

Moran-Sanchez 2021

UNIVERSIDAD DE SALAMANCA
FACULTAD DE FILOLOGÍA
DEPARTAMENTO DE FILOLOGÍA INGLESA



**VNiVERSiDAD
D SALAMANCA**

CAMPUS DE EXCELENCIA INTERNACIONAL

TESIS DOCTORAL

FANS, FANGS & FRENZIES: PARTICIPATORY CULTURE, AND THE
(RE)IMAGINATION OF JANE AUSTEN IN THE MONSTER MASH-UP
PHENOMENON

DOCTORANDA

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2021

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Introduction

In 1817, when Henry Austen wrote the “Biographical Notice of the Author” for the posthumous publication of the joint edition of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, he lovingly described Jane Austen as modest and pious, an extensive reader and naturally gifted writer, ultimately hoping for her elegant writing to live long and be deservedly recognized (37-40). Unbeknownst to him was the fact that, two hundred years after her death, Jane Austen’s face would be printed into ten-pound notes as one of the most representative novelists in the history of English literature. With six finished novels, early childhood writings, and personal correspondence translated into dozens of languages, numerous adaptations of generally acclaimed storylines enticing audiences all over the world, and with thousands of academic investigations paying tribute to her work and persona, the fame and readership of the writer have slowly yet steadily grown over the past two centuries. Considered by several voices one of the most, if not the most, ‘English’ of authors due to her exquisite portrayal of the oftentimes idealized Regency Period (1811-1820) and its inevitable connection to a prevailing perception of the term “Englishness” (Sales 16-17), she has not only become one of the cornerstones of British literary heritage but also a timeless icon in the field of popular culture.

In *Jane’s Fame: How Jane Austen Conquered the World* (2009), Claire Harman offers an elaborated overview on the cultural heritage of Jane Austen, providing a series of interesting reasons as to why her literature and characters are still amongst the best-known and most-loved by a global readership. Throughout this investigation, Harman claims that the timeless romances of the authoress have, throughout time, played a crucial role in this outstanding longevity. Most of the exquisite plots presented in her novels tend to keep readers in a constant state of anticipation and anxiety, for they

foresee the Mills-and-Boon formula consisting of two protagonist characters who meet, fall in love, but have to endure and overcome a series of obstacles to be united (246)—this formula is also representative of the so-called Chick-Lit, a genre that appeals to a generally female readership. On this regard, Harman also illustrates how curiously, contemporary Romance literature tends to follow Austen more closely than Mills-and-Boon since her male characters, instead of dominators, are introduced before the audience as helpmates to female heroines (248). Moreover, the author's intricate storylines have, over the last decades, inspired the release of several literal, and also less faithful, adaptations belonging to the Romantic Comedy genre—*Clueless* (1995), *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001), *Bride and Prejudice* (2004), *The Jane Austen Book Club* (2007), *Lost in Austen* (2008), *From Prada to Nada* (2011), *Austenland* (2013), *Unleashing Mr. Darcy* (2016), etc.—, thus unsurprisingly, the English author remains a best-seller in the market that caters to a wide audience, one that statistics show as majorly female.

On this note, Deidre Lynch asserts that these numerous cinematic (re)imaginings have inevitably influenced the current prevailing view on Jane Austen as an archetypal author for women when interestingly, at the time of publication, and even a century after, her books were mostly read and reviewed by men (Vickery). In addition, and taking into consideration assorted well-known male historical figures among admirers and recurrent readers—King George IV (1762-1830), Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832), Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881), Winston Churchill (1874-1965), Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936), etc.—, it is somehow amiss to assume that her approachable and enjoyable narratives have, from the very beginning, suited a certain gender. In Todd's opinion, her books offer, in fact, a comprehensive approach. In her words, “[h]er novels are investigations of selfhood, particularly female, the oscillating relationship of feeling and reason, the interaction of present and memory, and the constant negotiation between desire and society” (xi). Furthermore, Harman suggests that their limitless interpretation and “extraordinarily accessible” prose are of significant importance in her mass popularity (4). Besides, her writings, filled with wit and humour, tend to deal with themes (family, power, wealth, social status, etc.) that are considered universal, resonating with

readers across generations and different periods of time (Alter). For instance, in The Guardian's article "200 Years On, Why Jane Austen's Lovers Find New Reasons For their Passion" (2011), Amanda Vickery explores the Austen Phenomenon, expanding on how the authoress is constantly rediscovered by new generations of readers that inevitably find themselves reflected in her classic characters. Moreover, the uncomplicated adaptability of her narrations, and the fact that her novels are part of public domain, keep encouraging the restless minds of writers, composers, film-makers, and dramatists to (re)imagine and (re)invent Jane Austen, introducing her timeless pieces into different media—subsequently turning her name into a boundlessly exploitable and profitable brand. Her great advantage, as will be thence developed, is that little is known about her life, so her figure becomes a blank slate, a canvas on which to rewrite stories that please her audience. According to Todd:

Each generation makes a consistent image of the author, a new commodity in keeping with its own desires: the kindly spinster of the 19th century, the baulked romantic heroine of the twentieth, and the ambitious professional author of the present. (2)

Indeed, the everlastingly devoted fan community of the authoress has throughout history had a significant importance in the development of the contemporary 'Austen Brand', by keeping her memory alive through the meticulous work of dedicated societies, and the enthusiastic consumption of practically anything connected to her name—from miscellaneous versions of her novels to biographies, or supernatural series where Jane Austen is the main protagonist.

The first stages of love and passion for everything connected to the writer—popularly known as Austenmania—trace back to the publication in 1869 of *A Memoir of Jane Austen* by the author's nephew, James Edward Austen-Leigh. This first biographical work, in addition to including the unpublished manuscript of Lady Susan and Cassandra Austen's original and verified sketch of Jane Austen, provided readers with personal correspondence and information on the English authoress (Johnson, *Cults and Cultures* 68) who, as a result of her nephew's initiative, would be known by admirers and the general public as "Dear Aunt Jane". Austen-Leigh's 'proper and Victorian' representation of his aunt as one talented, gentle, and kind lady encouraged a sudden change in the

public attention towards her name and literature. This early phase of Austenmania was followed by the growing interest of Victorian readers who, as Austen-Leigh intended with his meticulously crafted biographical work, found in Austen an ideal of domesticity, purity, and modesty, admirable ‘female’ virtues at the time. This period coincided with the birth of one of the most active and everlasting fan communities in the history of literature: Janeites—a term first coined by George Saintsbury in the year 1894. The popular appeal of Jane Austen, and the almost uninterrupted release of brand-new and diverse editions of her books for more than 180 years led in the middle of the nineties to a second, more vivid, surge of Austenmania. Mostly motivated by one single “shot of a wet white shirt clinging seductively to the chest of the British actor Colin Firth” (Yaffe xiii) in the 1995 BBC miniseries of *Pride and Prejudice*—considered by several admirers of the author a ‘landmark’ and best adaptation of the classic novel¹—, the strong and ever-growing fascination for the ‘Austen Universe’ has enthroned her as an indispensable figure in popular culture. In *Everybody’s Jane: Jane Austen in the Popular Imagination* (2012), Juliette Wells illustrates how today Jane Austen is a “bonanza of presence” (180) because her characters and stories seem to be everywhere, reworked into almost every format to reach beyond literature and the English-speaking-world. Considering assorted modern (re)tellings of her books and comic versions—such as Manga Classics’ *Pride and Prejudice* (2014), *Sense and Sensibility* (2014), and *Emma* (2015)—, television and YouTube series like *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (2012-2013), *Welcome to Sanditon* (2013), and the original *Emma Approved* (2013-2014) by Pemberley Digital, children’s books—such as *Pride and Prejudice* (2012) and *Emma* (2016) by Cozy Classics or *Sense and Sensibility* (2013) by BabyLit—, musical productions, or theatre plays among others, it would be accurate to state that in the 21st century, Jane Austen has become an icon in the field of adaptation.

¹ In “Anatomy of a Janeite: Results from The Jane Austen Survey” (2008), Jeanne Kiefer asserts that 62% of surveyed fans chose *Pride & Prejudice* (1995) as their favourite Jane Austen adaptation, followed by *Persuasion* (1995) and *Sense and Sensibility* (1995).

Although the last decades have been witness to a constant flow of literary remakes, unique to our era is the appearance of a movement that focuses on introducing all sorts of anachronistic elements belonging to erotica or the paranormal into her six renowned novels (Johnson, *Cults and Cultures* 177). Resembling fanfiction— stories, written for and by fans, based upon the characters, plots, and settings of antecedent texts (Van Steenhuyse 165)—, and mostly a phenomenon of American origin, Austen hybrids are texts capable of interesting standard Janeites while attracting, at the same time, new readers. Often neglected by academic investigation, these modern Austen remakes present a complex relationship between the terms of ‘adaptation’ and ‘appropriation’. Julie Sanders distinguishes both by asserting that, while the first signals an existing relationship with a source text, the second involves a more decisive journey away from the said initial source (qtd. in Cartmell and Whelehan 25). Capable of fitting into each of these categories, these narratives are clear products of their 6 specific culture and time. On this regard, in the book *Jane Austen and the Representations of Regency England* (1994), Roger Sales states that popular modern texts connected to Jane Austen should be worthy of and included within academic research for they are available materials to everyone that help audiences construct a basic idea of both the author and the time in which the stories were written (26). This thesis proposes to follow the previous argument and fill a void in academia by exploring in-depth one of the many variations of Austen’s hybrid texts: the monster mash-ups.

Significantly encouraged by the major success Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight Saga* had between the years 2005 and 2008—including the swift growth of its fandom, and its eager involvement in diverse creative activities such as fanfiction, fanart, etc.—, a significant number of publishing houses decided to invest in the eerie and supernatural as products that could entice new generations of enthusiastic readers. This revival of the dark and horrific prompted, in a short period of time, the publication of plentiful novels that, just as *Twilight* did before them, romanticised creatures of nightmare (vampires, wolves, etc.). Among this growing amount of mainstream stories, the Monster Mash-Up Phenomenon rapidly became a trend that drew the attention of consumers, for it involved

the development of hybrid narratives through the introduction of such creatures, in addition to all sorts of bizarre and uncanny elements, into canonical novels.

The preeminent vogue started in 2009 when the Philadelphian publishing house Quirk Books released *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, written by Jane Austen and Seth Grahame-Smith. Defined by standard readers of Austen as “wildly inappropriate” (Mulvey-Roberts 34), this rewriting filled with zombies and a series of striking violent scenes topped the prestigious New York Times best-seller list for a total of twelve weeks. The unexpected success of the novel rapidly set into motion an original and unexplored market within young adult literature—saturated today with hybrid versions of acclaimed classic novels such as *Alice in ZombieLand* (2009), *Jane Slayre* (2010), *Grave Expectations* (2011), or *The Vampire Count of Monte Cristo* (2013). Simultaneously, the idea originating from Quirk Books spread to various genres, particularly to historical fiction. The fusion of history with grotesque and foreign elements lead to the publication of various novels that also catered to young audiences: *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter* (2010), *Boleyn Tudor Vampire* (2010), *Queen Victoria: Demon Hunter* (2010), *Shakespeare Undead* (2010), etc. Still, although these characters and stories majorly met the demands of the modern teenage reader (Rabey 38), Mulvey-Roberts asserts that including them within the mash-up genre would be misleading, since they do not combine a pre-existing text with a parallel version or have, in fact, two or more different authors (18); therefore, they can be considered a different part of the vogue: one that does not mash two literary genres, but history and story, historical characters and fantastical creatures.

Although the term ‘mash-up / mashup’ is generally connected to music, it is present in a disparate number of fields such as art, cinema, design, or literature². Kathleen S. Bartels describes the controversial word as the fusion or mixture of different elements, the art of “carefully crafted”

² Although both terms are correct, to avoid confusion this thesis will refer to ‘mashup’ as culture, methodology, and musical genre, while ‘mash-up’ will be solely used in reference to its counterpart in the field of literature and main object of study.

juxtaposition (16). Tracing back its origin to the 19th century, due to the rapid expansion and circulation of images and the interest of the general public for photography, mashup has endured and become one of the preeminent models of cultural production in the 21st century—substantially as a result of the spread and easy access to digital media (images, sounds, etc.). In music, a mashup song (also known as ‘bootleg’ or ‘bastard pop’), is in its most basic form a new track created by blending two samples of different songs (Serazio 79). In art, the same methodology is connected to assemblage practices that originated mainly from collage. Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), Georges Braque (1882-1963), and Juan Gris (1887-1927), essential figures of Modernism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, developed this form by incorporating already-existing materials into the production of art itself, thus developing what Bruce Grenville defines as “mashup methodology” (“Mashup” 18). Later movements such as Pop Art would also reflect this methodology by turning to popular culture (advertising, product packaging, etc.) for imagery and inspiration (Wolf), incorporating once again existing objects into brand-new artistic works. In literature, mash-up encompasses any hybrid narrative developed through the introduction of an already-published piece of classic fiction into a genre completely different from its original (Murphy “Remix Culture”), presenting brand-new (re)imaginings of popular storylines.

With the emergence and rapid spread of new and disparate types of media objects, it comes as no surprise that the process of ‘mashing-up’ has become a recurrent practice of cultural production. Moreover, the undoubted influence in the 21st century of popular culture and ‘Do It Yourself’ (DIY) methodologies that require the active participation of recipients in the development of new media objects, have sparked the creativity and curiosity of generations of consumers, particularly younger ones. Such activities have directly fostered the establishment of what Henry Jenkins describes as “civic engagement” or “participatory culture”. Enticing consumer involvement through a series of particular characteristics—low barriers to artistic expression, or support for the development and circulation of new media objects (Jenkins, *Confronting the Challenges* 5-6)—, participatory culture has become the cornerstone of modern fan communities. Within these, it is possible to find a wide

and diverse range of original creations devised by fans such as cosplay (costume play), fanart (fan art), fanvids (fan videos), fanzines (fan magazines), or fanfiction, a practice that takes DIY methodologies one step further. Written by fans, and mostly for fans, this type of amateur fiction borrows characters and settings from original stories to expand and introduce them into new narratives. Shared on specialized sites and online archives (*FanFiction.net*, *Archive Of Our Own*, or *Wattpad* among others), fan-written fiction allows amateur authors to “push the boundaries of narrative” (Lang) and improve, at the same time their writing skills through constant feedback received from readers/subscribers. Similar to mash-up, this transformative practice encourages fans to elaborate on source plots belonging to disparate mediums such as literature, cinema, television, or even real-life events, that have teased them with unanswered questions, or to simply assume the role of explorers and discover the wide range of possibilities offered by already-existing characters or narratives.

Within the aforementioned context of Fandom Studies, this thesis aims to investigate the 2009 Monster Mash-Up Phenomenon as a distinct answer to the series of innovative ways in which media objects are created in the 21st century. Building on several prior artistic practices and movements, the mash-up genre offers a juxtaposition of disparate elements that, even if foreign to one another, create a specific sense of harmony altogether. Regarding its direct connection to popular culture, Michael Serazio introduces irony, recycling, and hybridization as its preeminent characteristics (79), illustrating also how in the field of music, this same methodology encompasses the three to “deconstruct (and mock) the arbitrarily divided and cherished pop canon” (83). This study proposes to investigate how this same idea is translated into the field of literature through the distinctive ironic and uncanny elements characteristic of monster mash-up. Moreover, at the core of the thesis, the direct relationship between this genre and fan-written fiction will be explored to demonstrate how participatory culture has fostered the creation of the genre. To illustrate this claim, the focus will be on the figure of Jane Austen—an author that presents a bridge between high and low culture—, crucial in the development of the genre ever since the publication of *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* in

2009. Various mash-up works based on her canonical novels will be employed to exemplify how fan-created artefacts influence this genre and contribute to the production of mass-media popular culture. Consequently, this thesis offers an interdisciplinary approach, bringing together Literary and Cultural Studies, Media and Fandom studies, and even the Digital Humanities, aiming to expand the concept of a popular canon that also widens the scope of scholarly research to include often disparaged narratives.

As for the outline of the present work, the first chapter of this thesis, “The Quintessence of Fandom”, investigates fan communities, placing the focus on the way members of an audience express themselves through fan-written fiction. With two landmarks in the field of Media Fandom Studies as background—Camille Bacon-Smith’s *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth* (1992), and Henry Jenkins’ *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (1992)—, this chapter offers a journey through the development of what is understood today as ‘fandom’, a sub-culture of individuals who, as consumers, gather to circulate views, opinions, self-creations, etc. connected to a shared object of passion. From Sherlockians to Beatlemaniacs, Trekkies, or Potterheads, this chapter offers an overview of the figure of the fan and several of the misconceptions around it, exploring also how members of the same community engage through what Henry Jenkins presents as participatory culture. The core of this first chapter, fanfiction, is investigated and introduced as the exponent representation of fan engagement, a creative expression that in the following chapters will be tightly connected to the origin and development of mash-up as a literary genre.

The second chapter entitled “Approaching Mashup Culture” offers an overview of the origins of ‘mashup’ and the underlying technique of creative juxtaposition it denotes, one that transcends various fields and disciplines—advancing and evolving throughout time to become today a major form of media production. Departing from the creation and development of collage, this chapter explores the fundamental ‘reprocessing’ nature of the methodology through diverse artistic practices such as readymade, Merz art, or the still thriving and overwhelmingly fashionable pop art. This

chapter further investigates how the same recovery and creative reconfiguration of existing elements present in such examples is a highly welcomed process within fandom communities. Exploring the essential and influential role of the amateur producer, supercut, vidding, dub, and mashup are put forward as techniques that embrace the creative and imaginative juxtaposition of given materials to highlight brand-new connotations disparate to those conveyed by the source in the first place. In the field of literature, this reconfiguration and disruption of classic narratives with seemingly unrelated elements belonging to diverse genres is present in the Monster Mash-Up Phenomenon. This chapter will study the core characteristics of the genre, and further evaluate its connection to amateur writing—focusing particularly on the distinct inspiration it draws from the world of fan-written fiction.

Chapter three, named “Between Two Worlds: The Austen Realm” offers an overview of the general impact the English authoress has in modern popular culture. Trying to unveil the ‘real’ Jane Austen, this segment investigates the lights and shadows behind her still mysterious figure, particularly how this same enigmatic nature fosters abounding present-day scholarly investigations that focus on anything and everything Austen. Set in the specific intersection between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture, her accessible and adaptable literature has proved to entice audiences from disparate cultural backgrounds and diverse periods. Undoubtedly, ever since the publication of James’s *A Memoir of Jane Austen* in 1872, her loyal and extremely active fan community has grown exponentially throughout the above mentioned various waves of Austenmania—the everlasting love and passion for everything connected to the vast Austen Universe. This chapter investigates this specific cultural phenomenon, thoroughly discussing the various misguided stereotypes connected to the figure of the Janeite to prove how, contrary to popular belief, Jane Austen’s readership is diverse enough to welcome boundless (re)imaginings of her stories. Ultimately, this segment serves as an introduction to the crucial role of the authoress in the establishment of the experimental 12 mash-up genre after the publication in 2009 of a foundational hybrid novel: *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*.

The fourth and final chapter of this thesis, “The Quirking of a Lady”, emphasizes the indubitable and lasting influence of Jane Austen—both as an admired author and timeless cultural

icon—in the development of the so-called Monster Mash-Up Phenomenon utilizing the conscientious analysis of three novels published in 2009 belonging to this vogue, hybrid pieces of 21st-century literature that perfectly combine the essence of the classic and the mainstream: *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, *Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters*, and *Mansfield Park and Mummies*. From the point of view of modern Fandom Studies, and recalling the thorough introduction to fan-written fiction from chapter one, this research will serve as an illustration of the direct connection between the amateur creative expression, and the sales phenomena that originated in the headquarters of Quirk Books. Retrieving Henry Jenkins' intricate terms of "Genre-Shifting", "Refocalization", and "Cross-Over", this segment puts forward various ways in which themes, plots, and characters belonging to these timeless novels are adapted and developed to engage various audiences, and at the same time, manifest the resilient nature of Jane Austen and her classic narratives.

As this investigation comes then to a close, it will evince that the thorough examination of such a unique phenomenon through an interdisciplinary lens provided by the diverse fields of Fandom Studies, Literary Studies, Cultural Studies, and Art Studies demonstrates how a novel experimental—and oftentimes depicted by academic investigation as 'minor'—genre like mash-up offers limitless research possibilities, particularly in regards to its multifaceted origins, embedded influences, and transformative nature. Furthermore, the in-depth exploration of the influence of Jane Austen within the inception and development of this 21st-century sensation in the field of mainstream literature will put forward numerous questions regarding the timeless character of her posthumous fame and privileged position in popular 13 culture, vindicating as well her significant place in academia as an indispensable instrument for social, cultural, artistic, and literary exploration.

Conclusions

This thesis has offered an overview of the unequivocal connection between the timelessly popular figure of Jane Austen, and the origin and consequent growth of the so-called Monster Mash-Up Phenomenon, a marketing vogue that throughout the beginning of the 2010s fostered the relevant monstrous (re)imagination of classic literature for the purpose of enticing modern audiences. In addition to highlighting such connection, this research has aimed to investigate the origins of the novel genre within artistic fields of professional and amateur nature in order to outline a direct and influential relation between this mainstream literary and cultural trend and the creative expression of fan-written fiction. An in-depth analysis of three hybrid novels published in 2009, a time when the genre saw the light and subsequently peaked, has exposed numerous creative and imaginative processes originated as pastime within active fan communities yet common to both spheres. These similarities pose relevant questions on contemporary literary production, particularly on how modern narratives can provide an international and online oriented readership with novels that easily cruise in between the domains of ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture, and whose authorship and development resembles that of abundant creative objects found in the World Wide Web. Indeed, as illustrated in the second chapter of this thesis, “Approaching Mashup Culture”, the Internet has not only fostered the emergence of a more proactive audience that engages in varied fields such as image or music, but also the steady transformation of contemporary literature into one dynamic process that conveniently adapts not only to technological advancements but also to prevalent fashions.

Echoing fanfiction—a longstanding amateur practice providing enthusiastic fans unwilling to bid goodbye to their favourite narratives with fresh and miscellaneous perspectives on them—the genre of hybrid nature originated after the publication of the foundational *Pride and Prejudice* and *Zombies* emerges as the exponential representation of the aforementioned evolution in the field of literature, with texts that perfectly blur set boundaries between the canonical and the marginal. As exposed throughout this scholarly approach to the genre, through complex processes of appropriation,

disruption, subversion, and juxtaposition, mash-up becomes an interesting locus of research on the boundaries of fiction (Borham-Puyal, “New Adventures” 1315), in addition to a compelling intersection between Art Studies, Fandom Studies, Cultural Studies, and Literary Studies.

Previously assessed in the introductory segment, the composition of this thesis has pursued an elaborated and extensive outline comprising disparate topics such as the inception and ongoing transformation of multimedia fan communities—including an overview of their numerous sub-cultural traditions, modes of engagement, and creative expressions of transformative nature—the early origins of mashup culture within a mutable and groundbreaking artistic sphere, and its subsequent translation into the field of literature at the hand of Quirk Books. The first chapter, “The Quintessence of Fandom”, has thoroughly considered the underlying yet significant relationship between the modern concept of fandom, and the unfolding of the Era of Convergence—an ongoing age where new technologies facilitate, on a daily basis, unlimited access to all sorts of entertainment objects. This investigation has evaluated common aspects between both phenomena to trace a direct connection between the emergence of such advancements, additionally to that of the World Wide Web, and the rise of what Henry Jenkins introduces as the culture of participation, an intricate conception that besets the crucial role of audience members not only as consumers but also as producers. So as to highlight such junction, various online creative platforms (*LiveJournal*, *MySpace*, *YouTube*, etc.) and social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) have been put forward as the exponential representation of how personal computing has facilitated globalized relations among users prompting, at the same time, an indisputable growth in multimedia fan communities with a formidable rising rate in online engagement during the last few decades.

Thus, this thesis sets fandom as a key element to take into consideration when addressing contemporary media production for, as illustrated through examples of successful TV shows and transmedia franchises like *Star Trek*, *Twin Peaks*, *The Wizarding World*, or *The Matrix*, eager fan communities have overtime become productive spaces of theories, ideas, and perceptions born out of pure enthusiasm—creative spheres to which directors, scriptwriters, and producers oftentimes turn in

the search of inspiration. Nonetheless, as this research discusses in the segment “Fandom in the Era of Convergence”, such boundless imaginativeness finds numerous paths to flourish and surface, being transformative expressions among the most creative means to do so. These disparate objects overflow the Internet, gathering thousands of clicks daily, providing their creators with inner-fandom fame in addition to a suitable platform to share their talent and original views on consumed media. Among these varied expressions, fanfiction is the one set as the core of this thesis, an established practice that keeps evolving altogether with fandom. Although much literature has been written on the topic, analysing its origins and characteristic elements—with noteworthy works by experts in the field such as Karen Hellekson, Kristina Busse, Anne Jamison, or Francesca Coppa among others—, the connection between the amateur practice and innovative genres found in the mainstream market is yet to be examined in-depth by academic research, hence the purpose of this study to fill an existing gap by shedding light into this thought-provoking association that poses numerous questions on 21st-century literary production and the limits of adaptation.

Having established a thorough background on fan-written fiction, the second chapter of this thesis, “Approaching Mashup Culture”, has focused on examining the inception and development of an imaginative production technique common to different fields that, although originating in professional artistic spheres has, throughout the evolution and expansion of fandom, been welcomed and appropriated by these communities. This section has highlighted the existence of an obvious connection between artistic activity, cultural context, and technological advancements in order to trace the origins of mashup. Creative practices and styles that might seem dissimilar for the unknowledgeable eye have been put forward as essential to highlight a common vogue for abridging the gap between ‘high’ a ‘low’ culture, with the (re)imagination and conversion of mundane objects into art as pieces capable of attracting audiences through an unmistakable feeling of familiarity. Just as Picasso, Schwitters, or Warhol did within their respective artistic frameworks, the elevation of the mundane has become a constant theme in contemporary cultural production, with disparate elements

that are appropriated, subverted, and oftentimes juxtaposed in the search of striking artistic hegemonies.

As illustrated along the chapter, this same reconfiguration of materials has, throughout time, been introduced into diverse fields such as music, where it has prompted the flourishing of mashup—a predominantly amateur genre that, in order to entice a large number of listeners, presents thought-provoking combinations of already-existing melodies with a characteristic ironic nature. This thesis has considered this particular style as an active response to contemporary media environments, while it has discussed the innovative use consumers do of widely accessible source materials and available technological resources—highlighting, at the same time, the figure of the so-called ‘bedroom producer’ who, in a similar manner to the fanfiction writer, shares their artistry and creativeness through the reworking of original elements into amateur artistic objects that generally encompass personal commentaries and ideas on consumed media.

The following section entitled “Mash-Up: The Literary Collage” has, based on the previous introduction to the production technique, introduced the mainstream genre object of study as the translation into literature of aforementioned artistic practices—particularly those welcomed within fan communities that have, throughout time, become safe spaces for creators to share their content with fellow fans. This specific segment has discussed the undisputable impact of the Era of Convergence in the field of literature, prompting a more familiar relationship between the figure of the author and that of the reader who are, more than ever, connected through the World Wide Web to exchange information, reviews, and ideas. Mash-up is therefore born in this distinctively engaging time, encompassing all sorts of excessive (re)imaginings that combine classic pieces of literature with elements borrowed from genres that appeal to the masses.

This thesis has proposed the understanding of such genre as an imaginative path within mainstream literature that poses a connection between elements considered to be culturally and temporally distant, with striking combinations that are attractive to the modern consumer. As exposed throughout the chapter, this same extravagance is what has majorly denoted mash-up, before the

public eye, as an opportunist minor genre that takes advantage of classic literature. In this context, this thesis originated as an interdisciplinary approach to this phenomenon seen as an artifact that reclaims the authority of canonical narratives, infusing them with all sorts of monstrous creatures to enhance their storylines in the most comic of ways. The characteristic derivative nature of the genre has, at the same time, been considered a key element in the analysis that has drawn numerous parallelisms between mash-up and fanfiction, a practice that has, on occasion, been harshly criticized for not being original enough, and taking advantage of already-existing source materials for the development of new storylines by amateur creators. Still, the most unique aspect to both practices has been proven to be the original homage they pay to these specific sources, expanding and (re)imagining them before the eyes of eager fans.

The theoretical framework of this multidisciplinary investigation encompasses the first two chapters that, interlaced, have aided to fill a gap in academic research for, apart from assorted contributions on specific examples of ‘mashed-up’ narratives, the genre has not been explored in-depth—particularly its multifaceted origin, and the numerous possibilities it inherits from divergent artistic expressions that generally have one characteristic in common: the recovery and careful juxtaposition of already-existing materials to produce brand-new creative objects that, although altered or enhanced, keep their original essence to evoke familiar feelings into an audience. Subsequently, this thesis has considered the emergence, continuous growth, and imprint of Austenmania in popular culture as an accommodating factor for the culmination of the distinct genre as an increasing interpretative phenomenon under the name ‘Jane Austen’. Indeed, as Deborah Yaffe asserts, the authoress uniquely stands in-between high culture and popular culture, being “easy to read, and easy to love” (xviii) and, thus, a perfect vehicle for engaging new audiences in experimental media objects that (re)imagine and adapt her beloved storylines into a myriad of formats. From professional and amateur musical productions to YouTube web-series, or upcoming Netflix

adaptations of her novels³, the authoress has deservedly become a constant in the field of popular culture, a renowned brand that even those consumers who have never been exposed to her literature are able to recognize.

The third chapter of this thesis named “Between Two Worlds: The Austen Realm” has examined various investigations by renowned scholars on the field such as Harman, Looser, Todd, or Sutherland among others, to compose an exhaustive state-of-the-art segment tracing the origins and evolution of the Jane Austen myth. Such investigations have helped distinguish various waves of Austenmania throughout history, periods of rising enthusiasm that have coincided in time with the release of unknown information about the authoress in the form of biography or academic research, or brand-new adaptations of her novels. As it has been demonstrated in this particular chapter, two could be considered the major factors that play a crucial role in this timeless popularity—on the one hand, the lack of factual information about the authoress that encourages readers and scholars to constantly rediscover her figure and literature, and on the other hand, the echoes she represents of an idealized time to the modern eye, a charming image perpetuated by the numerous on-screen adaptations of her esteemed stories.

Considering that this admirable longevity is directly related to an unlimited demand by enthusiastic fans and that one of the prominent disciplines of this thesis is that of Fandom Studies, this research has also explored separate nonfiction pieces by Janeites—Yafee, Scheinman, Luetkenhaus and Weinstein, etc—that focus on the engaging community built around the author while offering first-hand experiences from an approachable stance. These works have been particularly selected as additional literature for the development of this thesis to put forward a modern, diverse and relatable view on the Janeite, one outside the academic sphere. With these works as background,

³ Carrie Cracknell’s *Persuasion* (2022) with Dakota Johnson in the role of Anne Elliot, and Becca Gleason’s recently announced adaptation *Netherfield Girls* (n.d) with Maitreyi Ramakrishnan in the role of Lizzie Bennet are two of the latest additions to the list.

the segment “A Contemporary Approach to Austen: The 21st-Century Janeite” has thoroughly examined how the passion for anything and everything connected to the English author has become resilient to diverse cultural changes and technological advancements, with new approaches to her literature attracting loyal fans, and converting standard consumers into Janeites. Therefore, as proven throughout the development of this investigation, her crucial importance in the field of popular culture, in addition to the boundless enthusiasm of her fandom, set her at the centre of experimental media production, with an innovative genre like mash-up as the exponential representation of this relevance.

To expand on the influence of Jane Austen in the origin and development of the Monster Mash-Up Phenomenon, the fourth and final chapter, “The Quirking of a Lady”, has traced the origins of the foundational novel that set off the mainstream vogue in addition to a successful pattern that, at the beginning of the brand-new decade, prompted the development of a monstrous canon of hybrid texts exploiting the hidden potential of classic literature. An in-depth analysis of three specific novels belonging to the hybrid genre, which had not received much scholarly attention or been studied together before, has served to investigate such canon that (re)imagines and amplifies set themes, adapting social discourses for a contemporary sensibility, while also introducing into canonical narratives popular elements that can engage a wide and diverse modern readership⁴. In addition to providing an introduction to the origin of these unique narratives that approximate the whimsical Regency world of Jane Austen to the popular and the eerie, the section has focused on exploring their specific debt to the inner-fandom activity of fanfiction by applying into said analysis various transformative strategies introduced by Henry Jenkins in the landmark research *Textual Poachers* as characteristic of this amateur creative expression that, just as the sales phenomenon originated in

⁴ Although numerous have been the contributions examining *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* and the novel marketing phenomenon the novel promoted, *Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters*, and specifically *Mansfield Park and Mummies* are hybrid novels that have been rarely mentioned outside the academic area that harshly criticised the genre. For instance, Sydney Miller’s article “How Not to Improve the Estate: Lopping & Cropping Jane Austen” depicts these (re)imaginings as “a celebration of bad taste” (444).

2009, expands on already-existing texts in order to produce all sorts of derivative objects—a process that, once again, serves to highlight the hypothesis of this investigation, the embedded connection between the experimental genre of non canonical literature, and that elaborated by active and enthusiastic aficionados within fandom.

Examining this experimental genre so-present in the mainstream literary field utilising an interdisciplinary lens demonstrates how mash-up proposes an active dialogue between an established canon, and characteristic elements belonging to the popular imaginary, ultimately combining them to put forward unique hybrid narrations that originally echo the timeless practice of fanfiction through the adoption and adaptation of several inner-fandom imaginative processes of appropriation and subversion. At the same time, it can be asserted that the non canonical genre proposes relevant contributions to an abiding tradition of (re)imaginings connected to the figure and literature of Jane Austen through the striking adaptation of universal themes that considers modern sensibilities in order to originate characters and narrations that can entice a wide contemporary readership. Simultaneously, the completion of this thesis paves the way for future investigations regarding various unexplored subjects such as the aforementioned intertextuality present in the ‘Supernatural Jane Austen’ series developed by Vera Nazarian—a collection of novels that contemplates a common world of connected storylines that acknowledge each other—, the application of clearly subverted gender roles to disparate mashed-up versions of classic pieces with remarkable female protagonists (*Android Karenina*, *Little Vampire Women*, *Jane Slayre*, etc.), or delve into the alterations mash-up proposes for iconic male heroes of literature, a topic yet to be generally addressed by academic contributions on the phenomenon. Conclusively, this thesis has aimed to vindicate, within the scholarly sphere, literary mash-up as a genre that, emerging from a long-standing artistic tradition, and the margins of participatory culture, perfectly blurs the boundaries between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture to originally recontextualize classic writings.

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