomén, obraz, život

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INTRODUCTION

Jane Austen was, and still is, acknowledged as one of the most influential female authors in literary history. The foundation of every artist is inspiration, which is closely associated with creativity. Jane Austen was undoubtedly a unique and distinctly creative author. Hence, it is only logical that Austen became a global inspiration for various works of authors of different genres. Nevertheless, the perception of Austen as an author and perhaps even more importantly as a person has changed throughout centuries. The way people view Austen today is different from the perception that people had two hundred years ago. Austen was clearly a gifted author; however, Susan Alhborn explains that a former general consensus suggested that novels had a reputation of being rather frivolous form of entertainment during her [Austen's] early life.¹ At the beginning Austen even published anonymously under the pseudonym "A Lady." A further obstacle was that she lived during the Romantic movement, the period of Byron, Blake, Wordsworth, and Coleridge. Therefore, it is understandable that attention was something quite hard to attract. Thus, Austen did not gain as much recognition as other acclaimed writers at her time. These reasons were arguably a part of the cause why it was not until the last decades when Jane Austen's name became truly popular and developed into a phenomenon of contemporary culture.

The concept of Austen being a contemporary phenomenon helped her novels to be considered with more seriousness and allowed much deeper analysis and criticism. The phenomenon caused a reaction of Austen enthusiasts and experts from all over the world. It was natural that after some time it were not merely the novels people began to concentrate on. Therefore, other resonant themes started to attract further attention of devoted critics of Jane Austen. Such themes included Austen's life, personality and, last but not least, the historical period over two hundred years ago.

The overall aim of the thesis is to depict Jane Austen in contemporary culture. Consequently, Austen's life and image are the main focus of this thesis. The general perception of Jane Austen's image as a phenomenon is presented in the first chapter, which is the theoretical part of the thesis. For the reason of creating a general image of Austen, it offers a brief summary of the most substantial facts that are generally known about Austen's life. The chapter also shows the influence Austen's historical period, its moral standards, expectations of society and gender roles had on the gradual development of Austen as a writer, person, and woman at the same time. Subsequently, it presents the ideas of several authors regarding the

¹ Susan Alhborn, "Jane Austen's Enduring Popularity," *Omnia Magazine* (2017): 12.

subject of why Austen has been such a phenomenon. The first chapter concludes with an introduction of the chosen genres and adaptations that depict Jane Austen's image in contemporary culture.

All the remaining chapters form the analytic part of the thesis. It concerns Austen's portrayal in chosen genres and their adaptations by analysing the most resonant themes of Austen's life, which authors use to depict her image. Specifically, the analytic part includes three chapters. Each chapter concentrates on a different trending genre of contemporary popular culture – books, films, and digital media. Thus, the second chapter of the thesis analyses a book genre by examining two books about Jane Austen – *Antipodes Jane* (1984) by Barbara Ker Wilson and *The Mysterious Death of Miss Austen* (2011) by Lindsay Ashford. The analysis explores the most resonant themes Wilson and Ashford focus on. Those themes include the connection of facts with fiction, Austen's family, secrets, mysteries that surround Austen's life and death, and lastly love life of Austen. The third chapter analyses three film adaptations of Austen's life – *Becoming Jane* (2007) directed by Julian Jarrold, *Miss Austen Regrets* (2007) by Jeremy Lovering and *Austenland* (2013) by Jerusha Hess. The most resonant themes of the films are love and marriage, social standards, expectations and norms of Austen's era, celebrated wit of Jane Austen, and depiction of Austen as an author. Additionally, the film *Austenland* explores the world of 'Janeites', a cult of Jane Austen fans and followers. The fourth and final chapter is based on the analysis of digital media. This chapter concerns the rise and growing popularity of the cult on the Internet. It focuses on one unique YouTube channel and two most popular blogs that follow Jane Austen. Inger Brodey leads The YouTube channel *Jane Austen Summer Program* (2017). The channel is dedicated to Jane Austen's work and offers its followers more detailed and specific information about Austen's everyday life and hobbies. The two blogs are named *Austenprose* (2007) led and edited by Laurel Ann Nattress, and *AustenBlog* (2004) edited by Margaret Sullivan. The blogs allow its followers to inspect Jane Austen from various modern points of view and provide them with the latest information and trends regarding their beloved author.

1. IMAGE OF JANE AUSTEN IN CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

This chapter aims at outlining the perception of Jane Austen's image of a phenomenon in contemporary culture. Hence, for the purpose of introducing the topic, it offers a summary of the most substantial facts that are generally accepted about Austen's life. It particularly illustrates the influence the historical period, its moral standards, expectations of society and gender roles had on Austen's development as a writer, person, and woman. Furthermore, the chapter presents the ideas of several authors regarding the subject of why Austen has been such a phenomenon. Thus, it intimates a portrayal of Austen's image in contemporary culture. The chapter concludes with a description of the chosen genres and adaptations that depict Jane Austen's image in contemporary culture.

Jane Austen is without a doubt one of the greatest novelists in English Literature and her name is widely known all over the globe. However, many authors contradict each other about the reality of Austen's life. In the book *Jane Austen: A life*, Claire Tomalin informs that Austen herself did not leave any autobiography or journals that would provide a better insight into her life and the only remnants are the letters Austen wrote to her sister Cassandra.² Unfortunately, most of the letters were burned and consequently destroyed by Cassandra. Therefore, for the sake of this thesis, it is vital to remind the most fundamental and substantial facts that are generally agreed about Jane Austen as an author, but also about her life and personality.

Jane Austen was born in 1775 in England, in a small village Steventon, Hampshire.³ Tomalin informs that Austen's father was a rector who supported his children in educating themselves, and her mother was a housewife.⁴ Tomalin adds that Austen came from a family of considerable size as she had seven siblings, six brothers – James, George, Edward, Henry, Francis, Charles, and one sister – Cassandra.⁵ Austen's sister Cassandra was "her closest companion."⁶ This only supports the prevailing assumption that Austen never met a man that would be worthy of Austen leaving her beloved sister. Throughout her life, Austen was "confined to the circle of minor landed gentry and country clergy that she was to use in her writing."⁷ As an author, Jane Austen is known for six novels. In Encyclopaedia Britannica,

² Claire Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A life* (New York: Vintage, 1999), 8.

³ "Jane Austen," Encyclopaedia Britannica, last modified September 29, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jane-Austen>.

⁴ Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A life*, 4.

⁵ Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A life*, 4.

⁶ Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Jane Austen."

⁷ Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Jane Austen."

Brian C. Southam presents that by writing all of her six full-length novels – *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1815), *Persuasion* (1817), and *Northanger Abbey* (1817) – she created the comedy of manners of middle-class English life in her time.⁸ The most critically acclaimed novel is by far *Pride and Prejudice*. Austen’s writing is appreciated and admired for its realism, wit, and brilliant prose style. She was an ambitious and stern moralist who wanted to make people less selfish and more reasonable. Moreover, Southam explains: “Through her treatment of ordinary people in everyday life, she was the first to give the novel its distinctly modern character.”⁹ Austen died in 1817, in Winchester, Hampshire. She probably died from Addison’s disease, however, the cause of her death was never proven. Austen died as a spinster, meaning she never married, and consequently had no children. Nevertheless, her death and love life are still considered as resonant themes that intrigue people all over the world.

Jane Austen’s life did not last as long as she or her admirers would have wanted it to last. Austen lived only forty-one years during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but they were years of turbulence and changes. It was a period of the Industrial Revolution that transformed Britain into the world’s first urban industrial power. However, in her work *Jane Austen*, Janet Todd proposes that for Jane Austen it was the Regency period that played the most significant role, and evidently influenced Austen’s life and work.¹⁰ Therefore, for the needs of this thesis, it is vital to present a general overview of the Regency period that undeniably impacts Jane Austen’s phenomenon.

The Regency period was an era between the years 1811 and 1820 under the rule of The Prince Regent. It was a short transition stage between the Georgian and Pre-Victorian eras. In the work *Eavesdropping on Jane Austen’s England*, Roy Adkins clarifies that during the Regency period the literary scene flourished.¹¹ Many great authors such as John Keats, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and William Wordsworth emerged. The same favourable atmosphere prevailed for the novels of Jane Austen, however, she was not appreciated in the same way. Nevertheless, The Prince Regent was an admirer of novels and appreciated Jane Austen’s work. In *A memoir of Jane Austen*, James Edward Austen-Leigh informs that he [The Prince Regent] even asked Austen to dedicate the novel *Emma* to him, which she of course did.¹² This great

⁸ Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Jane Austen.”

⁹ Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Jane Austen.”

¹⁰ Janet Todd, *Jane Austen* (London: Welbeck Publishing Group, 2019), 5.

¹¹ Roy Adkins, and Lesley Adkins, *Eavesdropping on Jane Austen’s England: How Our Ancestors Lived Two Centuries Ago* (London: Little Brown, 2013), 19.

¹² James Edward Austen-Leigh, *A Memoir of Jane Austen* (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 2002), 131.

honour promotes the fact that at the end of her life Austen became a recognized author. In the Regency period the population increased massively and especially higher classes thrived. The differences between low, middle, and upper classes changed the society rapidly. Everyone was treated and should behave according to his social class, status, and property. Many of these differences were described in Jane Austen's novels, showing the impact it had on all social classes. In *The Jane Austen Pocket Bible*, Holly Ivins presents a list of the most prominent features of Regency society – wealth, land, inheritance, careers, fashion, social events, dances, and dinners.¹³ Therefore, women had to follow the rules and prioritize their appearance over education or independent thoughts. Ivins also claims the manners of the Regency period that women were expected to obey saw them as “meek, obedient, docile and soft”.¹⁴ A woman following the rules was much more likely to become a suitable wife. In *Jane Austen: Two Centuries of Criticism*, Laurence Mazzeno defines marriage as “a contract whose significance resulted from cultural expectations that viewed marriage as a social and family duty.”¹⁵ Thus, women married for practical reasons such as money, property, and status. This notion of a marriage is supported by Gilbert and Gubar, who in their work *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, elucidate that Austen in her novels refers to the economic, social, and political power of men and illustrates how and why women's survival depends on male approval and protection.¹⁶ Therefore, Austen was aware of male superiority being more than a fiction as she additionally discussed the gender roles of the Regency period. Ivins claims that Austen mocked the accepted model of female behaviour by breaking the conventions.¹⁷ Austen primarily focused on the gentry since she belonged to this class but she also illustrated the view into other classes, mainly the upper class. A reliable example of Austen's depiction of the upper class can be seen through the character of Mr Darcy in her highly rated novel *Pride and Prejudice*. All of the mentioned factors in some way influenced Jane Austen's development as a writer, person, and woman. Consequently, Austen's unique insight and opinions regarding the Regency period helped her to create an image that decorates her until this very day.

Jane Austen's image of a phenomenon is a resounding concept of contemporary popular culture. This notion had been examined by many authors in the past decades. Thus, this chapter

¹³ Holly Ivins, *The Jane Austen Pocket Bible: Everything You Want to Know about Jane and Her Novels* (Richmond Surrey: Crimson Publishing, 2010), 26.

¹⁴ Ivins, *The Jane Austen Pocket Bible*, 27–33.

¹⁵ Laurence Mazzeno, *Jane Austen: Two Centuries of Criticism* (New York: Camden House, 2017), 219.

¹⁶ Sandra Gilbert, and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (Yale: Yale Nota Bene, 2000), 120.

¹⁷ Ivins, *The Jane Austen Pocket Bible*, 33.

consults the ideas engaged with Austen's image as a phenomenon. It is apparent that Austen was a remarkable author. To prove this claim, Holly Ivins mentions that Sir Walter Scott, one of the greatest literary figures in history, praised Austen's novel *Emma* for its realism, reviewed it publicly, and used Austen's work in defending the novel form as a whole.¹⁸ Thus, Sir Walter Scott dedicated Austen a posthumous guarantee of quality. However, it did not mean Austen would automatically surpass all other authors of her time. Coming into the Victorian era, Austen's novels became less popular. Ivins explains that Austen's work simply did not meet the expectations of Victorian novels as good as for instance Charles Dickens.¹⁹ However, in 1869 James Edward Austen-Leigh, Austen's nephew, published *A Memoir of Jane Austen*. As Ivins says: "This work sparked an interest in Jane and her novels saw a rise in new editions [...]."²⁰ Nevertheless, in the memoir, Austen-Leigh proposes that Austen's life was peaceful and offered nothing special apart from her later recognized writing talent.²¹ This idea which described Austen's life as rather dull and unattractive, did not satisfy majority of Austen's readers and followers. Thus, literary experts and critics started to create their own image of Austen that was much different. Ivins informs: "They coined the term 'Janeite' to describe themselves and the movement saw the beginning of literary criticism of Jane Austen."²² This wave of excitement was further encouraged when Austen's letters that she wrote to her sister Cassandra were discovered and published in 1884. Since then, people began to be convinced or at least wanted to believe that Austen's life is full of unknown facts, secrets, and mysteries. All of that inspired Austen's later admirers to imagine their own Jane Austen. This newly discovered passion was becoming gradually more noticeable in the literary circles all over the world. Thus, each individually biased perception of Jane Austen gave birth to many adaptations of not only Austen's novels but her life as well. Janet Todd explains: "Through the last century her [Austen's] novels have become a global brand."²³ This claim supports the argument that Jane Austen has truly become a phenomenon. However, authors realise that the image of Jane Austen is an evolving entity. For a long time now, Austen's image has been constantly changing and developing based on cultural needs and preferences of particular historical periods. As Janet Todd says:

¹⁸ Ivins, *The Jane Austen Pocket Bible*, 57–58.

¹⁹ Ivins, *The Jane Austen Pocket Bible*, 57–58.

²⁰ Ivins, *The Jane Austen Pocket Bible*, 57–58.

²¹ Austen-Leigh, *A Memoir of Jane Austen*, 16.

²² Ivins, *The Jane Austen Pocket Bible*, 59.

²³ Todd, *Jane Austen*, 5.

Every new decade interprets her to fit its desires. In general in the late nineteenth century the prevailing image was created by her nephew, who depicted his aunt as a kindly retiring spinster; the late twentieth century, however, stressed the professional woman writer who knew her own genius. Every reader has a private fantasy that she alone knows the real Jane Austen.²⁴

How the image of Jane Austen will be perceived fifty years from now is unclear. Hence, Austen's image still remains open for discussion and nobody can possibly know whether or not there will be any new facts to be found in the future. However, people's imagination is an inexhaustible source of ideas. Thus, there might be no need for any new discoveries regarding Austen's life, because people will invent them themselves.

The vast majority of authors ask the question concerning the means through which Jane Austen herself contributed to the creation of her phenomenon. In her work *Jane's Fame: How Jane Austen Conquered the World*, Claire Harman answers that question: "She [Austen] laboured to make her own novels as attractive as possible and – it worked better than anyone could have imagined possible, or desirable."²⁵ Furthermore, Susan Ashford claims: "Austen created rich, internal lives of her characters that remain relevant and relatable."²⁶ That is by many critics considered to be one of the most significant reasons why Jane Austen truly conquered the world and became such a phenomenon. Hence, Austen owns primarily herself for becoming a phenomenon in contemporary culture. However, it is undeniable that the mentioned efforts of Austen-Leigh's memoir triggered the world's re-discovered attention towards Jane Austen. Nevertheless, it is still Jane Austen who was a unique author with exciting life and background.

Hundreds of historians and other experts from various fields of study still attempt to gather new information about Jane Austen's life, work, and legacy. For many of them it is fascinating that there is so much the world does not know about Austen. However, despite all of the unknown facts, Austen is still considered as one of the greatest, if not the greatest, literary figures of all time. Therefore, it makes perfect sense that by many experts, the name Jane Austen has been compared with the names of the most acclaimed literary authors in history. This honour only proves the unrelenting impact Jane Austen had on the entire cultural history. To support this claim, Susan Alhborn compliments on Austen's phenomenon by saying: "I would say that of dead authors, she may very well be the most popular out there."²⁷ Alhborn also adds:

²⁴ Todd, *Jane Austen*, 5.

²⁵ Claire Harman, *Jane's Fame: How Jane Austen Conquered the World* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2009), 183.

²⁶ Alhborn, "Jane Austen's Enduring Popularity," 12.

²⁷ Alhborn, "Jane Austen's Enduring Popularity," 12.

“Perhaps second to Shakespeare, but arguably with a greater fan base.”²⁸ These words of praise promote the idea of Jane Austen being the most influential author that had ever lived. It is indeed the increasing fan base that distinguishes Austen from other historically acclaimed writers. In *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, Edward Copeland refers to Austen as “a commercial phenomenon and a cultural figure.”²⁹ People are fascinated by Jane Austen’s character as a writer, person, and woman. Hence, this enduring popularity and phenomenon has converted into an obsession. New genres of popular culture started to be interested in Jane Austen’s work and life, and new types of adaptations emerged. Therefore, these genres create an image of Jane Austen in contemporary popular culture. The authors of the adaptations of Jane Austen present many different points of view regarding Austen’s image in contemporary culture. They offer different possibilities and opportunities of Austen’s work or life. Hence, they seek to create a portrait of what could have happened or perhaps what should have happened.

The thesis concentrates on three main genres that recreate Austen’s work or depict her life. As the thesis states in the introductory chapter, the three genres are books, films, and digital media content. In accordance with the means that used to be available, the book genre was the first genre devoted to Austen’s phenomenon. Authors of the books based on Austen tried to capture her in ways that would suit the needs of their readers. Therefore, modern novels inspired by Austen began to unfold. The inspiration came from Austen’s work, its historical setting, and characters. Other sources of inspiration included Austen’s life and its highlights, but also its unclear hints, possible secrets, and mysteries. Many different types of adaptations occurred, as Holly Ivins explains: “[...] adaptations of her work, ranging from sequels to erotica to horror stories.”³⁰ Such adaptations include for instance a novel called *Mr Darcy Takes a Wife*, written by Linda Berdoll, or a series of books written by Marsha Altman, which she fittingly named *Pride and Prejudice Continues*. Examples of horror stories inspired by Austen’s work include Amanda Grange’s *Mr Darcy, Vampyre* or a parody novel written by Seth Jared Greenberg called *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*. From these examples it is evident that authors loosen their imagination regarding Jane Austen. However, this thesis does not deal with such far-fetched adaptations. Or does it? The thesis examines two books about Jane Austen – Barbara Ker Wilson’s *Antipodes Jane* and Lindsay Ashford’s *The Mysterious Death of Miss Austen*.

²⁸ Alhborn, “Jane Austen’s Enduring Popularity,” 12.

²⁹ Edward Copeland, and Juliet McMaster, *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 211.

³⁰ Ivins, *The Jane Austen Pocket Bible*, 60.

Both books are based upon the idea of what may have occurred in Jane Austen's life. Wilson reinvented Austen's story as most lovers of Austen would like to imagine it by introducing the idea of Jane Austen travelling to Australia. Ashford presents an intriguing back story about Austen's mysterious death. Therefore, both books delve deep into Austen's life, and depict her in the most extraordinary ways.

After the initial success of the book genre, the film genre stole the spotlight from the books, and it soon became the most prominent of all genres concerning Jane Austen. In *The Routledge Companion to Jane Austen*, Cheryl Wilson explains that films and television largely contributed to Austen's contemporary image of being a phenomenon.³¹ As Susan Alhborn says: "They [films] have allowed us to visualize the culture, see the characters come to life, and hear their voices."³² At the turn of the century, five major film adaptations were introduced to the world. Susan Alhborn mentions Ang Lee's *Sense and Sensibility*, Nick Dear's *Persuasion*, the BBC *Pride and Prejudice* starring Colin Firth and Jennifer Ehle, Amy Heckerling's *Clueless*, and *Emma*, starring Gwyneth Paltrow.³³ The films expanded very quickly and introduced Jane Austen globally. As Frawley says: "Their success put Austen into another orbit."³⁴ Nevertheless, the mentioned film adaptations focus merely on the world and characters that Austen wrote about in her novels. Hence, it is not surprising that directors wanted to explore the real life and personality of Jane Austen herself as well. Therefore, the films started to create an image of Jane Austen on screen. As mentioned in the introduction, the thesis analyses three such films – *Becoming Jane* directed by Julian Jarrold, *Miss Austen Regrets* by Jeremy Lovering, and *Austenland* by Jerusha Hess. The film *Becoming Jane* is a biographical portrait of a twenty years old, pre-fame Jane Austen. *Miss Austen Regrets* explores the later years of Austen's life as she is approaching forty. *Austenland* is a film based on Shannon Hale's novel of the same name. It explores the world of Janeites who try to rewind the time and live in the Regency period. The impact of the film industry on Jane Austen's contemporary image is undeniable. Holly Ivins supports this claim by listing several Austen's achievements in popular polls that took place after most of the film adaptations were introduced. The list includes Jane Austen being voted as one of the fifty women who have changed the world, and BBC's Big Read poll voted Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice* as the nation's second best-loved novel.³⁵

³¹ Cheryl Wilson, and Maria Frawley, *The Routledge Companion to Jane Austen* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 38.

³² Alhborn, "Jane Austen's Enduring Popularity," 12.

³³ Alhborn, "Jane Austen's Enduring Popularity," 12.

³⁴ Wilson, and Frawley, *The Routledge Companion to Jane Austen*, 39.

³⁵ Ivins, *The Jane Austen Pocket Bible*, 35.

The poll proves that Austen is truly one of the very best, however, it is safe to assume the results would not be that astonishing if it was not for the gradual popularization of Austen through contemporary genres of popular culture.

Over the years, the screen gradually replaced books. Hence, the rise of digital media was the next step in this evolution. It does not mean that books are long gone, however, majority of people prefer digital content. Just as book or film adaptations did, digital media introduced Jane Austen to even bigger audience. Thus, in recent two decades Austen's enduring popularity has been growing enormously. Janine Barchas illustrates the influence of Austen's image on her followers by reflecting on the year 2017 when Austen's two hundred years death anniversary demonstrated how important figure Jane Austen became in the contemporary culture. Barchas explains that Austen's name appeared in multiple global headlines, while celebrations and museum exhibitions took place all over the world.³⁶ These events gathered thousands of Austen's fans and followers. However, Barchas informs that the prevailing part of the fan base were the followers of online communities, especially blogs, and social media platforms.³⁷ Digital media content transmitted the perceived image of Austen as a phenomenon of contemporary popular culture. It also engaged Austen's work, life, and the adaptations with even greater fan base. Thus, one can assume that Austen's current fan base would not reach such high numbers as it does, if there was no digital media content to promote her legacy. Hence, the thesis analyses digital media as another genre of popular culture that concentrates on Jane Austen's image in contemporary world. The digital media analysis elucidates the cult of Janeites on the Internet. Hence, it undertakes the analysis of two popular blogs and one unique YouTube channel that follow Jane Austen's phenomenon. Inger Brodey's YouTube channel *Jane Austen Summer Program* can be considered one of the kind, because besides Austen's novels, the videos also focus on Austen's everyday life and hobbies. Thus, the content offers the viewers scrutinous exploration of the historical period and its impact on Jane Austen's everyday life. Moreover, the thesis analyses the blogs *Austenprose* led and edited by Laurel Ann Nattress, and *AustenBlog* edited by Margaret Sullivan. Both blogs inspect Austen from many different modern points of view and allow its followers to remain well informed about the latest events or trends. Therefore, just as the book or film genres, it shows the image of a phenomenon of Jane Austen in contemporary culture.

³⁶ Janine Barchas, and Devoney Looser, "Introduction: What's next for Jane Austen?," *Texas studies in literature and language* 61, no. 4 (2019): 335.

³⁷ Barchas, and Looser, "Introduction: What's next for Jane Austen?," 335.

To summarize, Jane Austen's work and life still fascinate people until this very day. Authors and followers of Austen's adaptations have been mostly interested in her unique novels, and her intriguing life with its backstories and mysteries. Austen's legacy in cooperation with different genres of popular culture ensured Austen's enduring popularity. Therefore, Jane Austen created an attractive image and became a phenomenon in contemporary culture.

2. JANE AUSTEN IN BOOKS

In general, the thesis follows an awareness of Jane Austen's phenomenon in contemporary culture. Therefore, this analytic chapter explores the ways in which the book genre presents the contemporary image of Jane Austen. It focuses on two book adaptations of Jane Austen's life – *Antipodes Jane* written by Barbara Ker Wilson and *The Mysterious Death of Miss Austen* by Lindsay Ashford. The analysis examines the most resonant themes Wilson and Ashford focus on. The themes include the connection of facts with fiction, Austen's family, secrets, and mysteries that surround Austen's life and death, and lastly love life on Jane Austen. Additionally, the analysis of each book mentions other themes that are not that resonant, however, these minor themes also help both authors depict Austen's image.

Every true fan of Jane Austen knows her famous quote in the opening of her most acclaimed novel *Pride and Prejudice*. The quote says: "It is a truth universally acknowledged [...]." ³⁸ Just as in *Pride and Prejudice*, the truth plays an important role in this thesis as well. A large number of the authors' ideas are produced by mixing their imagination with both the known facts and fragments of information about Jane Austen's life. Hence, the authors of Austen's adaptations utilize their own fantasy in order to create a thrilling image of Jane Austen. Consequently, the analysed adaptations do not present any newly found and proven facts regarding Jane Austen. The authors merely offer the possibilities and opportunities Jane Austen may have experienced. Despite Austen's prevailing image of a phenomenon, every person creates his or her own perception of Jane Austen and her remarkable legacy.

The popularity of book genre and its adaptations was extremely influenced by the capital idea of writing about Jane Austen herself and her life, not just her work. Claire Harman explains the influence of such adaptations on the growth of Austen's popularity by saying: "The widening audience was not for the novels so much as for the novels in combination with 'Miss Austen', and increasingly 'Jane'." ³⁹ This notion particularly interested Barbara Ker Wilson and her book *Antipodes Jane*. Wilson clarifies that there is very little information about Austen's life in the early nineteenth century as none of her letters from that period survived. ⁴⁰ Therefore, Wilson focuses on this period of Austen's life and what may have happened, if she had travelled to Australia in 1803 when she was twenty-six years old. This idea offers the fans and followers of Jane Austen an ideal "form of entertainment that allows them to forget about the real

³⁸ Jane Austen, *The Complete Novels of Jane Austen* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2004), 287.

³⁹ Harman, *Jane's Fame*, 155.

⁴⁰ Barbara Ker Wilson, *Antipodes Jane* (New York: Viking, 1984), 6.

problems of life.”⁴¹ In other words, it offers escapism, which has been the main reason why people read the books based on fiction. Thus, in *Antipodes Jane*, escapism allows people to explore a potential world and adventures Jane Austen may have experienced. Nevertheless, Wilson herself explains that it is clear there is plenty of room for speculation among the few facts that are available on Austen’s life in the early 1800s.⁴² Hence, *Antipodes Jane* reinvents the story of Jane Austen as most lovers of Austen would like to imagine it. Wilson advocates her choice of recreating Austen’s journey to Australia by saying:

It need occasion no great surprise that the visit made by Jane Austen to the Colony of New South Wales [Australia] in 1803 passed without significant remark at the time, and as a consequence has not been previously described. At that time she was quite unknown; her first novel to be published, *Sense and Sensibility*, did not appear until 1811, almost a decade later.”⁴³

The novel *Antipodes Jane* is truly a unique adaptation of Jane Austen’s life. It focuses on the time period of Austen’s life that is quite unclear and also somehow mysterious.

One of the resonant themes that Wilson presents is indeed the mystery that surrounds Jane Austen and her life. Until this day, there are not many sources of information regarding Austen’s life. The major sources are the letters Austen wrote to her sister Cassandra and the memoir of James Edward Austen-Leigh, who was Austen’s nephew. But apart from these sources, there only exist various hints that suggest different possibilities about Jane Austen. Thus, *Antipodes Jane* explores one particularly interesting hint. Wilson informs: “She [Austen] having barely survived a romance of which all evidence has in fact been destroyed [...]”⁴⁴ This hint proposes that there was something more about Jane Austen’s love life than the world acknowledges. Therefore, Wilson inspects the possible love story Austen may have known. However, *Antipodes Jane* presents a story about lost love rather than offering a happy ending. In the book, twenty-six years old Jane Austen finds her desired love in form of a gentleman Mr Elliot Fordwick, whom she meets in Sidmouth. Unfortunately, Mr Fordwick dies from a disease. Thus, devastated Jane Austen accepts her aunt’s proposal of accompanying her and her husband to Australia. Austen seeks to run away from the reality and sorrow of her life “not knowing that she will be able to forget wholly about her disappointing love affair.”⁴⁵ In Australia, Jane Austen meets another man, Mr D’arcy Wentworth who is a naval officer, and

⁴¹ “Escapism,” Dictionary Britannica, accessed November 4, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/escapism>.

⁴² Wilson, *Antipodes Jane*, 6.

⁴³ Wilson, *Antipodes Jane*, 6.

⁴⁴ Wilson, *Antipodes Jane*, 7.

⁴⁵ Wilson, *Antipodes Jane*, 110.

Austen experiences another hope for love. Wilson informs that D'arcy Wentworth is not merely a creation of her fantasy, and that he was a real person Austen met in 1787, however, their relationship remains unknown.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the fact Austen used his name for creating her famous novel character Mr Darcy supports the idea that Austen was indeed somehow interested in Mr D'arcy Wentworth. However, in *Antipodes Jane* their romance lasts only for a very brief moment as Austen learns about the criminal and gambling past of Mr D'arcy Wentworth. To make matters worse, Mr Elliot Fordwick, Austen's previous lover who is supposed to be dead, appears in Australia. Austen is shocked and subsequently realises that love is not meant for everyone. At the end of *Antipodes Jane*, Austen leaves Australia with a healed heart and peaceful mind. The adaptation of Austen's possible love story described by Wilson is truly intriguing. Therefore, if this had really happened to Jane Austen in her real life, there is no wonder she would not have wanted to marry or fell in love again. As Wilson states in her book: "The ultimate conclusion of that ill-fated romance seemed to have changed her thinking habits; she felt quite free to turn her thoughts to other subjects."⁴⁷ This statement acknowledges the image of Austen that prevails in contemporary culture. Austen is perceived as someone who chose her own happiness over struggle and pain, more specifically her passion for writing over love and marriage.

Barbara Ker Wilson chose a fitting name for her novel *Antipodes Jane*. Dictionary Britannica defines the noun "antipodes" as "Australia and New Zealand."⁴⁸ This is the most common definition of the noun as it contrasts Australia and New Zealand to the western hemisphere. Thus, it makes perfect sense Wilson used it to name Austen's journey to Australia. However, the noun "antipode" also means "the exact opposite or contrary,"⁴⁹ which also corresponds with the idea of *Antipodes Jane*. The fact that Austen is located at the other side of the globe helps Wilson to capture the image of Austen. In Wilson's novel, Jane Austen visits the penal colony in New South Wales, Australia. It is "a place rife with scandal and rumour [...] a community of ex-cons and aliases; bigamists; counterfeiters; confidence tricksters; suspected murderers, every other sort of criminal known to man or woman."⁵⁰ However, the reality does not correspond with this description of the colony. Hence, despite the unattractive narration of the place, Austen learns that "people living there alternate between feeling

⁴⁶ Wilson, *Antipodes Jane*, 328.

⁴⁷ Wilson, *Antipodes Jane*, 321.

⁴⁸ "Antipodes," Dictionary Britannica, accessed November 4, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/Antipodes>.

⁴⁹ "Antipode," Merriam-Webster Dictionary, accessed November 4, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/antipode>

⁵⁰ Wilson, *Antipodes Jane*, 23.

supremely content, and longing to leave.”⁵¹ The life in the colony is not as bad as people would expect but it is isolated from the outside world, especially Britain which is their homeland. While in Australia, Austen is portrayed as “a voracious reader, ‘desperate walker’, and most principled young lady.”⁵² Therefore, owing to her active participation in the colony, Austen meets several interesting people, gains both positive and negative experience, and explores the culture of Australia and the Aboriginal Australians. She is particularly astonished by the life of the Aboriginal people and describes them as “noble savages who are not corrupted by the civilized world.”⁵³ However, after few months in Australia, Austen realises that despite being in Australia, the manners of people are not that different from those in Britain. The Australian society is just as corrupted as the more ordered British society. The inequality, orphanage, prostitution, and xenophobia against the Aboriginal people is clearly visible. This idea of corruption is encouraged by Austen explaining that people are much the same everywhere.⁵⁴ Thus, Wilson tactfully describes that Jane Austen sees the society with many flaws. She distinguishes between the negligible flaws and significantly problematic ones that need to be changed. Therefore, this depiction of Austen corresponds with the image of Jane Austen in contemporary culture. The world values Jane Austen as someone who openly criticized the society.

Jane Austen is probably the first author that comes to mind when people hear the word wit. Austen’s wit has been celebrated for a long time. Therefore, it is important to understand its meaning. Dictionary Britannica defines wit as “an ability to say or write things that are clever and usually funny.”⁵⁵ Jane Austen undoubtedly possessed such quality. She managed to write with subtle humour, and her precise observations helped her to portray nuanced and realistic characters. Claire Harman characterizes Austen’s unique wit as “delicate and gossamer.”⁵⁶ Thus, Jane Austen’s use of wit is a resonant theme regarding her writing style. Consequently, Wilson herself felt inspired and executed several attempts for witty interactions in *Antipodes Jane*. In the first part of the book, Mary Austen, the second wife of Jane Austen’s brother James, complains: “The only thing I crave just now is a new mangle, my old one is quite worn out?”⁵⁷ To which Jane responds gaily: “Then you must give it a decent burial – James can attend to the

⁵¹ Wilson, *Antipodes Jane*, 119.

⁵² Wilson, *Antipodes Jane*, 153.

⁵³ Wilson, *Antipodes Jane*, 119.

⁵⁴ Wilson, *Antipodes Jane*, 237.

⁵⁵ “Wit,” Dictionary Britannica, accessed November 4, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/wit>.

⁵⁶ Harman, *Jane’s Fame*, 175.

⁵⁷ Wilson, *Antipodes Jane*, 72.

proper obsequies, 'twould rest well beneath the mulberry tree, I think."⁵⁸ Another witty situation appears when Jane teases an Australian citizen by saying: "Pray, why do you not consider breeding young kangaroos instead of fat lambs? It would surely save you the trouble of building up a flock of creatures which are not indigenous to the continent."⁵⁹ Wilson even attempts to reinvent Austen's famous quote from *Northanger Abbey*: "The person, gentleman or lady, who has not pleasure in a good novel, must be intolerably stupid."⁶⁰ In *Antipodes Jane*, Mr. Fordwick states: "The reader who finds no pleasure in a good novel must be intolerably dull-witted."⁶¹ This only documents the influence of Austen's wit that decorates her unique style of writing. Jane Austen's wit has inspired many authors throughout the history. Therefore, it is incorporated into her contemporary image of a phenomenon.

Another theme of *Antipodes Jane* is the depiction of Jane Austen's family. Despite the fact that Austen leaves her family for her journey to Australia, the first part of the novel explores the dynamics inside the family. Wilson particularly focuses her attention towards Austen's relationship with certain family members but also the family as a whole. In the novel Austen's family lives in Steventon, a small village, and leads a perfectly content life. The family wants Jane Austen to be happy. Thus, the family, and especially her mother, impel Jane to marry because being happy was considered a synonym to being married. However, Jane's father is concerned for his daughter finding a husband as he says: "Jane's intelligence and wit may well be to her disadvantage where marriageable young men are concerned [...] she will need to find a suitor of rare discernment."⁶² During the Regency period the marriage was perceived as the highlight of any woman's life. Nevertheless, Jane Austen understood that women did not marry for love and affection but rather for money and property. This image of Austen's disillusionment regarding the marriage is presented in *Antipodes Jane* as well. Jane is torn between the search for love and the pressure of her family. She is pushed by the family to find herself a wealthy husband that would secure not only her but the Austen family itself. This constant pressure is intensified by Jane being twenty-six years old, which makes her an older bride. Thus, the family fears that possible suitors are less likely to notice her. The only family member that seems to understand Jane's hesitation regarding marriage is Cassandra, her sister, who is yet unmarried as well. Their mother complains about her daughters' stubbornness by

⁵⁸ Wilson, *Antipodes Jane*, 72.

⁵⁹ Wilson, *Antipodes Jane*, 151.

⁶⁰ Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1998), 85.

⁶¹ Wilson, *Antipodes Jane*, 91.

⁶² Wilson, *Antipodes Jane*, 33.

saying: “It is Jane’s whole future life at stake [...] what is to become of her?”⁶³ However, Jane is capable of ignoring such comments and she much rather “provided herself with ink and paper, and was busy writing.”⁶⁴ *Antipodes Jane* also focuses on Austen’s relationship with her sister Cassandra. The contemporary image is widely perceived as an ideal loving connection of two sisters. Therefore, Wilson uses this consensus in her novel as well. Jane’s relationship with Cassandra is described as perfect. Wilson explains that Cassandra and Jane were devoted to one another; few sisters could ever have enjoyed so completely each other’s confidence.⁶⁵ To support this image of their sibling love, their mother once declares: “If Cassandra were going to have her head cut off, Jane would insist on sharing her fate.”⁶⁶ Moreover, this deep connection between the sisters described in *Antipodes Jane* is even more reinforced when Wilson illustrates Jane’s feelings by saying: “[...] she would miss Cassandra dreadfully – that was the worst aspect of this adventure.”⁶⁷ All things considered, the family of Jane Austen is depicted as a functioning close-knit family that supports its members. Therefore, through the description of dynamics of Jane Austen’s family, Wilson presents the image of Jane Austen’s loving and warm personality that is perceived in contemporary culture.

There is one alluring hint in *Antipodes Jane* that concerns the moment when Jane’s father decides to move the family from Steventon to Bath. When the family are selling the possessions they do not need anymore, Jane’s cherished piano and all of her books are appraised and sold without her knowledge. Jane says to Cassandra: “The whole world is in a conspiracy to enrich one part of our family at the expenses of another.”⁶⁸ It may be seen as an insignificant squabble, however, it may also indicate possible tension inside Austen’s family. This small hint may support the claim that there was someone in the family who wanted to deliberately harm Jane under the guise of fake smiles and feigned love. This possibility inspired Lindsay Ashford and her book *The Mysterious Death of Miss Austen*. Ashford’s novel is heavily based on one of the greatest literary mysteries of all time – Jane Austen’s death. It is a serious mystery novel based on historical fact. As Ashford herself says: “This intriguing novel, which is both a puzzle and an unusual love story, delves deep into the world Jane inhabited and will fascinate those who love her novels.”⁶⁹ This short description of *The Mysterious Death of Miss Austen* already raises a number of questions and intensifies the mystery. In addition to that, the novel opens

⁶³ Wilson, *Antipodes Jane*, 33.

⁶⁴ Wilson, *Antipodes Jane*, 35.

⁶⁵ Wilson, *Antipodes Jane*, 30.

⁶⁶ Wilson, *Antipodes Jane*, 30.

⁶⁷ Wilson, *Antipodes Jane*, 115.

⁶⁸ Wilson, *Antipodes Jane*, 82.

⁶⁹ Lindsay Ashford, *The Mysterious Death of Miss Austen* (Naperville: Sourcebooks Landmark, 2011), 1.

with the quote from Jane Austen's novel *Emma*: "There are secrets in all families, you know."⁷⁰ Thus, the mysterious tone of Ashford's novel is apparent from the very beginning. *The Mysterious Death of Miss Austen* tries to depict Jane Austen's personal life and especially her death in a different manner than the world is used to. As the title suggests, the most resonant theme is the death of Jane Austen. Another theme the book deals with is the portrayal of the Austen family and its role it may have played in connection with Austen's death. Finally, it presents yet unexplored possibility of Austen's love life.

Ashford tries to shock her readers and Austen's followers. Therefore, she uses the surviving letters from the Austen archive and connects them with her own imagination and a very bold claim. Lindsay Ashford introduces the plot:

The Mysterious Death of Miss Austen imagines the summer of 1805 and Jane's close friendship with Anne Sharp, governess to her brother Edward's children. As the bond between the two women deepens, Anne senses a dark undercurrent within the family, something that troubles Jane and threatens those she loves [...].⁷¹

Nevertheless, this excerpt creates even more mystery, and rightly so. The death of Jane Austen is not the only mystery the book focuses on. Two other mysteries concern the circumstances surrounding, firstly, Jane Austen's aunt Mrs Leigh-Perrot, and secondly, Austen's brother George. In *The Mysterious Death of Miss Austen*, Mrs Leigh-Perrot is accused of grand larceny, specifically for stealing lace to the value of twenty shillings. Such crime would condemn her to a forced transportation to the penal colony in Australia. However, Clair Tomalin states that Mrs Leigh-Perrot was only blackmailed by greedy shop owners and was found innocent.⁷² Although, the novel suggests she may have been guilty. George Austen, Jane Austen's second brother, was "epileptic and may have been deaf."⁷³ Thus, these impairments caused that George lived apart from the Austen family. In addition, he was also omitted from the family tree and all wills. However, it does not seem right that his family would abandon him in such manners. Was there something George knew but could not tell? Did someone from Austen's family took him out of the picture before he would reveal the secret? Both of these uncanny stories depict Austen's family as suspicious and phoney. Therefore, Jane Austen is portrayed as someone who quite possibly went through several shocks and intrigues at the very heart of the family.

The main theme of *The Mysterious Death of Miss Austen* is Jane Austen's death. In contemporary world, there exist many theories and speculations about the illness that may have

⁷⁰ Jane Austen, *Emma* (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), 34.

⁷¹ Ashford, *The Mysterious Death of Miss Austen*, 1.

⁷² Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A life*, 65.

⁷³ Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A life*, 42.

caused Jane Austen's untimely death in 1817. Experts generally present several possibilities of Austen's death. Janet Todd specifically includes Hodgkin's disease, bovine tuberculosis, and Addison's disease, which is widely accepted as the one that killed Jane Austen.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, in *The Mysterious Death of Miss Austen*, Ashford chooses completely different and more sinister explanation as she introduces the possibility that someone poisoned Jane Austen. However, this idea is not based merely on Ashford's imagination. There is one surviving letter written by Jane Austen in 1817. The letter informs Austen's niece Fanny about Austen's illness and more importantly describes Austen's physical condition and the appearance of her face. Janet Todd encloses the letter that says:

I certainly have not been very well for many weeks, & about a week ago I was very poorly, I have had a good deal of fever at times & indifferent nights, but am considerably better now, & recovering my Looks a little, which have been bad enough, black & white & every wrong colour. I must not depend upon being ever very blooming again. Sickness is a dangerous Indulgence at my time of Life.⁷⁵

In the letter, Jane Austen describes her skin colour as black and white. This vivid depiction inspired many people, including Ashford, to believe that Austen was poisoned by arsenic. However, many experts state that during Austen's life arsenic was a common medication prescribed for many illnesses and may have caused the discolouration of skin. Nevertheless, it is a mystery to which the world will probably never find an answer, and it is a topic open to many assumptions. Therefore, it creates a mysterious image of Jane Austen in contemporary popular culture.

The Mysterious Death of Miss Austen depicts Austen's family as both close-knit and distant at the same time. All members of the Austen family stay in touch, however, they do not disclose many details about their lives. Thus, throughout the book, Anne Sharp, a close friend of Jane Austen, begins to notice suspicious behaviour of various family members. She confides to Jane who hints that she knows about it and introduces Anne to her novel *The Watsons*. Several scholars have explored the possible content of *The Watsons* and revealed that it reflected Austen's family.⁷⁶ However, in Ashford's novel just as in reality, the novel was never finished. *The Mysterious Death of Miss Austen* alludes to the possibility that in *The Watsons*, Jane is about to reveal unexpected family secrets and thus she is killed before she would complete her novel. The secret Jane may have wanted to reveal concerns Henry Austen, Jane's brother. In the novel there are multiple hints that Henry may be romantically involved with a

⁷⁴ Todd, *Jane Austen*, 145.

⁷⁵ Todd, *Jane Austen*, 145.

⁷⁶ Jane Austen, and Arthur Bingham Walkley, *The Watsons* (New York: Scholar's Choice, 2015), 13.

married woman. Later on, it is revealed that this woman is Elizabeth, who is a wife of Edward Austen, Jane's other brother. The details of their affair are mostly told from the perspective of Anne Sharp who says: "But they were nowhere to be seen [...] I saw Henry's coat disappearing into the little bathing house."⁷⁷ This adultery also had other although unwanted consequences as Anne adds: "The birth had come exactly nine months later [...]."⁷⁸ Nevertheless, Ashford depicts Jane as torn between her love for Henry and the truth. This is documented by the fact that at first, Jane decides not to continue with *The Watsons*. To elucidate Jane's decision, Ashford uses the famous quote from Austen's novel *Mansfield Park*: "Let other pens dwell on guilt and misery."⁷⁹ However, Jane changes her mind after Anne Sharp uncovers Henry's relationship with another married woman. This time it is Mary Austen, who is the second wife of James Austen. Jane is angry with Henry and disappointedly says: "I am beginning to believe that he is capable of almost anything."⁸⁰ Mary Austen is the most crucial character of *The Mysterious Death of Miss Austen* as she is the one who poisons Jane. Anne Sharp describes Mary's cruelty by saying: "Such crimes would require ruthless determination [...] her conscience or lack of it was something only she could answer for."⁸¹ Despite Mary's despicable qualities, she is quite inconspicuous and that intensifies the mystery behind Austen's death as Ashford makes the readers create their own assumptions. Nevertheless, the first motive for the murder of Jane is clear. Mary did not want Jane to reveal her secret relationship with Henry as it would destroy her family and reputation. However, the second motive is more complicated. As a child Mary had smallpox and she heard the doctor saying to her mother that she [Mary] would be scarred and less attractive for possible suitors. This knowledge made Mary's life difficult as she lacked confidence and feared that everyone derides her scars. Therefore, Mary's second motive for poisoning Jane is described simply as Mary's own pain that she eases by hurting others. Nevertheless, this conclusion of *The Mysterious Death of Miss Austen* does not bring the desired satisfactory explanation. It only makes Austen's fans wonder whether there were any accomplices. But who hated Jane so much to poison her? Was it Henry? Or was it someone nobody suspected in the first place? These possible questions only support the vague explanation of Jane Austen's death in contemporary culture. Thus, the image of Jane Austen's death is a topic open for discussion and individual interpretation.

⁷⁷ Ashford, *The Mysterious Death of Miss Austen*, 28.

⁷⁸ Ashford, *The Mysterious Death of Miss Austen*, 30.

⁷⁹ Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park* (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), 411.

⁸⁰ Ashford, *The Mysterious Death of Miss Austen*, 103.

⁸¹ Ashford, *The Mysterious Death of Miss Austen*, 299.

Love is a theme that appears throughout the whole Ashford's novel. There is love between the siblings – Jane and Cassandra. This love is interpreted through the letter Cassandra writes after Jane's death. Janet Todd offers the content of this very letter that says: "She was the sun of my life, the gilder of every pleasure, the soother of every sorrow, I had not a thought concealed from her, & it is as if I had lost a part of myself."⁸² Thus *The Mysterious Death of Miss Austen* follows contemporary image of Jane Austen as a wonderful and beloved sister. Furthermore, the love theme also concerns Austen's personal life which is a bit of an enigma in contemporary culture. In Ashford's novel, Jane's character reflects the prevailing image of Austen regarding love and marriage. Jane does not seek love and marriage as she concentrates on her writing. Nevertheless, *The Mysterious Death of Miss Austen* offers a unique portrayal of Jane Austen's love life. The novel explores the possibility of Anne Sharp's romantic relationship with Jane. Anne shows her love for Jane mostly in her thoughts while Jane shows Anne her affection in physical ways. There is nothing sexual going on, however, Jane lies with Anne in bed where she kisses and hugs her. Nevertheless, Anne is aware that it was impossible to have a lesbian relationship publicly. As Anne states: "But my version of that love could never be celebrated [...] it could not even be acknowledged."⁸³ Therefore, Anne never tells Jane about her true feelings as she fears she would lose her forever. This depiction of love can certainly be considered unique among authors who try to capture the world and life of Jane Austen. However, the fact that Austen never married and died as a spinster may support this idea regarding Austen's sexuality and thus Ashford creates an unprecedented image of Jane Austen in contemporary culture.

To conclude, this analytic chapter focusing on the book genre offers a variety of different views on Jane Austen in contemporary culture. Austen's image of a phenomenon helps both Wilson and Ashford to create exciting adaptations of Austen's life. Therefore, the adaptations use the mystery of Jane Austen's life to their advantage. By mingling the facts with fiction both novels provide its readers with intriguing possibilities and include exciting themes that depict Austen as someone whose life was not black-and-white as many people tend to believe.

⁸² Todd, *Jane Austen*, 144.

⁸³ Ashford, *The Mysterious Death of Miss Austen*, 183.

3. JANE AUSTEN IN FILMS

This analytic chapter presents how the film genre together with its chosen adaptations depict Jane Austen's image in contemporary culture. Susan Alhborn claims that although Jane Austen was a popular author, her iconic image is primarily due to film adaptations.⁸⁴ Thus, this analytic chapter concerns the films *Becoming Jane* directed by Julian Jarrold, *Miss Austen Regrets* by Jeremy Lovering and *Austenland* by Jerusha Hess. The analysis focuses on the most resonant themes the films use to describe Jane Austen. Such themes include love and marriage, social standards, expectations and norms of Austen's era, celebrated wit of Jane Austen, and depiction of Austen as an author. In addition, the film *Austenland* explores the theme of the cult of Janeites.

The state of Jane Austen's phenomenon in contemporary culture is perfectly described in the words of Syrie James who says: "[...] the moment has not ended, it has not even slowed down."⁸⁵ Moreover, Gina MacDonald supports the influence of the film genre on Austen's popularity by saying: "Austen films have brought her novels a far wider readership [...]."⁸⁶ This suggests that as far as the film genre is concerned, the boom of films based on Jane Austen's novels has been successful and many film studios still see the potential of their adaptations. In *Jane Austen on Film and Television*, Sue Parrill says: "They [novels] tell good stories – simple love stories which are still appealing, particularly to a female audience."⁸⁷ However, this claim makes Jane Austen rather one-dimensional for the screen. Hence, Parrill also lists another reason that supports the creation of films about Jane Austen. She describes Austen as "a canonical author whose life and work signify English national heritage."⁸⁸ Consequently, the guaranteed female audience in combination with Austen's popularity encourage directors to create films based merely on Austen's life and especially her own love life as well. Nevertheless, Claire Harman warns that literary authors "make poor subjects for biopics as they lead, on the whole, pretty dull lives,"⁸⁹ and there is certainly some truth to that statement. However, Jane Austen's popularity and the mystery that surrounds her life distinguish Austen from such definition. Therefore, many successful adaptations of Jane Austen's life enthralled the film audience and reinforced the image of a phenomenon of Jane Austen in contemporary culture.

⁸⁴ Alhborn, "Jane Austen's Enduring Popularity," 12.

⁸⁵ Syrie James, *The Lost Memoirs of Jane Austen* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 18.

⁸⁶ Gina MacDonald, and Andrew MacDonald, *Jane Austen on Screen* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1.

⁸⁷ Sue Parrill, *Jane Austen on Film and Television* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2002), 3.

⁸⁸ Parrill, *Jane Austen on Film and Television*, 6.

⁸⁹ Harman, *Jane's Fame*, 256.

One of the most successful films based on Jane Austen's life is the 2007 romantic drama *Becoming Jane* directed by Julian Jarrold. The film describes the story of a twenty years old, pre-fame Jane Austen, played by famous actress Anne Hathaway, and her love affair with an Irish gentleman Tom Lefroy, played by James McAvoy. Holly Ivins informs that the film *Becoming Jane* is largely based on the book *Becoming Jane Austen* by Jon Spence, who explored the possible relationship of Austen and Lefroy in the surviving letters of Jane Austen.⁹⁰ Clair Tomalin also claims that the letters Austen wrote to her sister Cassandra show the relationship of Austen with Tom Lefroy as very deep and Austen even considered marrying him.⁹¹ Thus, *Becoming Jane* predominantly concerns the themes of love, marriage, and the expectations of Austen's era. *Becoming Jane* is set before the Regency period, however, it uses its expectations regarding love and marriage as the main goal in life of women in the film is to marry a rich man. The film captures young, rebellious and somewhat naive Jane Austen who is completely enchanted by Tom Lefroy's intellect and boldness. At first, Jane and Tom cannot stand each other and this part of the plot strongly resembles Mr Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet from *Pride and Prejudice*. Nevertheless, just as Darcy and Elizabeth, Jane and Tom also find their common ground and fall deeply in love with each other. Hence, Jane decides to ignore the conventions of the society and declines the offer to marry a wealthy gentleman Mr Wisley, whom she had agreed to marry before she met Tom. As Jane says in the film: "His fortune will not buy me."⁹² Therefore, Austen is depicted as a woman whose views on love and marriage deviate greatly from the traditional expectations of society as she believes women should marry for love instead of money or property. Nevertheless, the film does not offer a happy-ending. Although Jane and Tom are indeed in love, unfortunately, it is not possible for them to marry as Tom's family relies entirely on him and his future financially convenient marriage, which Jane simply does not provide. *Becoming Jane*, with necessary cinematic tension and fiction follows the hints of Austen's possible love affair with Lefroy. Nevertheless, in its essence the film mirrors Austen's real love story. Austen truly refused to marry for money and believed in value of love. However, one day Austen allegedly compromised and accepted a marriage proposal, only to realise she was wrong and decided not to marry. Also, the end of the film depicts Jane Austen as still unmarried close to forty years old woman who chose her writing over love. Thus, the film stays true to the spinster image of Jane Austen and subsequently

⁹⁰ Ivins, *The Jane Austen Pocket Bible*, 168.

⁹¹ Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A life*, 114–117.

⁹² Julian Jarrold, director, *Becoming Jane* (Buena Vista International, 2007), 8 min.

creates an image of Austen as a woman of unusually modern principles and moral standards that remain timeless.

In her novels, Jane Austen managed to capture a realistic portrait of the world as she wrote about ordinary people in ordinary situations and yet made them extraordinary through her great deal of wit and clever sympathy. Austen's wit was closely analysed in the previous chapter focusing on the book genre, however, for many people her wit is the most intriguing feature of Jane Austen's image. Therefore, it is not surprising the film genre, including *Becoming Jane*, tries to incorporate such a unique feature into its adaptations of Austen as well. Thus, another resonant theme *Becoming Jane* uses in order to depict Austen's image is her celebrated wit. The film presents Jane as an intellectual and someone who has an opinion on everything. Hence, *Becoming Jane* imitates Austen's wit in Jane's observations of the events through her teasing remarks or deeper contemplations about love, marriage, and social status. Nevertheless, some attempts do not resemble Austen's famous wit at all. Claire Harman says: "Austen films rely in great part on their visual realisation of the erotic potential [...] on the dramatization of scandalous elements locked into some of Austen's backstories."⁹³ *Becoming Jane* is no exception. To prove this claim, there is an interaction between Jane and Tom when he reads to her from the book about natural history that says:

Swifts, on a fine morning in May, flying this way, that way, sailing around at a great height [...] then, one leaps onto the back of another, grasps tightly and forgetting to fly they both sink down and down, in a great dying fall, fathom after fathom, until the female utters a loud, piercing cry of ecstasy.⁹⁴

This scene shows the dramatization Harman describes. However, there are also moments in *Becoming Jane* that resemble Austen's wit quite accurately. For instance, Jane says teasingly during the ball: "This, by the way, is called a country dance, after the French, contredanse [...] not because it is exhibited at an uncouth rural assembly with glutinous pies, execrable Madeira, and truly anarchic dancing."⁹⁵ Jane also says: "No sensible woman would demonstrate passion, if the purpose were to attract a husband,"⁹⁶ when Tom says she dances with passion. Through these scenes, Austen's wit is depicted as an important characteristic of her personality. Therefore, *Becoming Jane* depicts Jane Austen in accordance with her contemporary image of an exceptionally perceptive, intelligent yet uniquely witty author.

⁹³ Harman, *Jane's Fame*, 251.

⁹⁴ Jarrold, *Becoming Jane*, 35 min.

⁹⁵ Jarrold, *Becoming Jane*, 28 min.

⁹⁶ Jarrold, *Becoming Jane*, 57 min.

Becoming Jane is a fitting name as the film describes twenty years old Jane Austen. But what exactly is Jane Austen becoming? The film shows her growth as a woman as she experiences marriage proposal, love, heartbreak and much more. Nevertheless, *Becoming Jane* also focuses on Austen's development as a novelist. In the film Jane says: "A novel must show how the world truly is, how characters genuinely think, how events actually occur."⁹⁷ She also adds: "A novel should somehow reveal the true source of our actions."⁹⁸ This signifies Jane's inventive thinking regarding novels. In *Becoming Jane*, writing seems to be easy for Jane until she meets Ann Radcliffe, the creator of the gothic novel and one of the few novelists that existed during Austen's time. After the conversation with Mrs Radcliffe, Jane discovers that becoming a female author is harder than she acknowledges and it comes at a cost. As Anne Radcliffe says: "To have a wife who has a mind is considered not quite proper [...] a wife with a literary reputation is nothing short of scandalous."⁹⁹ Thus, Jane realises she may have to abandon the idea of finding a husband for her writing career. This dilemma *Becoming Jane* presents, corresponds with the reality of Austen's life as her writing career in combination with her moral standards were part of the reason why she had to sacrifice her own happiness. Nevertheless, in the film Jane is convinced she loves writing more than anything. When asked about the fate of her characters Jane says: "My characters shall have, after a little trouble, all that they desire."¹⁰⁰ This shows Jane as perfectly content with finding her own happiness in her novels. The very last scene of *Becoming Jane* shows Jane as a published author as she reads her novel *Pride and Prejudice*, which is according to the film, based on her love story with Tom. Moreover, Jane reads part of her novel aloud to Tom's daughter named Jane. The scene is supposed to represent that although apart for many years, Jane and Tom never stopped loving each other. The fact that Tom Lefroy's daughter is named Jane is historically accurate. However, Jane's inspiration for *Pride and Prejudice* still remains unclear. Although, Jon Spence describes the possibility of Lefroy being the main inspiration for Austen's character Mr Darcy as quite probable.¹⁰¹ In conclusion, *Becoming Jane* depicts Jane Austen as naturally gifted author whose intriguing life helped her to create unique novels full of sensibility that largely contributed to her contemporary image of a phenomenon.

Another film the thesis analyses is *Miss Austen Regrets* directed by Jeremy Lovering. Unlike *Becoming Jane* which depicts Jane Austen's earlier life, *Miss Austen Regrets* "looks at

⁹⁷ Jarrold, *Becoming Jane*, 39 min.

⁹⁸ Jarrold, *Becoming Jane*, 39 min.

⁹⁹ Jarrold, *Becoming Jane*, 68 min.

¹⁰⁰ Jarrold, *Becoming Jane*, 108 min.

¹⁰¹ Jon Spence, *Becoming Jane Austen* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2007), 97.

the last few years of Jane's life as she is inspired to reflect on her own life after her niece Fanny asks for advice on finding a husband."¹⁰² Although *Miss Austen Regrets* was not as successful as *Becoming Jane*, it is one of the few films that offer an insight into Austen's later life and her death. *Miss Austen Regrets* is fairly accurate, since much of the script is based on Austen's surviving letters. Therefore, *Miss Austen Regrets* does not tell the romantic love story as there is no indication of such relationship in Austen's later life. Hence, the film explores Austen's contemplations about decisions she made during her life, and whether or not she regrets any. The film opens with a scene from 1802 that shows Jane, played by Olivia Williams, leaving a big mansion where she accepted but then declined a marriage proposal. After this scene, the film is set in 1814 when Jane is almost forty. Jane is portrayed as far more pessimistic than in *Becoming Jane* where she is depicted as full of potential and determination to defy the social standards and expectations of others. In *Miss Austen Regrets*, Jane seems to be unsure whether true love is achievable for everyone, however, she still declares that everyone should have the chance to marry for love. Thus, love and marriage play an important role in the film. As John Spence informs: "Early in November 1814 [...] Fanny was trying to come to a decision."¹⁰³ In the film Fanny's decision concerns whether or not she marries Mr Plumtre. Fanny goes to her aunt Jane for advice about her suitor, but Jane admits that she herself lacks experience in these respects, since she has never married. Fanny, who adores Jane's novels, compares Mr Plumtre to Mr Darcy from *Pride and Prejudice*. Jane says to Fanny: "My darling girl, this is the real world [...] the only way to get a man like Mr Darcy is to make him up."¹⁰⁴ Thus Jane's contemptuous behaviour makes Mr Plumtre withdraw his planned proposal to Fanny. This image of Austen is quite special as the world does not really see her as bitter and envious. Nevertheless, based on the letters she wrote to her sister Cassandra, she was indeed sometimes like that. Thus, the film manages to make Austen more human despite of her prevailing image of an infallible and omniscient author.

Miss Austen Regrets also tackles the portrayal of Austen as someone who quite possibly refused to search for love as she had already lost it once. This is likely a reference to Austen's alleged affair with Tom Lefroy. In the film, Jane says to Fanny: "The truth is Fanny [...] I am she that loved and lost."¹⁰⁵ This image is supported by the appearance of Reverend Brook Bridges, who is Fanny's uncle, with whom Jane apparently has some romantic past. The details

¹⁰² Ivins, *The Jane Austen Pocket Bible*, 169.

¹⁰³ Spence, *Becoming Jane Austen*, 209.

¹⁰⁴ Jeremy Lovering, director, *Miss Austen Regrets* (BBC, 2007), 10 min.

¹⁰⁵ Lovering, *Miss Austen Regrets*, 8 min.

of their relationship are left unresolved, however, from Jane's behaviour and reactions, it can be inferred that she is not rushing into any rekindling of the relationship. Thus, the film shows that Austen in her later life after her unsuccessful love story, was no longer the enthusiastic, perhaps even a little naive, girl that is depicted in *Becoming Jane*. Therefore, *Miss Austen Regrets* deviates from the commonly misinterpreted image of a mortified spinster by narrating that Austen remained unmarried by her own decision and was perfectly content with her situation.

The satisfaction of Jane with her life is also portrayed by her depiction as an author. *Miss Austen Regrets* shows Jane as a published author with three successful novels – *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Mansfield Park*. Janet Todd explains that at her later age Austen was unlikely to marry, and she had no choice but to “write well for money.”¹⁰⁶ The film follows this logic as Jane searches for a publisher that would offer more money for her new novel *Emma*. For Jane's sake, Henry Austen, her brother, helps to negotiate the deal in London. In addition, Jane also receives an offer to dedicate *Emma* to The Prince Regent. Jane thinks of her novels as of her babies as Janet Todd also highlights: “[...] she received a printed copy, her ‘own darling Child’.”¹⁰⁷ In *The Memoir of Jane Austen*, Austen-Leigh describes a letter wrote by Austen to her friend that says: “I trust you will be as glad to see my Emma, as I shall be to see your Jemima.”¹⁰⁸ This close attachment is visible in the film as well. Jane is depicted as a woman who chose her novels instead of a marriage with no love. Therefore, *Miss Austen Regrets* creates the image of Jane Austen as a more realistic woman, who knows there is so much life has to offer even without a marriage.

At the end of *Miss Austen Regrets*, Jane becomes sick. Her condition worsens quickly, so Jane decides to go to Bath as the sea air may help her from pain. In Bath, Jane reflects on her life, whether she was right to never marry and sacrifice her family's financial security for her principles and her dream of being a writer. Jane says: “This life I have is what I needed [...] I am so much happier than I thought I would be.”¹⁰⁹ Jane also adds: “The only regret I have about not marrying is that I am going to leave you and mother with nothing.”¹¹⁰ The final scenes show Fanny at her wedding as she finally marries, however, Jane did not live long enough to see Fanny's happiness. Fanny later finds Cassandra burning the letters from Jane. Fanny tries to stop Cassandra as she believes there are secrets about Jane's personal life, and it is fair to say

¹⁰⁶ Todd, *Jane Austen*, 61.

¹⁰⁷ Todd, *Jane Austen*, 61.

¹⁰⁸ Austen-Leigh, *A Memoir of Jane Austen*, 132.

¹⁰⁹ Lovering, *Miss Austen Regrets*, 79 min.

¹¹⁰ Lovering, *Miss Austen Regrets*, 77 min.

Fanny is not the only one who longs to read her aunt's letters. Nowadays, there are millions of people who would do anything to read about Austen's life in her destroyed letters. Nevertheless, the world will never know for sure what Jane Austen's life was truly like. Therefore, *Miss Austen Regrets* introduces yet another possible image people may or may not choose to represent their beloved Jane Austen.

The last film this chapter analyses is *Austenland* directed by Jerusha Hess. This romantic comedy, based on Shannon Hale's novel of the same name, explores the world of Janeites. *Austenland* is truly an original adaptation as there are very few films that focus on contemporary Janeites, "enthusiastic admirers of Jane Austen."¹¹¹ *Austenland* accurately depicts the obsession of Janeites through the character of Jane Hayes, the protagonist of the film. Jane is an American woman in her thirties who is obsessed with Mr Darcy played by Colin Firth in the BBC film adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, and like a true Janeite, she collects everything from "the books, tea towels, pens and coffee mugs."¹¹² Jane's obsession forces her to compare every modern man to Mr Darcy and it ruins her love life. One day, Jane sees the advertisement of Austenland resort that says: "You get to play the heroine of your very own Jane Austen story."¹¹³ Thus, Jane decides to visit Austenland, an English holiday resort for Janeites. At Austenland, all visitors receive a pseudonym, wear the period costumes, and live as people of the Regency period. Moreover, Austenland experience is supplemented by actors who imitate the Regency period gentlemen and women. The highlight of the resort is that each female visitor experiences a romance with one of the male actors at Austenland, but touching is forbidden. Therefore, Jane hopes to experience the Regency period and meet her dreamy gentleman.

Jane's stay in Austenland offers several classic activities of the Regency period such as hunting, shooting ducks, horse riding, dancing, enjoying music, and dining. However, Jane purchased the cheapest option the resort offers and thus is unable to experience all activities. Jane's accommodation is also quite modest, and she is treated with disregard by the owners of Austenland, who rather pay attention to wealthier visitors. This depiction of Jane's financial state mirrors the differences and haughtiness of social classes of the Regency period. Nevertheless, when Jane decides to take matters into her own hands by dressing into a beautiful dress and behaving like a confident lady, the perception and behaviour of people changes as she becomes a respected member of the group. Unfortunately, this complete turnaround the film

¹¹¹ "Janeite," Merriam-Webster Dictionary, accessed November 12, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Janeite>.

¹¹² Todd, *Jane Austen*, 152.

¹¹³ Jerusha Hess, director, *Austenland* (Sony Pictures Classics, 2013), 3 min.

presents does not resemble Austen's life at all. Austen was only marginally successful in convincing the society of the Regency period that she was more than an old spinster who trampled all chances of happiness. Although Austen became a published author, the surrounding world and society reproached her for not marrying and leaving her family in an unfavourable financial situation. In *Austenland*, the character of Jane Haynes reflects the life story of Austen regarding marriage. In the film, Jane Haynes is not married and subsequently receives pity wrapped in a dose of ridicule from others. But unlike Austen, Jane Haynes eventually meets her desired Mr Darcy.

Claire Harman suggests that Jane Austen is contemporarily popular because the film genre exploits the potential of her love stories.¹¹⁴ *Austenland* certainly agrees with Harman's claim as it tells a romantic story of Jane Hayes. In the film, there are two men interested in Jane. The first man is Martin who is a secret actor chosen to guarantee the experience for Jane. Another man is Mr Henry Nobley, who is also an actor, but not the one chosen for Jane. Nobley tries to talk to Jane, however, their conversation mirrors the story of Mr Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet from *Pride and Prejudice* as they dislike each other at first. Hence, Jane thinks Nobley only imitates Mr Darcy's behaviour and is the actor chosen for her. Later, Jane and Martin kiss and she believes she found love outside the act of *Austenland*. At the same time, Nobley tries to warn Jane that Martin is an actor by saying it is not a good idea to "cavort with the servants,"¹¹⁵ but uninitiated Jane does not understand what Nobley is trying to tell her. At the final ball, Nobley confesses his true love to Jane: "I did not intend on falling in love, but I have,"¹¹⁶ however, confused Jane declares that she does not want Nobley's fake love and still believes Martin's love is real. The next day, Jane discovers Martin was only an actor and feels deceived. Back in America, disappointed Jane sells her Janeite collectibles. Suddenly Nobley arrives and he explains that his name is indeed Henry Nobley, he is a professor who wanted to experience the Regency period, and he truly loves Jane. Jane finally believes him and they live happily ever after. This complicated love story of the film indicates that *Austenland* capitalizes on the theme of love and image of Jane Austen as someone whose love life was more complicated than it may seem. Therefore, *Austenland* tries to ingratiate with fans of Jane Austen by offering the perfect ending to the love story Austen herself never had.

To conclude, the film industry offers hundreds of adaptations that focus on variety of stories, mysteries, and themes regarding Austen's life. Subsequently, the adaptations depict

¹¹⁴ Harman, *Jane's Fame*, 256.

¹¹⁵ Hess, *Austenland*, 47 min.

¹¹⁶ Hess, *Austenland*, 75 min.

Austen's image in different ways. Some describe Austen's love life or the Regency period, and some concern Austen's legacy, opinions, and her contemporary impact. Nevertheless, no matter the chosen image of Jane Austen, the film genre as a whole and each adaptation of Jane Austen help to maintain the intriguing image of a phenomenon of Jane Austen in contemporary culture.

4. JANE AUSTEN IN DIGITAL MEDIA

Janet Todd says: “On the Internet Jane Austen is examined by numerous sites and blogs [...]”¹¹⁷ Therefore, this final analytic chapter of the thesis focuses on the depiction of Jane Austen through digital media content. The chapter concerns the cult of Janeites and its popularity on the internet. To introduce the topic of Janeites, it offers some crucial facts about the history of the cult and its contemporary state in digital media. Consequently, the analysis concerns a YouTube channel *Jane Austen Summer Program* that offers fascinating videos regarding Austen’s everyday life and hobbies. Furthermore, the chapter analyses the blogs *Austenprose* and *AustenBlog*. Both blogs are among the best on the internet as they inspect Austen from many different views and provide their fans with the latest information and trends. Therefore, the analysis of digital media content strengthens Jane Austen’s image in contemporary culture.

Jane Austen’s phenomenon is closely associated with the cult of Janeites. Throughout the thesis, the term Janeite was explained and mentioned in connection with the enduring popularity of Austen and also the film *Austenland*. Nevertheless, for the needs of this analytic chapter it is crucial to understand the gradual development of the cult throughout the history. Janet Todd perfectly outlines the rise of the cult in the first half of the twentieth century:

Soon the author herself [Austen] became a sort of national treasure, with gentlemanly ‘Janeites’ growing sentimental over the heroines, especially Elizabeth Bennet. Later still, the novels provided an escape from the horrors of the First World War; Rudyard Kipling’s short story ‘The Janeites’ portrays a common soldier joining officers in a secret society of Austen lovers. [...] For activist women of both First and Second Wave feminism, the novels were less easily assimilated than her professional image: Austen became useful as a role-model for the struggling woman author who had to use subterfuge to get her message across.¹¹⁸

This suggests that Austen undeniably became an important source of help for people in distress. Some even believe Austen became a “signifier of English national identity.”¹¹⁹ The second half of the twentieth century concentrated on much more positive side of Austen’s potential by connecting people with the same interests and creating a society around Jane Austen’s legacy. Since then, the boom of Austen’s phenomenon influenced the adaptations of book and film genres. Thus, Jane Austen became an inspiration for modern sensibilities and especially the cult of Janeites on the Internet.

¹¹⁷ Todd, *Jane Austen*, 152.

¹¹⁸ Todd, *Jane Austen*, 151.

¹¹⁹ Nicole Peters, “Austen’s Malleability: Fans, Adaptations, and Value Production,” *Reception* 10 (2018): 74, <https://doi.org/10.5325/reception.10.1.0074>.

In contemporary culture it is the digital media content that is the most vital for Janeites. Countless devoted online communities on websites, blogs, and social media abound across the Internet. In her research, Krueger claims that the digital and online fanbase of Janeites changed the perception of Jane Austen by “challenging and reinforcing traditional narratives.”¹²⁰ Krueger adds that the fandoms operate through discussions within a wider community.¹²¹ Peters suggests that the topics of such discussions include not only Austen’s work and its adaptations, but also concepts of feminism, race, heteronormativity and gender.¹²² Thus, the digital media fanbase broadened the scope of modern issues Austen’s work and image are engaged with. Hence, this shared passion created many groups of Janeites all over the world, each with its own main reason for following Austen’s cult and legacy. The most dedicated and obsessed Janeites display such enthusiasm that reminds the subcultures of Harry Potter or Star Trek. According to Barchas, one of the New York conventions in 2012 gathered over one thousand Janeites wearing stunning dresses and costumes with incredible period details, attending the provided lectures, workshops, and a ball with authentic music and dances.¹²³ This only reinforces the idea of Jane Austen’s contemporary digital influence and her image of a phenomenon.

Some people dismiss Jane Austen simply as a romance novelist whose only interests consisted of love, marriage, and money. Nevertheless, the devoted Janeites understand there is more than that to Austen’s work and life. One of these Janeites is Inger Brodey, the founder of a YouTube channel *Jane Austen Summer Program*. The channel offers many intriguing videos that analyse Jane Austen’s novels, their background inspiration, and implications for current sensibilities. However, *Jane Austen Summer Program* also includes videos that concern Austen’s everyday life and hobbies that were common and popular during the Regency period, which makes the YouTube channel truly unique. The channel offers seven videos of lectures on different activities of Jane Austen’s life and era. The videos offer an insight into activities of eating, dressing, crafting, dancing, playing games, reading, and gardening. Each video features an expert in the field that the lecture presents. Therefore, the videos offer scrupulous explorations of the typical activities Austen herself experienced. The most popular video focuses on eating in Austen’s era and features a food historian KC Hysmith. In the video, Hysmith presents the parts of Austen’s novels that mention food, and subsequently discusses

¹²⁰ Misty Krueger, “Handles, hashtags, and Austen social media,” *University of Texas Press* 4 (2019): 378, <https://doi.org/10.7560/TSSL61404>.

¹²¹ Krueger, “Handles, hashtags, and Austen social media,” 380.

¹²² Peters, “Austen’s Malleability: Fans, Adaptations, and Value Production,” 92–95.

¹²³ Barchas, and Looser, “Introduction: What’s next for Jane Austen?,” 337.

the cooking techniques and possible ingredients for preparing a meal in Austen's era. As Hysmith says: "Her [Austen's] family managed a little farm [...] so they got a lot of their foodstuff from there."¹²⁴ Hysmith adds that Austen's lower class position in gentry forced her to "embody food knowledge from her parents and other relatives [...]."¹²⁵ Moreover, the video describes Austen's attitude towards food, buying and making of food in her times, information about historical cookbooks, teas Austen drank, and much more. Another video of *Jane Austen Summer Program* concerns the ways people dressed in Jane Austen's era. This video shows a lecture by a dress historian Hilary Davidson. In the video Davidson introduces a unique insight into the Regency period and its dress codes. Davidson says: "I try to interrogate a lot of the myths [...] so I wanted to go back to first principles and kind of explore it as people who lived in that time would have known it."¹²⁶ All of these are just few examples of information the videos by *Jane Austen Summer Program* present as it is impossible for the thesis to name all of them. In general, Janeites are fascinated by Austen's time. Thus, any possible way to return to the Regency period through clothes, food, dance or anything else agrees with their obsession and fandom. Hence, *Jane Austen Summer Program* with its videos and accessibility secures a close relationship with the audience and engages many further discussions of devoted Janeites. Such devotion and perhaps obsession only supports the growing popularity and influence of digital media on Jane Austen's image of a phenomenon in contemporary culture.

Blogs are the most frequent form of digital media content that focuses on Jane Austen. Therefore, the thesis analyses two most successful blogs – *Austenprose* led and edited by Laurel Ann Nattress, and *AustenBlog* edited by Margaret Sullivan. The blog *Austenprose* has been founded in 2007 while *AustenBlog* has already been active since 2004. Since then, both blogs have attracted Janeites from all over the world. The blogs create a virtual space where the members of Austen online community share their own ideas about many different topics concerning their beloved author. Through discussions, the blogs allow Janeites to express their opinions on Austen's work, life, legacy, newly introduced possibilities and hints that surround Jane Austen, film adaptations, fanfiction, illustrations, and so much more. Both blogs offer intriguing content for its visitors. Janeites may explore hundreds of fiction and non-fiction books, films, surviving letters of Austen, Austen's novels, Regency and Victorian novels,

¹²⁴ Jane Austen Summer Program, "Jane Austen & Co.: 'Eating With Austen,' featuring food historian KC Hysmith," 8 July 2020, YouTube video, 12:15, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UpmIGowSSJM>.

¹²⁵ Jane Austen Summer Program, "Jane Austen & Co.: 'Eating With Austen,' featuring food historian KC Hysmith," 13:35.

¹²⁶ Jane Austen Summer Program, "Jane Austen & Co.: 'Dressing With Jane Austen,' featuring dress historian Hilary Davidson," 13 July 2020, YouTube video, 9:50, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a6DyTEh1kgo&t=3s>

period drama, and there is no end to the list. Moreover, the blogs include thousands of available discussions and posts on variety of topics from all the years since their foundation. Thus, the blogs *Austenprose* and *AustenBlog* offer overwhelming amount of information about Jane Austen and make an inexhaustible source of information as there are new additions to the blogs almost every single day. Hence, the followers of the blogs are not merely Janeites. The regular attendance of both blogs also includes many scholars who offer interesting ideas, research, and reviews about Jane Austen from verified sources. Krueger explains that the blogs enable “the sharing of information and scholarship about Jane Austen among both fan-readers and academic scholars in new ways.”¹²⁷ Therefore, the blogs *Austenprose* and *AustenBlog* create an enormous network of Janeites and inspire people in their self-education or artistic endeavours. The blogs allow Janeites to follow and better understand the roots and reasons for Austen’s enduring popularity and her image of a phenomenon in contemporary culture. Therefore, the online communities of the blogs also use Jane Austen’s image to challenge social norms and modern issues in a way most other authors cannot. Digital media content transmitted the perceived image of Austen as a phenomenon of contemporary popular culture and engaged Austen’s name, work, life, and the adaptations with even greater fan base.

To conclude, digital media managed to build a community around Jane Austen. This online fandom successfully connects Janeites all over the world. The contemporary popularity of Austen’s work, life, and legacy enables the communities of Janeites to express themselves through their beloved author. Digital media depict Jane Austen almost as a goddess and assure her a digital afterlife. Therefore, digital media content helps to maintain Austen’s popularity and image of a phenomenon.

¹²⁷ Krueger, “Handles, hashtags, and Austen social media,” 382.

CONCLUSION

To call Jane Austen ubiquitous may seem as an exaggerated statement, however, the thesis proves she is rightfully entitled to such description. The thesis depicts Jane Austen as a phenomenon of contemporary culture as people all over the world are truly enchanted by her. Since 2017, Jane Austen's portrait has been present on the British ten-pound note. This truly unmatched honour supports Jane Austen's image of a phenomenon. Furthermore, Austen's work is currently among the very best literature has to offer and the world is curious about the woman behind all of those wonderful novels. Thus, Jane Austen's work is not the only aspect that still fascinates people until this very day. People are interested in Austen's intriguing life with its backstories and mysteries as well. Therefore, Jane Austen's attractive image inspires the genres of books, films, and digital media of popular culture to use this image to their advantage and create exciting adaptations of Austen's work and life.

For some people the way Austen seems in the surviving letters and her novels is enough. But others rather choose to explore other possible depictions. The books, films, and digital media try to depict Jane Austen in ways that engage the audience the most. Thus, by connecting facts with fiction the genres introduce many alluring possibilities. The genres offer a variety of different stories, mysteries, and hints regarding Austen's life. Hence, the adaptations of the genres create specific representations of Jane Austen. The depicted images of Austen vary from a spinster to a fighter for justice, however, each adaptation brings a unique insight and introduces Austen's phenomenon to the masses. Subsequently, the adaptations prefer to focus on certain resonant themes of Jane Austen's life. Most of the adaptations describe Austen's family, love life, the Regency period, death, authorship, wit, legacy, opinions, or her contemporary impact. Through such themes the adaptations manage to depict Jane Austen from different angles and incorporate her character into the sensibilities of the modern age.

To conclude, the image of a phenomenon has kept Jane Austen prominent in contemporary culture while her work, life, character, and legacy in cooperation with the genres of popular culture and their adaptations ensure her enduring popularity.

RESUMÉ

Jane Austen je známá zejména jako autorka s vytříbeným smyslem pro humor, schopností detailního a realistického popisu svých postav či jako představitelka nadčasových a láskyplných románů. Současná kultura vyobrazuje Jane Austen jakožto autorku, která i po více než dvě stě letech od své smrti nepřestává inspirovat a udivovat mnoho lidí po celém světě, a proto se stala fenoménem dnešní doby. Právě tématem vyobrazení Jane Austen v současné kultuře se tato bakalářská práce zabývá. Primárně se soustředí na život a obraz Jane Austen a prezentuje obecné vnímání jejího fenoménu. Práce analyzuje, jakým způsobem vybrané žánry populární kultury a jejich adaptace vyobrazují Jane Austen v současné kultuře a na která témata jejího života se proto soustředí.

Práci zahajuje teoretická kapitola, která prezentuje obecné vnímání obrazu Austenové jakožto fenoménu. Pro uvedení tématu práce, kapitola představuje všeobecně uznávaná a nejpodstatnější fakta ohledně života Jane Austen. Jedním z nejdůležitějších zdrojů o životě Austenové je nepochybně dochovaná osobní korespondence, konkrétně dopisy, které nabízejí daleko detailnější vhled a představu o jejím životě. Kapitola zároveň osvětluje vliv období regentství, jeho morálních standardů, očekávání společnosti a genderových rolí na vývoj Austenové jako spisovatelky, osobnosti a ženy. Období regentství souviselo s rozdíly mezi společenskými třídami. Tyto rozdíly Jane Austen sama na vlastní kůži zažila a popisovala je tak ve svých románech. Tuto problematiku dále prokládala narážkami na nerovnoměrné postavení žen ve společnosti, které se odrážely ve všech životních sférách, a nutily tak ženy do manželství z ryze praktických důvodů. Tím pádem jedinečný vhled a názory Austenové na období regentství jí dopomohly k vyjádření nadčasových myšlenek, které ji zdobí dodnes. Dále teoretická kapitola přibližuje názory několika autorů na téma, které se zabývá fenoménem Jane Austen v dnešní době. Kapitola tak ukazuje postupný historický růst Austenové nejen jako autorky, ale také osobnosti, a nakonec jakožto fenoménu současné kultury. Kapitulu uzavírá představení vybraných žánrů a adaptací, které vyobrazují Jane Austen v současné kultuře. Vykreslení zmíněných témat, která teoretická kapitola představuje, slouží k obecnému porozumění a náhledu do problematiky, na kterou se zaměřuje analytická část práce.

První analytická kapitola této bakalářské práce se soustředí na knižní žánr populární kultury, který se věnuje fenoménu Jane Austen v současné kultuře. Tím pádem kapitola zkoumá způsoby, kterými žánr knih prezentuje současné vyobrazení Jane Austen. Zaměřuje se na dvě knižní adaptace života Jane Austen, kterými jsou *Antipodes Jane* od Barbary Ker Wilson a *The Mysterious Death of Miss Austen* od Lindsay Ashford. Autorky se zcela logicky snaží zachytit

Jane Austen způsobem, který přiláká co možná nejvíce čtenářů. Obě knihy jsou proto založeny na myšlence toho, co se mohlo v životě Jane Austen přihodit. Barbara Ker Wilson ve svém dobrodružném románu *Antipodes Jane* vytváří příběh Jane Austen, která odcestovala do Austrálie. Lindsay Ashford skrze dramatický román *The Mysterious Death of Miss Austen* představuje vsutku neortodoxní zjištění ohledně smrti Jane Austen. Analýza tedy zkoumá nejvíce rezonantní témata života Jane Austen, na která se adaptace zaměřují. Mezi tato témata patří prolínání faktů a fikce, vliv rodiny, důvtip, milostný život, nejasná smrt a v neposlední řadě tajemství a záhady, které obklopují život Jane Austen. Proto se obě adaptace zabývají hlubokými momenty a otázkami života Jane Austen a vyobrazují její život tím nejneobvyklejším způsobem. Nicméně kapitola pracuje s předpokladem, že analyzované adaptace nepředstavují prokázaná a nově zjištěná fakta. Autoři adaptací využívají vlastní fantazii, aby vytvořili vzrušující obraz Jane Austen. Tím pádem pouze nabízejí možnosti a příležitosti života Jane Austen.

Druhá analytická kapitola bakalářské práce představuje filmový žánr a jeho snahy o adaptace života Jane Austen. Kapitola zkoumá, jakými způsoby filmový žánr spolu s vybranými adaptacemi vyobrazují Jane Austen v současné kultuře. Kapitola se tedy týká analýz třech vybraných filmů, které jsou inspirovány životem a fenoménem Jane Austen. Tyto filmy jsou *Becoming Jane*, *Miss Austen Regrets* a *Austenland*. První film *Becoming Jane*, který režíroval Julian Jarrold, popisuje dvacetiletou Jane Austen a její milostný příběh s Tomem Lefroyem. Další film, který kapitola analyzuje, nese název *Miss Austen Regrets* a režíroval ho Jeremy Lovering. Tento film vypráví příběh posledních let života Jane Austen, která se zamýšlí nad svým uplynulým životem a rozhodnutími, která v minulosti učinila. Posledním filmem je *Austenland* od režisérky Jerusha Hess. Tato romantická komedie inspirovaná stejnojmenným románem autorky Shannon Hale zkoumá svět Janeites a jejich obsesi obdobím regentství. Analýzy se proto zaměřují na několik konkrétních témat, která filmy využívají pro vyobrazení Jane Austen. Mezi taková témata patří láska, manželství, sociální standardy, očekávání a normy období regentství, obraz Austenové jakožto autorky a také její oslavovaný důvtip. Film *Austenland* navíc zkoumá téma kultu Janeites. Všechny tři filmy jsou důkazem toho, že potenciál Jane Austen, ovlivňuje mnoho filmových studií natolik, že nabízejí různorodé adaptace, které jsou inspirované touto znamenitou ženou, spisovatelkou a osobností. Popularita a tajemno života Jane Austen proto dávají za vznik mnoha filmovým adaptacím, které uchvacují filmové publikum a posilují tak fenomén Jane Austen v současné kultuře.

Třetí a poslední analytická kapitola této bakalářské práce se zaměřuje na digitální média a jejich vliv na vyobrazení Jane Austen jakožto fenoménu současné kultury. Kapitola se týká

kultu Janeites, nadšených obdivovatelů Jane Austen a veškerého obsahu, který se s ní pojí. Tento kult se stal velice populárním především na internetu a skrze digitální média se okolo fenoménu Jane Austen utvořily stovky komunit, které spojuje obdiv a vášeň ohledně Jane Austen. Kapitola nabízí stručný úvod do tématu kultu Janeites včetně zásadních momentů historie kultu. Dále pak řeší současný stav kultu na platformách digitálních médií. V důsledku toho se analýza soustředí na YouTube kanál *Jane Austen Summer Program*, který nabízí fascinující videa ohledně každodenního života a koníčků Jane Austen, které byly běžné v období regentství. Tato jedinečná videa obsahují několik přednášek expertů z různých odvětví, kteří nabízejí odborný vhled na činnosti, které Jane Austen sama zažila. Tyto činnosti zahrnují oblékání, ruční práce, tanec, hraní her, čtení či zahradničení. Dále kapitola analyzuje dva z nejúspěšnějších blogů internetu zabývajících se Jane Austen. Jsou jimi blogy *Austenprose* a *AustenBlog*. Oba blogy vytvářejí jedinečný virtuální prostor, ve kterém členové komunit sdílejí své představy a názory o různých tématech týkajících se Jane Austen. Oba blogy zkoumají Jane Austen z mnoha různých pohledů a poskytují tak svým fanouškům ohromné množství informací. Digitální média jsou proto nevyčerpatelným zdrojem, jelikož se jejich obsah nepřetržitě rozšiřuje každým dnem. Digitální média tak dokázala vytvořit komunitu okolo Jane Austen, která spojuje lidi po celém světě, a posiluje tak vyobrazení Jane Austen jakožto fenoménu v současné kultuře.

Veškeré analyzované příklady v této bakalářské práci poukazují na fakt, že Jane Austen je skutečně fenoménem současné kultury. Skrze žánry populární kultury se Austenové dostává posmrtné slávy, o které se jí nikdy ani nesnilo a její současný vliv je daleko pozoruhodnější než si velká část populace připouští.

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