Adaptations, Sequels and Success
The Expanding Sense and Sensibility Text Universe

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Abstract. This article asks why people are obsessed with Jane Austen’s stories and why her stories are spreading across the globe, across media forms, and across generations? In an attempt to analyse the Austenmania-phenomenon, this article examines various re-presentations of Austen’s Sense and Sensibility in order to discuss what these re-presentations contribute with to the understanding of the source text and to the text universe as a whole. The analysis shows that the re-presentations not only expand Austen’s story and provide insight into the characters and their actions, but also draw attention to historical and contemporary power hierarchies and gender roles.

Keywords: Jane Austen; Sense and Sensibility; text universe; re-presentation; adaptation; fan fiction.

1. Introduction

“a picture is worth a thousand words—unless they’re Jane Austen’s, of course”
(Nora Foster Stovel, n.pag.)

Although it is 200 years since Jane Austen’s life (1775-1817) came to an end, her presence is still very strong particularly through her fictional works which are more read and wider spread today than ever [1]. Most famous are her six novels: *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1816), *Northanger Abbey* (1818), and *Persuasion* (1818). These novels are famous in their own right, but also through the numerous re-presentations that exist in the forms of version novels, movies, TV-series, and fan fiction that connect to the characters and fictional worlds of her novels in some way. Austen’s novels, her settings and particularly her characters live on in ever-expanding text universes. Hence, Austen’s six novels have developed into a huge phenomenon – a shared passion sometimes referred to as “Austenmania” (Pucci and Thompson 1). This phenomenon nourishes a franchise that exists beyond the written word, which can be seen in the numerous fans from all over the world, Janeites, who visit the places where Austen lived and the places where the novels were filmed. In addition, through online discussion communities such as “The Republic of Pemberley,” fandoms such as “Bits of Ivory” and Twitter accounts such as “@DailyJaneAusten” with more than 25,000 followers and “@JaneAustenLIVES” with more than 23,000 followers (as of October 2017), Austen’s stories reach an even larger population.

Looking at the huge phenomenon of Austenmania, it is relevant to ask: why are people still obsessed with Jane Austen and her stories 200 years after their publication and why are her stories still spreading across the globe, across media forms, and across generations? Why do people feel the need or desire to keep expanding Austen’s fictional works and worlds? Many readers want to interact with her stories and to alter them so that they become what the readers want them
to be, or to continue the stories so that they end in different ways or not end at all. This article analyses the Austenmania-phenomenon by looking more closely at re-presentations of Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility* as it analyses (parts of) the Sense and Sensibility text universe in order to discuss what the various re-presentations contribute with to the understanding of the source text, that is Austen’s novel, as well as of the text universe as a whole.

What, then, is a text universe? When parts of a story (source text), such as plot, setting, characters etc. are used in the creation of new stories in various text- and media forms, the source text and the various re-presentations together form a text universe relating to a particular text. Just like the universe, a text universe is constantly expanding, since every story offers infinite possibilities to be expanded through, for example, prequels and sequels, as well as through web pages and merchandise. Every new story adds to the text universe by (unique) contributions that develop the story further. These contributions problematise the hierarchical relationship that traditionally has existed between the source text and the various re-presentations. Because the participants in a text universe have various first encounters with the story (one might have Austen’s novel while another might have Lee’s film as their first encounter), the various texts might be seen as holding a more equal position in the text universe. Because every participant creates his or her own text universe depending on which texts, re-presentations, he or she adds to it, every text universe is an individual construction. While one participant might have watched Lee’s film, read Austen’s novel, written and read hundreds of fan fictions relating to the Sense and Sensibility story, another participant might have watched Alexander’s TV-series and read Austen’s novel. Even though their text universes are different, they share the experience of participating in the Sense and Sensibility text universe. Clearly, there are numerous ways to use a story. To experience the story in different ways is a trend, as Pucci and Thompson point out: “Increasingly, this is the way cultural experiences are disseminated and consumed: see the film, read the book, buy the soundtrack, check out the Web site, visit the ‘actual’ Austen sites in English country houses and countryside” (5). As a result of this trend, Austen’s stories and characters exist in several forms and contribute to a growing franchise which, like a ripple effect, keeps spreading and thus reaching new audiences, new (co-)creators, and new fans.

A text universe may thus consist of numerous stories told in very disparate text and media forms. In order to work with such a large and diverse text universe, and as a way to illustrate that the various texts that make up the universe neither have the same aims, nor the same frame works, the various re-presentations are divided into three different categories of which the first two will be dealt with in this article; *remakes*, where the story is made again – a repetition of the same story but in new and/or different fashion (which might be achieved through the transfer of the story to a new medium, an adaptation), *makeovers*, where the story is made anew – an alteration of the story to fit a new audience (through for example variation novels, and fan fiction), and *factions*, where (parts of) the fictional story is made non-fictive or made to appear as real (examples of this category are Facebook pages, Twitter accounts, merchandise, buildings and locations, and cosplay).
2. Remakes and Makeovers

One large category of remakes are film adaptations, which aim to retell a story in a new medium and at the same time stay faithful to the source text. Fans of a story will always question why this or that scene is deleted, altered, or added etc. “The challenge for filmmakers is to find the visual language and a reading of the original that allow the story to speak to that new audience,” as Penny Gay argues (108). An adaptation thus has a double target audience in that it addresses fans as well as newcomers to the story. In addition to the double address, the story needs to be translated from a linguistic to an audio-visual medium when it is adapted from a novel to a film. Hence, when Austen’s 200-year-old novel was adapted to a film in 1995, the late 20th century audience of fans as well as newcomers needed to be taken into consideration. “Bridging the historical gap is a major challenge for any adapter of Austen,” Foster Stovel argues (n.pag).

The film adaptation Sense and Sensibility directed by Ang Lee and broadcast in 1995, won Emma Thompson an Academy Award for best adapted screenplay. While adaptations are remakes that aim to tell the same story with minor changes, and as such invite comparison, it is fruitful to discuss what these changes contribute with to the Sense and Sensibility-text universe and to the understanding of the source text, Austen’s novel, rather than foregrounding the similarities and differences between the two texts. “Exploring Thompson’s adaptation can highlight differences between page and screen,” Foster Stovel claims (n.pag), and adds that “[i]t can also illuminate Austen’s text and the change in sensibilities between Regency and modern societies” (n.pag). One major difference that is noticeable between the Regency era in which Austen’s novel and Lee’s film are set and the late 20th century in which the watching of the film takes place, is gender roles. In the film, Margaret Dashwood, aged 13, holds a position from which it is okay to be ignorant of and ask questions related to social and cultural codes. Hence, she represents the position of the audience, “[i]n order to bridge the cultural gap,” Foster Stovel argues (n.pag). An example of this is the scene where Margaret wonders why they cannot stay in the house and Elinor explains: “Because houses go from father to son, dearest—not from father to daughter. It is the law” (00:05:25-00:05:45). She thus clarifies the primogeniture that Austen fans are likely familiar with, but which can be difficult to understand by an audience in 1995.

Another notable change in Lee’s film is the portrayal of the male characters. Being a story about a family of women, Austen’s novel focuses on the portrayal of the female characters, but Lee’s film adds sympathetic features to Mr Ferrars, which can be seen in his kindness to Margaret (00:10:50-00:10:58) and his attempt at teaching her to fence (00:13:20-00:13:53), as well as to Colonel Brandon, who is portrayed as a father-figure who fails because he gives his protégée too much independence (1:31:00-1:31:07). Hence, Lee’s Sense and Sensibility “used updated versions of the early 19th-century heroes to sell emerging ideals of manhood to the late-20th century, at a time when the pro-feminist men’s movement was challenging gender norms in the realm of politics and pop culture” as Devoney Looser claims (n.pag). As a result,

[The changes Lee and Thompson made to Austen’s original story meant the title Sense and Sensibility no longer alluded to just the characteristics of its heroines.]
It now applied to the heroes as well, with Rickman and Grant’s characters proving men could combine a heightened emotional sensitivity (“sensibility”) with the traditionally masculine bedrock of clear-eyed rationality (“sense”). (Looser, n.pag.)

This remake, though set in the Regency era, translates some elements, including the male characters, in order to make them believable to the audience in 1995. In addition, Austen’s critique of gender roles is further enhanced in Lee’s film. An example of this is when Elinor explains to Edward, who believes that he and Elinor are in a similar position because he is forced into an idle and useless job by his family, that “you will inherit your fortune. We cannot even earn ours” (00:17:06-00:17:13). Through this film, the economic and social status of women during Austen’s era is placed in the foreground. Sense and Sensibility is Austen’s “sourest look at the oppression of women through marriage, property and family” (Fuller 20), and Lee’s remake enhances the social and economic critique initiated by Austen. Linda Hutcheon argues that adaptation may “keep that prior work alive, giving it an afterlife it would never have had otherwise,” because “adaptation is how stories evolve and mutate to fit new times and different places” (176). Hence, this remake contributes to the text universe not only by transferring the story to an audio-visual medium, and thus making it accessible to a new audience, but also by illuminating and strengthening gender aspects put forth in the source text.

Ang Lee’s Sense and Sensibility is a commercial success, not only because it received positive reviews and earned seven Academy Awards nominations (of which Thompson won for best adapted screenplay) and eleven BAFTA nominations (of which Thompson won for Best Actress in a Leading Role, Winslet won for Best Actress in a Supporting Role, and the cast led by director Lee and producer Doran won for Best Film), but also because it generated an increased interest in Austen’s Sense and Sensibility as well as her other fictional works, and has contributed to the Sense and Sensibility text universe as it has inspired numerous remakes and makeovers.

In 2008, BBC broadcasted a remake of Austen’s novel as a 3-episodes TV-series adaptation entitled Sense & Sensibility directed by John Alexander with screenplay by Andrew Davies. Naturally, this remake relates to Austen’s novel, but it also needs to relate to previous remakes or makeovers. In particular, it needs to relate to Lee’s film released more than 10 years prior. Just as Lee’s film, Alexander’s series follows Austen’s story closely with some small adjustments to the plot, in addition to the adjustments required when transferring the story from one medium (novel) to another (TV-series). As a story broadcast to a 21st Century audience, Alexander’s series emphasises the inequality of men and women during Austen’s era, which can be seen in Elinor’s response to her half-brother John inheriting Norland: “Sons are always heirs. There is nothing anyone can do about it” (Ep 1, 00:05:00-00:05:06). This response clearly highlights the disadvantageous position of daughters in Austen’s contemporary society. In a discussion of Austen adaptations, Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield claim that “[w]hat the writers and directors behind the four updates find regrettable is Austen’s lack of advocacy for women’s careers (other than as wife)” (n.pag). In Austen’s story, the most important task for women is to find suitable husbands, a
life-mission that when placed in such an illuminate position, might be considered as a subtle critique against prevailing social gender norms. Alexander’s TV-series, foregrounds this life-mission and further questions it, which can be seen in particular when the Dashwood family meet with their relative, who greets them by claiming: “I dare say we shall find you all husbands before the year is out. How is that?” (Ep 1, 00:33:12-00:33:14), upon which Elinor points out: “My youngest sister is perhaps a little young for a husband, Sir” (Ep 1, 00:33:20-00:33:22). Hence, the ridiculousness of this haste to marry of one’s female relatives further enhances the criticism of the position of women during Austen’s era.

One widely discussed adjustment in Alexander’s series is the opening scene portraying an erotic encounter where Willoughby seduces a young woman (Ep 1, 00:00:00-00:01:01). For fans and people familiar with Austen’s story, this scene might be slightly confusing, but it is possible to understand who they are. However, for people not familiar with the story, this scene might be very confusing, and in addition, distracting to the story as it reveals Willoughby’s true character long before Marianne realises what he is like. In a newspaper article about the adaptation, Julie Moult and James Mills bring up critique from the chairman of the Jane Austen Society against Andrew Davies for including the scene in a TV-series, which “is lowering itself by degrading fine English literature in the battle for ratings” (n.pag.). In the same article, it is reported that “Davies rubbished suggestions he had sexed-up the novel for ratings – although he admitted his version was more overtly sexual than previous adaptations” (n.pag.). Ratings are of course important in the entertainment industry, and this particular episode was reportedly watched by over five million viewers (Moult and Mills n.pag.). However, besides an increase in circulation, this remake, like other remakes, strengthen the already close relationship between the audience and Austen’s stories where some themes initiated by Austen, are criticised, explained and emphasised.

Remakes of Sense and Sensibility make minor adjustments to the source text, but through the adaptation of the story to another medium and to another target audience, these changes are significant to the understanding of the source text as well as of the text universe. One consequence of remaking the story is that Sense and Sensibility enthusiasts may come into contact with Austen and her literary productions through remakes rather than through the novel. The possessiveness they experience is thus dependent on which version of the story they prefer to identify as the “original.” Regardless of whether it is Austen’s words in a book, Lee’s words and images of Austen’s words in a in a movie, or Alexander’s interpretations in a television series that is a person’s first contact with Sense and Sensibility, the many and various remakes contribute to and profit from an ever-growing Austen universe.

While remakes make small, but significant, alterations to the source text, makeovers aim to alter the story in more dramatic ways, for example re-tell the story from another character’s perspective, change the setting, time period, or genre, or continue with the story after Austen’s novel ends. One large category of makeovers are version novels, that is novels where writers use parts of the source text, for example, setting, plot, or characters, and create a new story, thus contributing to the constantly expanding text universe. While there are numerous
version novels that relate to Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, there are also many, though not as many, version novels that relate to *Sense and Sensibility*.

The first example of version novel that will be discussed here is part of a larger project – the Austen project – created by the publisher HarperCollins with the idea to assign six contemporary best-selling authors to retell Austen’s six novels. So far, four novels have been re-told in the project, and the first one to be published is Joanna Trollop’s *Sense & Sensibility* (2013). Although, Trollop’s novel is set in contemporary England, the story, plot, and characters are very close to Austen’s story, plot, and characters. What this story adds to the text universe apart from an updated context is a critique of the power hierarchies based on gender and social status found in Austen’s contemporary society, but also in the society of today. In Austen’s contemporary society, family fortunes were inherited by male relatives. Though this is not a general custom in today’s society, it is still the case in Trollop’s novel where “Darling Uncle Henry didn’t leave [Mr Dashwood] Norland or any money or anything. He got completely seduced by being a great-uncle to a little boy in old age. So, he left everything to them. He left it all to John” (9). The decision to let the male heir inherit the estate is portrayed as an act of will rather than a social restriction. However, when this primogeniture takes place in the 21st Century, it seems out of place and thus illuminates social structures created to privilege men over women. Hence, while continuing these structures, the makeover can, at the same time, be seen as a critique of the same.

While readers of Austen’s novel in the 21st Century might accept the fact that the mission in life for Elinor and Marianne is to find suitable husbands who can support them because it reflects Austen’s contemporary society, they might expect a difference when the story is set in the 21st Century. However, this is not the case in Trollop’s novel, although Elinor is a working girl, who functions as the breadwinner of the Dashwood family, since neither Marianne nor her mother are willing to find work. Except for Elinor, the female characters are portrayed as rather helpless and seem to be unable to take care of themselves. The youngest Dashwood sister, Margaret, questions women’s role in society, but apart from this, there is not much adjustment to the contemporary audience.

In addition to Margaret’s questioning of women’s role in society, Trollop gives voice, however little, to Belle Dashwood, expressing a desire to find love again: “she did have a desire not to look only like the mother of three grown daughters,” and a wish to be acknowledged as “a woman who was admired for what she still had, rather than was pitied for what she now lacked” (171-172). Even though her attempts to be introduced to the London society is immediately silenced by Mrs Jennings who claims: “You dear? What would you want with London, living where you do?” (173). Mrs Dashwood’s “heart was a muscle as well as an organ, and required exercise” (172). This acknowledgement of Belle Dashwood as a woman who yearns to be recognised and loved, can be read as a critique against the fact that in the source text, Mrs Dashwood is not as a woman considered suitable to find a husband, though she is not much older than Colonel Brandon. Trollop’s Belle is not a suitable match form Colonel Brandon either, but this novel adds to the text universe by acknowledging the mature woman as an emotional and sexual being.

Another project that aims to re-present Austen’s novels by creating mash-ups of Austen’s classic novels and elements from popular culture is undertaken by
Quirk Books, and the most famous makeover in the series so far is *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2009) by Seth Graham-Greene. As part of this project, Ben Winter’s version of Austen’s novel, *Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters* (2009), aims to popularise Austen’s novel by making it into a sea monster action story. In an interview, Dr. Troost explains that this makeover is “a market calculation,” where the “people at Quirk Books decided they wanted to do something that was kind of exciting” (Carone and Cavanaugh n.pag.). Apart from functioning as a popularisation, that is, a classic story with elements from popular culture, *Sense and Sensibilities and Sea Monsters*, adds to the text universe by bringing in elements of horror, satire and comedy. Moreover, it brings in mutant characters, who look horrible, but are kind, in the form of Colonel Brandon who “suffered from a cruel affliction […]. He bore a set of long squishy tentacles protruding grotesquely from his face […] like hideous living facial hair of slime green” (38). Thus, this makeover makes it very clear that Marianne needs to learn to appreciate certain qualities in a man when choosing whom to marry. Hence, this novel strengthens the beauty and the beast-theme subtly initiated by Austen. Another contribution to the Sense and Sensibility text universe provided by Winter’s version novel is the portrayal of physically strong female characters who use weapons to survive on the island surrounded by sea monsters. In particular, Mrs Dashwood acts quickly when the family is first attacked by a sea monster: “She grasped a spare oar from its rigging, snapped it in twain upon her knee with a swift motion, and plunged the sharp, broken point into the churning sea – piercing the gleaming, deep-set eye of the beast” (30). Hence, the mature woman is portrayed as fearless and physically strong in this makeover.

Regarding popularisations, it is neither possible nor necessary to discuss whether the function of the popular elements is to introduce a classic story to a new target audience or whether the function of the classic text is to provide credibility and status to a popular text. Instead, as this article argues, it is fruitful to look at what the various pieces in the text universe mosaic contribute with when it comes to the understanding of the source text and of the text universe as a whole.

Many writers have taken on larger individual makeover projects of rewriting several of Austen’s novels. Two such projects are mentioned here. Emma Tennant has created sequels to several Austen’s novels, as for example, *Pemberley; or, Pride and Prejudice Continued, An Unequal Marriage; or, Pride and Prejudice Twenty Years Later, Emma in Love: Jane Austen’s Emma Continued*, and *Elinor and Marianne: A Sequel to Sense and Sensibility*. In *Elinor and Marianne: A Sequel to Sense and Sensibility*, Tennant uses the sisterly bond between Elinor Ferrars and Marianne Brandon. In addition to continuing the story and thus contributing with an expansion of the plotline, Tennant uses letters to convey a personal tone and an insight into the characters’ thoughts and wishes. As a result, the reader is distanced from the plot, but at the same time gains a closer understanding of the two sisters.

Amanda Grange re-write Austen’s story from the perspective of the main male character, as for example, *Mr Knightley’s Diary, Mr Darcy’s Diary, Captain Wentworth’s Diary, Edmund Bertram’s Diary, Colonel Brandon’s Diary, Henry Tilney’s Diary, Wickham’s Diary*, and *Dear Mr Darcy*, in addition to the sequels
Mr Darcy Vampyre and Pride and Pyramids with Jacqueline Webb. In Colonel Brandon’s Diary, the story, told from the perspective of Colonel Brandon, focuses on his love to Eliza and his care for her daughter – events only mentioned in Austen’s novel. Hence, this version novel contributes with a fuller understanding of Colonel Brandon’s actions, and provides insight into why he might be the way he is and behave the way he does. As an effect, the reader sympathises with Colonel Brandon already from the start and sees Willoughby for who he is.

Another makeover that is set in the 21st Century is the film Scents and Sensibility (2011) directed by Brian Brough with screenplay by Jennifer Jan and Brittany Wiscombe. The connection to Austen’s novel is made clear in the title of the film, however, with a pun. In this film, the basic story of Austen’s novel is set in the 21st Century United States. Instead of Mr Dashwood’s death, Elinor and Marianne’s father is imprisoned for fraud and embezzlement, which means that Mrs Dashwood and her daughters have to leave everything they own and have to find new jobs. The film makers have incorporated an element of shunning to illustrate the difficulty for the Dashwood sisters to find a job, hence maintaining the connection to the source text while still making the story believable to the audience. On the one hand, it is impossible for Elinor to find a job that suits her competence, so she needs to work as custodian at a spa. Marianne, on the other hand, lies about her name, and finds job as a copy girl. In addition to finding jobs and supporting their mother and younger sister, Marianne and Elinor start a successful business creating lotion, which illustrates that young women can be successful in business as well as in love. As a result, this story contains empowering elements for young women of the 21st Century and, as such, contributes to the expanding text universe by adding a contemporary response to Austen’s novel.

The film From Prada to Nada (2011) directed by Angel Gracia with screenplay by Fina Torres, Luis Alfaro, and Craig Fernandez is also a makeover of Austen’s Sense and Sensibility. Set in the 21st Century Los Angeles, the story focuses on the drastic change from a life among the wealthy in Beverly Hills to a life with their aunt in East Los Angeles for Nora and Mary Dominguez upon the sudden death of their father. In addition to focusing on the appropriation of living under poorer circumstances and valuing other aspects of life than what they are used to, the film brings in the aspect of valuing a cultural heritage. Having lived in Beverly Hills, the sisters identify themselves as American, which can be seen when Mary explains that her parents are Mexican, but that she is “American of course” (00:40:50-00:41:05). Furthermore, cultural stereotypes are placed in the foreground in this film, where Mary immediately thinks that Bruno is going to steel from her (00:34:30-00:34:34). When he then asks: “Do you think all Mexicans steal?” (00:34:42), she replies: “I don’t know. I’m not Mexican” (00:34:45). The denial of their Mexican heritage can further be seen in the fact that neither of the sisters speaks Spanish (00:41:20-00:41:23). Gracia’s Mary, just like Austen’s Marianne, goes through a humbling learning experience and, as a result, she and her sister start to accept their cultural heritage and appreciate their life in east Los Angeles. While Austen’s novel focuses on a small, homogenous, and monocultural part of English society, this makeover, though it uses many elements from Austen’s novel, adds to the text universe by incorporating the
aspect of double cultural belongings not only for the main characters, but also for the city of Los Angeles.

While version novels and films is one big category of makeovers, fan fiction is another. Fan fiction is not a new phenomenon even if the term is fairly new [2]. However, during the last decade there has been an enormous increase in this kind of literature much due to the expansion of the Internet. Fan fiction is a concept that relates to texts of various length and quality, often in English as a global language, written by fans and based on texts (printed, visual or other) that they admire. Writers of fan fiction use an already existing narrative world or characters when they create their own interpretations, alterations or continuations of the source text.

Fan fiction is produced on an amateur level online often in specific communities, so-called fandoms, where writers participate anonymously using pseudonyms. There are plenty of websites and fandoms dedicated to Jane Austen’s literary production. In one of the larger communities, Fanfiction.net, there are, for example, nearly 800 stories related to the novel Pride and Prejudice alone. There are also other websites more specifically aimed towards Austen-fans, such as Jane Austen Fan Fiction (janeaustenfanfiction.com). A large website that contains fan fiction along with discussion boards for “The Truly Obsessed” is The Republic of Pemberley, where there are specifically categorized fan fiction rooms such as “Jane Austen Sequels” that focuses on continuations of Austen’s novels and “Bits of Ivory” that focuses on the Regency era only. This website is run by a volunteer committee and is host for a large number of fan fiction writers and Austen enthusiasts. Located online, fan fiction is part of the globalization of various text universes, and fan fiction connected to Austen contributes to the global spread of these text-universes as well as to the current Austenmania.

Interactivity is a keyword of the fan fiction writing process. The practice of fan fiction illustrates a fan’s desire to be an active part of the creation of the story. The reader or watcher becomes a prosumer, the combination of producer and consumer of literature (Toffler 492). Not only is the act of writing fan fiction interactive, but the activity within the communities is also interactive since they are participatory cultures where it is common to comment on one another’s productions as well as to evaluate and rate them. The response process aims to improve such productions, at the same time as it creates a dialogue between writers and readers from various areas across the world. “Fan fiction can be seen,” Henry Jenkins claims, “as an unauthorized expansion of these media franchises into new directions which reflect the reader’s desire to ‘fill in the gaps’ they have discovered in the commercially produced material” (n.pag.). Among the ways to “fill in the gaps” are: to rewrite the story from a new perspective, to continue the story or to alter the heterosexual pairings in the source texts into new heterosexual constellations or more frequently into homosexual pairings called slash (male) and femslash (female) (Pugh 91, 109). In a way, a fan fiction writer can be seen as a critical reader of the source text in that he or she may emphasize what he or she sees as its weaknesses.

Fan fiction and version novels share many similar traits, but also differences, the biggest one being that while fan fiction writers write for a limited group of people with a common interest in the same story without making any profit, the version novel writers make a profit from their productions. Hence, while fan
fiction is written by fans for fans, version novels are not necessarily, but could be, written by fans, however, they are clearly written for fans.

It is imperative to treat the source text with utmost respect when producing a piece of fan fiction. Many pieces of fan fiction start with a writer’s comment, where the ideas behind the story are explained. “Marianne’s Lesson” by A.Lady.001, for example, begins with an explanatory comment: “Hi. I want to share this idea that I had with you all. I guess I really don’t want Marriane gets Brandon XD. But I hope you enjoy it. Story is altered in order of some things could happened, but the facts that are not mentioned here are supposed to have occurred as it is known” (n.pag, original emphasis and spelling). In the story, the woman whom Colonel Brandon loved many years prior, who was married to his brother and after an accident were presumed dead, suddenly comes back: “After twelve years missing, Eliza Brandon was standing at that door, looking at him with wet eyes and a tender smile. […] He ran to her and took her in his arms as tight as he could” (n.pag.). Clearly, A.Lady.001 does not see Colonel Brandon and Marianne as a suitable match. Since Marianne does not appreciate him and his characteristics, she needs to learn a lesson:

Every time Marianne saw, from Elinor’s window, the boys and his father returning from hunting, all smiling and running, she couldn’t stop thinking about the possibility that she once had of be the mother of those beautiful kids and the wife of that amazing man, who only now she noticed. This certainly gave her a lesson and she will definitely learn of it. (n.pag.)

By learning too late that Colonel Brandon is a good man with qualities sought after in a husband, and realising that she should not have been so foolish as to reject his addresses in favour of Willoughby, Marianne learns her lesson. This makeover adds to the text universe an alternate ending to Austen’s novel, and thus suggests that the match between Marianne and Colonel Brandon is wrong, since she needs to appreciate him fully in order to deserve him.

There are many fan fiction stories that focus on the relationship between Marianne and Colonel Brandon, illustrating a desire to show how they fall in love and learn to respect one another. In “There and Back, Again” by dyingforsomefiction, which extends the plotline, Colonel Brandon is wounded in battle, and Marianne who misses him when he is away, decides to join him at the hospital and stay with him during the amputation of his arm. After this ordeal, “[s]he, in her foolishness, had completely misread the man” and realises that she has “every reason to regret the way that she had treated him” (n.pag.).

These two examples of fan fiction contribute to the Sense and Sensibility text universe by adding pieces of Colonel Brandon’s past relationships, thus creating a fuller character portrayal, and in different ways suggest that Marianne and Colonel Brandon are not suitable for each other at the end of Austen’s story. Whereas they do not end up in a relationship in “Marianne’s Lesson,” they do end up together, but after some time with several difficult trials in “There and Back, Again”. In his latter story, one could argue that Marianne learns her lesson.

Fan fiction based on Sense and Sensibility is a result of the interest Austen’s novel generate. Version novels, on the other hand, might also be a result of an interest in Austen’s novels, but also demonstrate a wish to make a profit from these stories. Both forms of remakes often focus on past and present gender roles and power hierarchies that
are either present or absent in Austen’s novel, or on relationships that need to be explored further.

3. Conclusion

What is the attraction of Austen’s stories? Why do people want to tell their version of the story over and over again? It is clear that readers, academics and enthusiasts alike, want to share her stories with people who are just as passionate about them. The remakes of Sense and Sensibility provide various interpretations of Austen’s novel and thus invite comparisons between the interpretations and the reader’s/fan’s own interpretation. The primary effects of using a well-known story are the elements of understanding and recognition, that is, the readers and/or viewers already know what will happen and can thus focus on the way the story is told and compare it with the “original” story or other remakes. However, in addition to a comparison, it is fruitful to analyse the various remakes and makeovers in order to see how they contribute to the understanding of Austen’s novel, and also to the Sense and Sensibility text universe as a whole. The makeovers not only expand Austen’s story and provide insight into the characters and their actions, but also draw attention to primarily issues of gender roles. By illuminating gender and sexual aspects, the makeovers place both historical and contemporary power hierarchies in focus.

Both remakes and makeovers bear witness to the pleasure and passion Austen enthusiasts experience from her novels. It is an increasingly contemporary phenomenon to participate in one another’s texts - something that can be seen in the explosion of blogs and wikis on the Internet. Websites like YouTube draw on contributions and comments. There is a tendency to measure a contribution’s success based on how many viewers it has or how many comments or likes it receives. This participatory culture strengthens the already existing phenomenon of fan fiction, which is facilitated by the structure of the Internet and allows for easy, immediate, and global feedback. It is not only participation in the circulation of the story that is significant in fandoms, but also participation in the discussion of the source text and its various re-presentations. It is a communal experience to create texts for and with the help of initiated readers who share an interest in and appreciation of Austen’s Sense and Sensibility.

Austen’s novels are clearly captivating and fascinating, but one must not forget that there is also profit to be made from the Austenmania that exists in today’s society. One of the many makeovers, Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters, is a popularization that aims to profit from various cultural phenomena as it has been written for a world-wide audience using elements from popular fiction such as monsters and pirates, and combining them with elements from high-brow literature. Hence, writers and publishers use not only Austen’s novels, but also the surrounding Austenmania to make profits. Whether there is a political agenda, a wish to make a profit, or a personal passionate relationship to Austen’s characters that inspire readers and fans all over the world to contribute to the growing Austen-universe, her novels have encouraged and will continue to encourage multiple interpretations.
Notes

[1] This article is a re-writing of the chapter entitled “Pleasure and Profit: Representations of Jane Austen’s Ever-Expanding Universe” published in The Global Jane Austen: Pleasure, Passion, and Possessiveness in the Jane Austen Community, edited by Lawrence Raw and Robert Dryden in 2013. While the chapter is centred around the Pride and Prejudice text universe, this article, though it re-uses several elements of the chapter, focuses on the Sense and Sensibility text universe.


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