Jane Austen: Light, Bright & Here to Stay

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The themes and heroines of Jane Austen's nineteenth century novels continue to be relevant in modern times to the modern woman. The very nature of the heroines in *Pride and Prejudice, Sense and Sensibility, Emma, Persuasion, Mansfield Park* and *Northanger Abbey*, their disregard for class and its restrictions on love and marriage, and their friendships speak directly to the women of current times. While all six of Jane Austen's completed novels contain strong heroines who relate to women today, Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice*, Emma in *Emma*, Fanny in *Mansfield Park* and Anne in *Persuasion* are the four who exemplify a desire for true love over status and money, a vision of camaraderie and a strong sense of self that transcends time.

Although Austen's novels are set almost two hundred years in the past, the strong yet unpretentious heroines, the class struggles, and the realistic romance plots, still resonate strongly with modern audiences. Austen's wit and intelligent sense of class and society, allows readers to feel as though they are connecting with the story on a personal level, as if they themselves could be a modern-day Austen heroine. "Everyone thinks she's Elizabeth Bennet; not everyone thinks she's Jane Eyre. Everyone knows a young woman trying to decide if the guy she's attracted to is Mr. Right. Not everyone meets Mr. Right who has a mad wife in the attic," said Marsha Huff, President of the Jane Austen Society of North America, to *The New York Times* (James). An Austen heroine is easy to identify with because she is smart, yet still can make mistakes before falling in love and her life falls into place. "Austen's heroines from 200 years ago translate well for the 21st century because they are intelligent and spunky and stand up to authority…You can put them in modern dress and [they] still seem like people we understand," Marsha Huff told the *Washington Post* (Krystal).

These heroines deal with friendship, money problems, and love – just as women do in any time period. "Each of us has a private Austen," the prologue of the novel, *The Jane Austen Book Club,* suggests (Fowler). Each woman can identify with a heroine; whether it be the smart and lively Elizabeth, sensible and loyal Elinor, calm and loving Anne, quiet and pious Fanny, imaginative and pleasing Catherine or the flirty and good-humored Emma. This relevancy to modern women has been the cause of the overwhelming amount of Jane Austen media. Novel continuations, biographies, films, websites, blogs, and other media have made its way into the mainstream. In a time of over-sexed entertainers, foul-mouthed comics and violent movies, people, mainly women, are amazingly still drawn to the regent society and Austen's "novels of manners."

Austen leaves out serious subjects such as war, religion and death, much to the dismay of some harsher critics, because they do not mesh with her comic spirit. However, it is not all "light, bright & sparkling" as Jane Austen once described her own *Pride and Prejudice*. She expects a lot from her readers - "moral attitudes," wit, critical thinking, and a sense of humor (Kirkham 246). Not only does she show the conflict between personal identity and social identity for women, she also clearly objects to women as "angels in the house." A term coined by another female writer, Virginia Woolf, an "angel," or the woman, does not seek happiness for herself and only cares for the others around her (Gilbert 162-3, Kirkham 232). Her development of her characters and her own romantic ideas on marriage make them timeless. Her heroines want love, something that was a new idea in Austen's time, yet very much like the women of today. They did not want to settle for anything less than Mr. Right, even if that meant going

against the class expectations of the time. In her novels, love is a virtue but marriage is the reward. However, to gain this reward, intellectual virtue must precede it. These heroines must know themselves before love and marriage (Emsley 33). A piece of advice that anyone, woman or man, can take to heart during any time period. This "restrained but exact social revolutionary" strayed from the accepted view on marriage at the time –a business proposition, really- and wrote her heroines as searching for someone who respected them as an individual (Robinson 180).

In the novels, marriage is the prevailing topic, but the women are the hunters and the men are the prey (Van Ghent, 301). The endings are not always clearly "happily-ever-after;" the heroines and their husbands must realistically compromise to have a happy marriage – just as an equal marriage in the twenty-first century. They are partners in their union and one is not over another.

Always checked by reality, she offers comic and subtle insight into morality and the issues that concern women, whether it be 1816 or 2009 (Cecil 147). Her ideas on love and class were witty yet wise, allowing readers to find a sister and friend in Jane, instead of a stuffy preacher, "as if she were part Jon Stewart, part Oprah Winfrey" writes Caryn James in *The New York Times* (James). It is no wonder then that Jane Austen continues to be a fixture on classic literature bookshelves, book clubs, and movie plots. Her ideas on love and marriage, friendship and those strong and smart heroines keep readers coming back for more and more insight on how to relate their lives to Elizabeth's financial woes, or Emma's hidden feelings for the "boy-next-door." These strong ideas on women, marriage, friendships, and how they all relate are what draw modern audiences to these modern adaptations, such as film, novels and other media, showing

that Austen's fiction can clearly stand the test of time. With numerous adaptations of Austen's works created for the end of the twentieth and the twenty-first century, her themes and how she writes about them are still relevant for the women of today.

Jane Austen's fictional genre is often classified as the "novel of manners," but it could very well be defined as the "novel of marriage" instead. The theme of marriage and love is present in every one of her novels, yet each has a distinct point of view, somewhat different than the view predominant at that time. Marriage as an institution has changed over many years and has gone from being a strict economic contract to a purely emotional union – and everything in between.

At the end of the 1700's a period of "Enlightenment" swept over Europe. This wave of new and more emotional thinking allowed a change to happen in the institution of marriage. Slowly men and women were giving the personal choice of choosing their partners instead of the previous held tradition of arranged marriages, as Stephanie Coontz suggests in her analysis on marriage in the eighteenth century. For the first time, it was socially acceptable to marry for love and affection rather than a political or financial alliance. In spite of this new thinking, the Enlightenment on marriage and love was not like the modern thinking of the same ideas. While in modern marriages classless partnerships and companionships are stressed, the Enlightenment period just brought about a subtraction of the "business" of marriage unions. This change, however, did not come without consequences and social backlash. These new ideas on marriage had critics worried that the social order would be destroyed and chaos would ensue. They believed that women and young people were not capable of making the important decision of a marriage partner and could make a disastrous choice. Even worse,

husbands could lose control over their wives because the women would be given this new freedom and they would demand more freedoms. In order to reestablish order in marriage, the ideas that sprang up during the Enlightenment were squelched (Coontz 145-150). Coontz argues further, "As the nineteenth century dawned, the control of husbands over their wives was reaffirmed," (Coontz 153). In response to the "take-back" on marrying for love, the nineteenth century brought about the desexualization of women. Once thought of as lustful objects that lure men to sin, women were idolized for their sexual purity, while men were regarded as the sinful beings. This idea appeased the supporters of a more affectionate marriage and also the traditionalists who feared for the social order. As Coontz deduces, "Putting women on a pedestal was a way of forestalling a resurgence of 1790s feminism without returning to a traditional patriarchy" (Coontz 160). However, the damage was done with these new romantic and exciting ideas on love and intimacy in a marriage. Once people knew that marrying for love was possible and acceptable in some social circles, the question arose, was it dishonest to marry without it?

For women, the idea of marrying for love was romantic yet for many, it was impossible. There was a real and practical need for financial security, especially in a social world that gave women no or limited legal and property rights. Left with nothing to live on in some cases, only a big enough dowry would attract a prosperous husband. However, this is a catch-22 because, as Lillian Robinson observes, often the young women who needed the affluent husbands the most, were not able to attract them because of their small dowries (Robinson 198). Consequently, in order to have money to live on, a woman needed a male provider. Stephanie Coontz concludes, "So many women were

forced into marriage merely to survive," (Coontz 179). This concept is foreign to modern women, but was very real in the past centuries. Earning a living, for a genteel woman, was considered a disgrace. Even those who braved becoming governesses, worked for the governess "trade" and the "offices of the human flesh," as if talking of slavery or prostitution (Robinson 189). Once the noble title of a woman who spun cloth, the word "spinster" became the label for the working - but more importantly, the unmarried woman. This negative backlash was due to the new respect for wives and marriage as men revered them as pure beings after the Enlightenment (Coontz 147). Marriage was sometimes the only alternative to destitution or prostitution for a poor unmarried female if no relative would take her in. With that as the bleak example, security seemed more important than intimacy in marriage for many women (Coontz 185).

Along with financial issues, the social standing of a woman depended on her marital status. Without a husband, a female had no social role and the skills she learned throughout her childhood and young adulthood were only useful in a marriage, not for the workplace (Robinson 189). In *Vindication of the Rights of Woman,* Mary Wollstonecraft asserts, "Strength of body and mind are sacrificed to libertine notions of beauty, to the desire of establishing themselves the only women can rise in the world – by marriage," (Wollstonecraft 10). She also said that women are taught from an early age that they only need to have a little cunning, a soft temper, and "outward obedience" and modesty and they will gain the security of a man. However, if they are beautiful, they did not need any of those attributes, until their beauty faded away (Wollstonecraft 19). An early advocator for women's rights, Wollstonecraft's ideas suggest that women are expected to only become respected once married, emphasizing the need for a man. Her disagreement

on these suffocating ideas put her alongside Austen in the fight for a woman's independent spirit and a more intimate marriage.

What defines an Austen novel is perhaps her view on marriage-- her heroines choose love over money in order to be happily marriaged to a man who can support them emotionally, rather than one who can only support them financially. The first sentence of the admired novel, *Pride and Prejudice,* lends itself to communicating the theme of marriage and money directly, with Miss Austen's famous wit and irony, of course. It begins, "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" (*Pride and Prejudice* 2). What Austen is really suggesting here, through the introduction of the themes of the novel, is that women are more likely the ones looking for a man with a good fortune, due to their limiting social choices. With her "ironical Austen attack," she approaches the subject of marriage head on in a society where it is changing but at a slow pace (Van Ghent 301). Austen recognized her limits as a woman and knew she was no revolutionary. "Women rule private life as men rule public," David Cecil said in his *Portrait of Jane Austen* (Cecil 19). She knew that although she disagreed with the limiting options for women, her writing could not change them directly. However, she could give her opinion on marrying for money and class snobbery by having her silliest characters have those thoughts and actions. Women were still marrying for money but some, Austen's heroines as an example, were taking the chance and marrying for love.

Although marriage was one of the very few options for a woman in Jane Austen's time, and the only financially comfortable one, her heroines are not willing to compromise love for stability and comfort. This is seen most clearly in Austen's

portrayal of heroine Elizabeth Bennet and her friend, Charlotte Lucas, in *Pride and Prejudice*. Elizabeth refuses Mr. Collin's offer of marriage even though she would be comfortable financially and the Bennet's estate, Longbourn, would stay in the family. She cannot marry him because, not only does she find him ridiculous but also he will never make her happy and she will never make him happy. However, Elizabeth's friend Charlotte accepts the silly clergyman's offer because of her fear of being poor and single. Charlotte is described as twenty-seven, plain, and only wanting a comfortable life. She tells Elizabeth, "I am not romantic like you, you know. I never was. I ask only a comfortable home; and considering Mr. Collins' character, connections, and situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with him is fair, as most people can boast on entering the marriage state" (*Pride and Prejudice* 234). Even though Charlotte realizes the ridiculousness of Mr. Collins and does not respect him, she ignores his comments and is happy having the status of a married woman. Just as Wollstonecraft asserts in her book, Charlotte only gains respect and status in the community when she becomes married; single, she is nothing. Austen knew the social and financial limitations on her sex at the time that she wrote her novels. So it is no surprise that she made it quite clear that although she does not agree with Charlotte's decision to marry Mr. Collins for a comfortable home, she completely understands it. As Lillian Robinson states:

> Yet marriage, as Jane Austen understands it, is based on and within material institutions. And the material role of women in those institutions was changing in response to the shifting balance of class society. The central contradiction in Jane Austen's work is tension between the ideal of marriage for love and the social reality of gentry life. (Robinson 199).

When the ideas of the Enlightenment in the early nineteenth century took off, Jane Austen's novels became very popular. The new thinking was parallel with some of her ideas on love and marriage, so her "clever satires of arranged marriages and the financial aspects of courtships" were accepted well by readers of the nineteenth century (Coontz 148). Austen had her heroines marry for love, yet was still aware of the disappointing limitations that her heroines would have in real life; their heroes were always conveniently well off. This sly but always playful remark to the social and gender demands of the time are lost on some, but more intelligent readers can see through Austen's wit and irony to understand her social commentary and opinions. "Anything is to be preferred or endured rather than marrying without affection, [however,] single women have dreadful propensity for being poor – which is one very strong argument in favor of Matrimony," Austen said herself to her young niece (Coontz 185).

Words like "fortune," "property," "possession," "establishment," and "business" are used in her novels to describe some of her marriage unions, rather than more romantic words like, "love" or "passion." Even in the lust-filled Wickham and Lydia elopement, money is the deciding factor in the end, not their youthful passion (Van Ghent 302). This constant battle with personal happiness versus survival, love versus money and heart versus head, is present in the inner workings of her complex heroines' minds. With closer inspection, Charlotte's situation is better than Elizabeth's if she had not married. Elizabeth has no brothers and therefore would have had nowhere to go if she remained unmarried. Charlotte, on the other hand, has brothers who could take her in, the only acceptable lifestyle for an unmarried woman (Robinson 187-188). So when Elizabeth refuses Mr. Collins, it is a big risk to her future, as well as her family's.

In *Mansfield Park*, the unlikely heroine Fanny Price gets a proposal from the gentleman Henry Crawford. However, she refuses the proposal that would indeed elevate her socially, because she does not like, much less love him. As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar point out, Austen uses Fanny as a moral model in the novel but also as a passionate woman who will only marry for love and affection (Gilbert 165). This refusal, however is not accepted by her uncle Sir Thomas who does not understand why she has declined a perfectly respectable man. He is a rich young gentleman, who is charming, agreeable, a friend to the family – they are certainly reasons to marry. But keeping with Austen's view of marrying for love, Fanny refuses because she seeks love, not financial security.

On the opposite end of the spectrum is Fanny's cousin Maria. As the novel begins, the flighty but beautiful Maria is engaged to Mr. Rushworth, a very rich young man with not much else to offer. "If this man had not twelve thousand a year, he would be a very stupid fellow," Maria's brother, Edmund, says about Mr. Rushworth (*Mansfield Park* 39). When the handsome and charming Henry Crawford comes to Mansfield Park, Maria, and her sister Julia, are smitten with him. As her marriage creeps up closer and closer, Maria takes more and more chances flirting with Henry because she is unhappy marrying Mr. Rushworth. "November was the black month fixed for his return…Maria was more to be pitied than Julia; for to her the father brought a husband" (*Mansfield Park* 105). As the sisters fight over Henry's affections and Mr. Rushworth is left in the dust, Austen shows the readers how marrying just for money can be very destructive. Even after the Rushworth marriage, Maria does not end her love affair with Henry and runs off with him. Even Julia elopes with a family friend, Mr. Yates. These consequences of

marrying without love show how a family can be ruined with scandalous behavior and how it could have been prevented if money was taken out of the marriage equation.

Unfortunately, Austen knew that money and class had everything to do with marriage and only a few could put it aside to find love. Although considered a gentleman, *Pride and Prejudice's* Mr. Bennet, is not particularly rich. Even part of the gentry, Mr. Bennet has significantly less of an income than the other genteel families. The Bennets are "cursed" with mid-to-low income and five daughters. Although Mrs. Bennet is portrayed as a silly, nervous and unintelligent mother, she does have good reason to worry about the marital status of her daughters. The pressure to marry was immense in Austen's novels, for a woman who is single and poor is the "worst" thing possible (Gilbert 136).

Knowing the threats of being poor and single all too well, Austen shows the world, through her characters how hard a life it is. In *Emma*, Emma's view on love and marriage is a little different than many heroines in literature. Emma says she will never marry, "Were I to fall in love, indeed, it would be a different thing! But I never have been in love; it is not my way or my nature and I do not think I ever shall. And without love, I am sure I should be a fool to change such a situation as mine" (*Emma* 70). She loves her position as mistress of her home and would never leave her ailing father. So instead of thinking of love and marriage for herself, she spends her energies matchmaking for her friends. "…it is poverty only which makes celibacy contemptible to a generous public…a single woman of good fortune is always respectable" (*Emma* 18). Emma's singleness is accepted more readily because of her wealth and status, while Miss Bates is considered a spinster and is pitied. She is an older single woman with no income, and

she's not handsome or clever – the "worst predicament in the world" (*Emma* 18). However, Emma's rosy view of singleness is not true. For although she would be indeed wealthy and be the mistress of a large estate, she would still have no role or social standing in society. Again, Robinson observes that marriage would have defined her and in this view, she would be no better off than the poor Miss Lucas before she accepted Mr. Collins (Robinson 197). Just like Emma, Elizabeth Elliot in *Persuasion* is of high birth and mistress of her home, yet has no power in society as an unmarried woman. There is no social role if unmarried. "Jane Austen makes it quite clear that the material condition of woman involves more than the price tag attached to her dowry and the income that portion combined with personal attributes, can win for her." Marrying can provide an "establishment," which can be more than enough to appease a poor single girl with little to no options, as Charlotte Lucas did in *Pride and Prejudice* (Robinson 188-189).

Austen used her ironic and romantic novels to show the ridiculousness of status when it comes to love and marriage (Robinson 180). When Lady Catherine, Mr. Darcy's titled aunt and one of the snobbier and frustrating Austen characters, hears a rumor that he has proposed to Elizabeth, she is enraged. She claims that Elizabeth is beneath the Darcy standards and by marrying him she will be refusing her duty, honor and gratitude. Her class difference could ruin the reputation of the high Darcy name. However, Elizabeth sees things quite differently. She disregards the status differences, seeing how high ranking Lady Catherine is, but how low her manners are to others. "Elizabeth reacts exactly the way we would react: she is insulted, she's indignant at the way this dinosaur from another era would try to tell this intelligent, beautiful young woman what to do," Marsha Huff said in *The New York Times* (James). Elizabeth holds her ground while the

formidable Lady Catherine insults her and her family, by saying, "He is a gentleman; I am a gentleman's daughter; so far we are equal." Lady Catherine replies back with venom, "True. You are a gentleman's daughter. But who was you mother? Who are your uncles and aunts? Do not imagine me ignorant of their condition" (*Pride and Prejudice* 646). Elizabeth keeps her cool and tells Lady Catherine only the truth. She comforts her with telling her she is not engaged to her nephew, but remains firm in saying she will not enter a promise that she will never become engaged to him in the future. Elizabeth's strong will is clear, and she does not care what this woman of high rank and birth demands and only does what is right for herself.

This disregard for status or class is common in modern times, as many people do not marry for money and rank, but it was very common in the time of Jane Austen. And the radical position Austen presents does, as Robinson claims, "uphold the daring, fundamentally bourgeois notion that human worth is not a matter of birth but of individual merit, of culture" (Robinson 180). Elizabeth Bennet and the many other heroines embody this ideology of thinking through their disregard of class and their search for love in their marriages, instead of unions solely for fortune. Austen even ends the famous novel with a passage on how the Gardiners (trade, not gentry) are good friends with the Darcys, showing that the theme is not just uniting a man and woman, but uniting two social classes (Fraiman 368).

In *Persuasion,* Anne is persuaded to refuse the love of her life, Captain Wentworth, because her good friend and mentor, Lady Russell, believed him to be beneath her. His lack of fortune and Anne's high birth is the right combination for Lady Russell to use class as an excuse to break up the young lovers. In another instance of

class affecting marriage, Elizabeth Elliot, Anne's older and decidedly colder sister, totally dismisses the idea of her father, Sir Walter, being in love with Mrs. Clay because of their difference in rank and class. She, unlike Anne, does not care about actual affection, but rather social appearances and staying within the accepted classes. Anne's other sister, Mary, does not want her sister-in-law Henrietta to marry the charming Charles Hayter because he is of lower status than them, saying that she does not think a woman has the "right" to choose a husband who will "bring down the family" (*Persuasion* 74). With all these restrictions on class surrounding the calm and wise Anne, it is shocking that she is able to break the pattern and finally marry the man she loves instead of a man she "should" marry.

Mary Crawford, of *Mansfield Park*, the spunky yet cunning sister of Henry, has her claws set in snatching up Edmund. However, as the second son, he is to enter a trade rather than inherit his father's title and land. Edmund, deeply spiritual, has his sights on being a clergyman, a respected yet lower status position. Trying to elevate herself in society, only thinking of money and not the feelings of Edmund, Mary tells him that his chosen profession is not worthy, not gentlemanly enough and certainly not important or high class. Austen has the negative character of Mary have this distorted view on class, money and reasons to marry, which shows her own opinion on the subject. Later in the novel, Mary seems to praise Tom's almost tragic near death for her own gain so that Edmund can inherit rather than become a "lowly" clergyman. It is no wonder that in the end, Edmund finally sees through Mary's motives for marriage and chooses Fanny as his devoted wife. In the novel *Emma*, Austen portrays the pressure for young women to conform to the gender role their class and society requires them. More specifically,

Emma has an overbearing father, she never travels out of her town of Highbury, and she must marry or remain with her father (DiPaolo 22). Her lack of options in a small town and sheltered life, show the readers how limiting a woman's life can be. The society in *Emma* is repressive and punishes and humiliates the women who do not fit into the mold of the "perfect woman and wife," such as the single Miss Bates. Austen's presents these society problems with wit and subtle irony. Through her characters, she can reveal the dirty details of genteel society without making a direct comment or leaving society herself (Gilbert 182-83).

Austen had the good-humor to laugh at people's or society's faults through her writing without open conflict (Harding 170). Before learning important life lessons, Emma struggles with class snobbery and looks down on Mr. Martin, a young farmer who proposes to Harriet, because he is not genteel. The heroine's social aspirations for Harriet blind Emma from seeing what Harriet really wants. Although the Martin family rents a large farm on Mr. Knightley's property, Emma believes he is of a lower class, coarse and not sophisticated enough for Harriet. She slyly suggests Harriet refuse Mr. Martin because of his lower status in the community. On the other hand, the very rich Mr. Knightley approves of the match between Mr. Martin and Harriet saying, "I never hear better sense from any one than Robert Martin" (*Emma* 49). He disapproves greatly of Emma's imposing her ideas and class values on Harriet and interfering with the courtship with Mr. Martin. He even reminds Emma of Harriet's questionable background and place in life; no parents, and no money. "What are Harriet Smith's claims, either of birth, nature, or education, to any connexion higher than Robert Martin? She is the natural daughter of nobody knows whom, with probably no settled provision at all, and

certainly no respectable relations" (*Emma* 50). After making a few mistakes and suffering humility, Emma comes to have a renewed sense of thinking on class and status. She finally approves of Harriet and Mr. Martin's union and thankfully their happiness is restored. Her class attitudes are revised and she realizes that she cannot take any credit when it comes to Harriet's happiness with the farmer. Emma, although the heroine, is not perfect by any means. She has the same class issues that many of the unpopular minor characters deal with in Austen's novels. However, she is able to evolve, change her thinking for the better and become a more mature woman. "Strengthen[ing] the female mind by enlarging it, and there will be an end to blind obedience," whether that be to a husband or to society's view on class and status as Mary Wollstonecraft says in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Wollstonecraft 24). She believed, as Austen did through her heroines, by disregarding the restricted views on society and class, happiness, independence and love is easier to come by. This view, seen most noticeably in Emma and Elizabeth, is present in all of Austen's heroines – they all, as young women, have many things to learn about life, love, and themselves.

This independence that characterizes so many Austen heroines defines how they react to the idea of marriage. The love that these heroines seek in their marriages is based on equality, respect and friendship. By having her heroines respected, they in turn, have respect in their marriages to their heroes. This is seen in the strong relationship between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy, which stems from their respect for each other. Elizabeth and Darcy are able to talk about their feelings and their relationship with each other honestly. Even when she was misguided about Darcy's rudeness to herself and her sister, as well as the scheming Wickham, she still feels comfortable voicing her opinions with feeling to

Darcy, no matter his rank or situation. Both have intense loyalty to their families and friends and respect that commitment. Even when Elizabeth finds out Mr. Darcy told Bingley to stop seeing her sister, she knows that he was in fact looking out for his friend's best interests; something she would do for her friends.

When Elizabeth approaches her father for the approval of the match between the young lovers, Mr. Bennet sums up Elizabeth's need for love and respect in a marriage, "I know that you could be neither happy nor respectable, unless you truly esteemed your husband; unless you looked up to him as a superior" (*Pride and Prejudice* 686). Although this seems anti-feminist on Mr. Bennet's part, he really means that Elizabeth could never marry a man who is lower in intelligence, wit and passion than she. "Your lively talents would place you in the greatest danger in an unequal marriage…My child, let me not have the grief of seeing *you* unable to respect your partner in life" (*Pride and Prejudice* 686). Not only does this bring to mind Mr. Bennet's life with his silly wife, but also the fate Elizabeth escaped by refusing the dull Mr. Collins. Darcy and Elizabeth's marriage is one of equality. Sarah Baxter Emsley, author of *Jane Austen's Philosophy of Virtues*, makes the point that they learn from each other and both grow from their mistakes, therefore making a partnership, rather than a man ruling his wife (Emsley 102).

In all Jane Austen's novels, marriage is the main concern, but not the heroines' whole-being. "The marriage of Elizabeth and Darcy is one of fulfillment and happiness, and yet both of them, like Elinor [*Sense and Sensibility*], Fanny [*Mansfield Park*], and Anne [*Persuasion*], are obliged to find fulfillment in the exercise of their own independent happiness first" (Emsley 22). Their independent spirits are what lead to their

equal partnerships and very ahead-of-their-time marriages. These young women learn their morals through life experience and reflection, not from other people telling them what is moral and what is not (Kirkham 235). While Austen creates heroines who are their husbands' equals. By becoming a partner in a marriage, the patriarchy would be overturned, "It is true, they could not then with equal propriety be termed the sweet flowers that smile in the walk of a man; but they would be more respectable members of society…" (Wollstonecraft 62). However Austen shows readers that it just might be all right for this to happen. After the marriage of Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth, the still prideful Darcy, in a good way, does not want to speak to his aunt because of the rudeness she has shown his new wife. "She sent him language so very abusive, especially of Elizabeth, that for some time all intercourse was at an end. But at length, by Elizabeth's persuasion, he was prevailed on to overlook the offence, and seek reconciliation…" (*Pride and Prejudice* 708). Although fiercely protective of his new wife and their equal union, Elizabeth is able to soften Darcy's pride once again at the conclusion of the novel in order to move on and live their new life together.

Austen's later novel, *Persuasion*, celebrates the idea of a mature and wise heroine. Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth's loving union full of respect comes from the fact that they are older. This novel is different from Austen's other works of fiction because here the heroine is much older, twenty-seven, and has still not made a match. In fact, she has had her heart broken most tragically. She suffers from this loss of love and loses her youthful glow because of it. However, their maturity and the obstacles they face in order to be eventually reunited show the respect and deep devotion that they have for one another, rather than a fast and furious passion that dies in a few months. Seeing

Anne again after eight years of separation, Wentworth justifies his feelings of love and admiration with angry pride by paying attention to Lousia and Henrietta to make Anne jealous. He is also himself jealous of Anne's attention to Mr. Elliot, a cousin, whom he believes will propose to Anne. "He had not forgiven Anne Elliot. She had used him ill; deserted and disappointed him; and worse, she had shewn a feebleness in character in doing so, which his own decided, confident temper could not endure," (*Persuasion* 59-60). Even amidst all this jealousy and misunderstandings, the love that they both have for each other is very palpable. Because of their longer life experience and maturity, the couple is able to enter into marriage, knowing full well the long-term commitment involved; they have loved each other and have been true for the eight years of their separation without each other knowing. "I offer myself to you again with a heart even more your own, than when you almost broke it eight years and a half ago. Dare not say that man forgets sooner than woman, that his love has earlier death. I have loved none but you," Captain Wentworth promises to Anne when the couple finally reunites (*Persuasion* 228).

The romantic plot for Emma is a bit less obvious than that of Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice* or Anne in *Persuasion*. As the love story grows, so grows her good character and her self-reflection. When the former "idealized Byronic hero," Frank Churchill, is found out, Emma believes that Harriet will once again be heart broken on her account (DiPaolo 23). The deceitful Frank has been secretly engaged to Jane Fairfax for months, even though he shamelessly flirted with Emma in front of her. However, as much as Emma tried to distance her self from romantic involvement, readers cannot help but get the feeling that she will find her "Prince Charming." Although Emma begins to

have feelings of love for Frank Churchill, she has no intention for anything other than friendship. Her true feelings show more when Mr. Knightley is the topic of conversation. Always around and a constant companion to Emma, Mr. Knightley is a dear friend who she respects greatly. In turn, Mr. Knightley respects her. When Emma brings up a potential romantic interest in Jane Fairfax to Mr. Knightley, he shrugs off all rumors saying, "She has a fault. She has not the open temper which a man would wish for in a wife," suggesting that Emma's talkative and open nature is what draws him to her (*Emma* 288). Mr. Knightley enjoys talking with Emma and also helping her become a better woman, "If I loved you less, I might be able to talk about it more. But you know what I am. You hear nothing but truth from me. I have blamed you and lectured you, and you have borne it as no other women on England would have borne it," he says as he declares his love to Emma for the first time (*Emma* 341-342).

Previously Emma claimed she did not want Mr. Knightley to marry anyone only because she wanted her nephew to receive the Knightley inheritance, as Mr. Knightley's younger brother is Emma's brother-in-law. But readers can see she is jealous of his attention to Jane Fairfax. The final straw is when Harriet reveals that she is seeking Mr. Knightley's attentions. Emma's conflicted emotions show how much she cares for her friend but also how much she is in love with Mr. Knightley. "It darted through her with the speed of an arrow that Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself!" (*Emma* 324). She suddenly realizes that she has loved him all along at the moment when she thinks he could possibly be taken away from her. Emma and Mr. Knightley's marriage grew from a friendship, something that many women at the time could not have. Friendship and respect with the opposite sex, that could lead to a romantic attachment is a modern idea

and Austen wrote this "girl-next-door" romance to illustrate her ideas on respect in a loving marriage. In Emma and Mr. Knightley's marriage, however, things are not the usual set up, as he gives up a lot of the expected power that came with a marriage in that time. They have a more equal marriage in that Emma requires Mr. Knightley to move into her home with her father, instead of packing up and moving in with him (DiPaolo 35).

What allows the theme of marriage in Austen's novels to continue to be relevant is the sensibleness. Austen was a realist is her writing, especially when it came to love and marriage. In her novels, she shows love and romance developing gradually and naturally growing. There is no dramatic "love at first sight" moment, but only the examination of the characters' hearts and souls over time to produce a lasting relationship. As Susan Morgan argues, "The potential of everyday life, the romance to be found in familiar circumstances, is the premise of Austen's fiction" (Morgan 340). Elizabeth, in fact, hates Mr. Darcy for most of the novel, before realizing her mistakes in judgment and slowly comes to terms with her hidden feelings for him (*Pride and Prejudice* 36). When he proposes marriage to Elizabeth the first time, a nerve-wracking event to any man, his pride is speaking more than his heart, "…he was not more eloquent on the subject of tenderness than of pride. His sense of her inferiority – of its being a degradation – of the family obstacles which judgment had always opposed to inclination" (*Pride and Prejudice* 350.) The marriage between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy also follows Austen's tendency for realism, as it could identified as a marriage from modern day – with a few time and setting changes of course. Both of strong character and liveliness, their union is more equal than many marriages would have been in Austen's time. In

fact, most of the marriages described in Jane Austen's fiction are less-than perfect. Few have friendship and even fewer have actual love (Emsley 79). However, her heroines want love in their marriage. While Mr. and Mrs. Bennet are far from the ideal marriage and Wickham is paid to marry Lydia in order to make her an honest woman, the Gardiners and the newly married Darcys prove to be the happiest of couples. Their secret is the friendship, love and respect that they share with each other. These traits, so common and almost instinctive, in marriages in the twenty-first century, were few and far between in the nineteenth century.

However, keeping with her realistic view on love, Austen's endings are not always perfect. With closer reflection, they are not conventionally romantic. Many times there is no embrace or kiss. In *Mansfield Park*, the scene when Fanny and Edmund finally are united is not acted out, only briefly stated in a few sentences after the fact. The endings are ironic, subtle and complex – just like real life "happy endings" (Grove 181). She also suggests that there is life beyond the "happy ending."' She creates realistic heroines (and heroes) who still are learning from mistakes after the story finishes and they are married off (Morgan 342). A reader, or viewer for example, can imagine what the Knightley's marriage is like with Austen's line, "the perfect happiness of the union." However, was she being serious or sarcastic? (DiPaolo 88) Keeping with Austen's realistic tone and endings, one might surmise that their marriage or any marriage that she writes would never be perfect. But in Emma's case, she had no expectations of marriage, so she has nothing to lose and everything to gain in marrying her best friend, confidante and mentor.

As Emma's friendship with Mr. Knightley shows readers Austen's feelings on friendships between the opposite sexes, it also shows that the friendships the heroines have throughout the novels allow them to grow and mature into well-rounded women. Not only do they have bonds with their own sex, they also strive for equality in respect and companionship with men. While the marriage plot seems to be what draws readers the most, the friendships of Austen's heroines show how their lives were more than just a "man hunt." The idea of friendship especially involving women at the time of Austen was a complicated one. While many critics say that women at that time gave up friendship for husband hunting, Austen writes the opposite. Friendship does not take a backseat to marriage for her heroines (Johnson 92). "Marriage is an unquestioned necessity in Austen's novels, but it is never the first or only necessity" Claudia Johnson says in her book *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel* (92). These friendships challenge the idea of a woman living solely for the man she is married to. This prospect gives women a new sense of self-sufficiency, something Austen stresses in her independent heroines. While history was behind in this concept, communities of women in literature have allowed women to express their aspirations with each other.

However, Nina Auerbach, in *Communities of Women*, explains that not everyone agreed that women should gather together. Wollstonecraft disagreed with this idea and claimed that because women are not trained to self-respect, it would only cause more harm than good. But Austen knew something about communities of women, as she lived with three other women, her mother, sister and a friend for many years after her father passed away (Auerbach 5-48). This experience only helped inspire the friendships between family, other women and even men that would appear in her novels.

Mansfield Park is concerned with equal relationships between characters and more importantly, the sexes, Margaret Kirkham suggests in her essay on feminist irony in *Mansfield Park* (Kirkham 242). Fanny has a very close relationship with her brother, William. When he comes back from the Navy, readers can see how much respect and love they have for each other. The friendship that deepens the most is the one between Fanny and her cousin Edmund. "She felt she had a friend, and the kindness of her cousin Edmund gave her better spirits with everybody else. The place [Mansfield Park] became less strange, and the people less formidable" (*Mansfield Park* 16-17). Edmund is a few years older than Fanny and mentors and forms her into the heroine that she is throughout the novel. They enjoy the outdoors together, read and recite together, and enjoy each other's intellectual and spiritual company.

> He knew her to be clever, to have a quick apprehension as well as good sense, and fondness for reading, which, properly directed, must be an education in itself…he recommended the books which charmed her leisure, he encouraged her taste, and corrected her judgment; he made reading useful by talking to her of what she read and heightened its attraction by judicious praise. (*Mansfield Park* 21-22)

This deep friendship eventually grows into a feeling of romantic love on Fanny's part, although she must endure Edmund's platonic interest and infatuation with Mary Crawford until he finally sees how right they are for each other. This friendship between females and males is something that is relatable to modern readers, as it is common in the twenty-first century. Austen knew that having women relate to men, and vice versa was important in a woman's development, something that many people at the time had not had in mind.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth's deep bond is with her older sister Jane. Although there are not many scenes with the Bennet family all together, Jane and Elizabeth are closest within the family. The sister could not be more different personality wise - Jane is calm, pleasing and beautiful, while Elizabeth is lively, witty and athletic. Elizabeth wants Jane to stand up for herself and be more opinionated, rather than passive and introverted. She is thrilled when Jane finally sees through the mean-spirited Caroline, "Good girl! It would vex me indeed, to see you again the dupe of Miss Bingley's pretended regard" (*Pride and Prejudice* 634). When the two daughters take separate trips with their aunt and uncle, Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner, Jane's trip is passive and non-active. She does not go out much and does not pursue her acquaintance with Mr. Bingley, even though they are both in London. However, when Elizabeth visits the Gardiners, they explore the surrounding countryside and estates. She is active the whole trip and enjoys traveling and seeing new sights. Although they are so different, Jane is the only person Elizabeth tells about her newfound feelings for Mr. Darcy, saying, "My sole dependence was on you; and I am sure nobody else will believe me, if you do not. Yet, indeed, I am in earnest. I speak nothing but the truth. He still loves me, and we are to be engaged" (*Pride and Prejudice* 678). Different from the other silly Bennet sisters, Jane and Elizabeth trust each other with their feelings and thoughts on their romantic interests. Even the secrets she had been keeping regarding Lydia's elopement and Darcy's involvement, she shares with her sister Jane, "All was acknowledged, and half the night spent in conversation" (*Pride and Prejudice* 682).

At the beginning of *Emma*, the heroine's new friendship with Harriet is purely an amusement for the bored and rich Emma. "I do not know what your opinion may be,

Mrs. Weston, of this great intimacy between Emma and Harriet Smith, but I think it a bad thing," Mr. Knightley predicts (*Emma* 30). However, as she changes and matures through the novel, Emma realizes the importance of friendship and female companionship. By the time Harriet is happily married to Mr. Martin and Emma is settled with Mr. Knightley, their friendship is one of equality. Before, Emma used Harriet for her games of matchmaking and personal delight. Mr. Knightley, who is concerned with Emma and Harriet's well being, says, "I think her the very worst sort of companion that Emma could possibly have…How can Emma imagine she has anything to learn herself while Harriet is presenting such a delightful inferiority?" (*Emma* 32).

It takes quite a few mistakes, at the cost of some friends' happiness, for Emma to learn and grow. After Emma dissuades Harriet from Mr. Martin, she decides to match her with the respectable clergyman Mr. Elton. Her mistake in judging Mr. Martin, as well as Mr. Elton's attentions, results in Harriet's heartbreak. In fact, Mr. Elton is besotted with the beautiful Emma. The wise Mr. Knightley can see the affection Mr. Elton has for Emma, but she is too blinded by her matchmaking. When Mr. Elton professes his love for Emma, Mr. Knightley is proved right. Emma is horrified and refuses profusely, thinking only of her dear friend Harriet and how she will feel when she finds out. Thankfully it all works out in the end, as Emma ends up with Mr. Knightley and Harriet is reunited with her farmer. "She must laugh at such a close – such an end of the doleful disappointment of five weeks back – such a heart – such a Harriet!" (*Emma* 379). Mr. Knightely is proved wrong about his assumptions of Emma and Harriet's friendship after all is said and done. For in fact, both have learned and grown from each other, proving a positive companionship. At the end of the novel, both women are close

friends and have grown significantly in maturity, allowing them to be happy for each other in their consequent marriages.

In *Persuasion,* Anne's friendships are outside her family. According to Johnson, "Isolation from the patriarchal family is a precondition for honest liberty, and moral imagination" (Johnson 69). Anne spends more time with friends than her own family. She has a stronger bond with those who have similar interests, temperament and opinions, rather than her own blood relations, especially a family that is as condescending and judgemental as the Elliots. A friendship with her old governess Mrs. Smith, a poor and widowed woman, causes tension in her family. Her sister Elizabeth and her father disapprove of this "lowly" friendship yet Anne sees no reason to end her bond with this woman over a small issue of class. Along with a friendship with a past schoolmate, Anne also is close with Lady Russell, the best friend of her late mother. This friendship, and a mother-daughter respect, is what lead to the action of the novel. Lady Russell, with her motherly wisdom, persuades Anne to refuse Captain Wentworth's proposal because of his lack of fortune. Anne's deep love and respect for Lady Russell allows her to be persuaded to give him up. "I am no matchmaker, as you well know," Lady Russell tells Anne, yet continues to encourage her attentions on scheming Mr. Elliot after she separates her from Captain Wentworth (*Persuasion* 153). Although Lady Russell is making all the important decisions for Anne, wrong ones at that, Anne still holds a deep respect for her friend.

> Young and gentle as she was, it might yet have been possible to withstand her father's ill-will, though unsoftened by one kind word or look on the part of her sister; - but Lady Russell, whom she has always loved and relied on, could not,

> with such steadiness of opinion, and such tenderness of manner, be continually advising her in vain. (*Persuasion* 27)

She knows, eight years of heartbreak later, that she was right in taking the advice from her older and wiser friend, even if it was wrong advice. She is mature enough to realize that she can be friends with Lady Russell, yet have very different views.

> Anne, at seven and twenty, thought very differently from what she had been made to think at nineteen. – She did not blame Lady Russell, she did not blame herself for having been guided by her; but she felt that were any young person, in similar circumstances, to apply to her for counsel, they would never receive any of such certain immediate wretchedness, such uncertain future good. (*Persuasion* 28)

At the conclusion of the novel, Captain Wentworth and Lady Russell resolve their differences and learn to care for each other, strengthening Anne's bond with her surrogate mother.

More than anything else, the very nature of Austen's heroines in her fiction is relatable to the modern woman. Their independence, intelligence, views on marriage and romance, and their equal and cherished friendships mirror what women experience in the twenty-first century. Each heroine, a different type of personality, is able to relate to any type of woman. This allows each Austen novel to give guidance for life to anyone who reads it, whether it is personal or romantic. Austen's "free-indirect style" of writing allow readers to see the heroine's perspective as well as the narrator's perspective on how they are different. As DiPaolo points out, the irony and humor that comes from this contrast is a feeling that the reader is reading about themselves and their best friend (DiPaolo 40). She used this technique often in her writing, allowing readers to feel as

though they are right there with the heroines. Kirkham also notes the narrative strategy, "Through the use of the 'indirect free style' of narration, Elizabeth's powers of rational reflection, as well as her personal point of view, are made plain" (Kirkham2 91). While the "villains" of Jane Austen's novels could be regular people, the heroines in Austen novels could also be regular women and girls. The heroines then have to distinguish who is good and who is bad; much like the struggle of women in any time period, according to Sarah Baxter Emsley (Emsley 55). "Jane Austen's work can be described as a realistic picture of social and domestic life, seen from a woman's point of view and treated in a spirit of comedy" agrees David Cecil (Cecil 144). Emsley also points out that Jane Austen's heroines do not rely on men for their own judgments and "moral guidance," but instead use their own heads and hearts to make their own decisions about their own lives (Emsley 81). Self-sufficiency is virtuous and present in all her virtuous characters, namely the heroines Elizabeth, Emma, Fanny and Anne. This virtue that is present in her other heroines as well, stems from an Aristotle view on moral education and the pursuit of happiness (Emsley 17-25). The idea of pursuing happiness, through self-sufficiency is something that any modern woman can relate to, giving Austen the timeless power through her independent, smart and unique heroines.

Austen's main virtues for her literary heroines, especially seen in Elizabeth of *Pride and Prejudice*, are intellectual, moral and spiritual, not just sexual or having to do with romantic love (Emsley 82). Elizabeth's character is different from the usual romantic heroine and most definitely the character of the "settling" Charlotte Lucas. Her father, Mr. Bennet, loves her best because she is smart, spirited, and witty. These are normally male characteristics, and therefore Mr. Bennet sees Elizabeth as the son he

never had. This is a contrast to Elizabeth's older sister and close confidante, Jane, who is much like the stereotypical romantic female. She is passive, quiet, and beautiful (Gilbert 157). Elizabeth's independent spirit is seen at numerous times throughout the novel. When Jane takes ill at Netherfield Park, Elizabeth refuses a carriage or a horse and treks there unaccompanied. This act of independence, and exercise, astonishes the Bingleys and impresses the brooding Mr. Darcy. He admires her spirit and activeness because she can walk alone without the help of a man. While the Bingley sisters disapprove of the walk and make fun of Elizabeth's disheveled appearance, "this adventure has rather affected your admiration of her fine eyes," Mr. Darcy defends her by saying, "Not at all, they were brightened by the exercise" (*Pride and Prejudice* 64). This seemingly small action in the novel directly shows how the heroine Elizabeth can easily translate into the modern day.

Not only is she smart and witty, she is also athletic and lively. Later in the novel after admitting their love for each other, Darcy even admits that Elizabeth's liveliness is why he fell in love with her. Another incident that shows Elizabeth's independence, confidence and class disregard, is the meeting with Lady Catherine. While Sir William Lucas and Maria tremble with nerves when meeting this high-ranked Lady, Elizabeth is calm and confident. Lady Catherine's somewhat insulting questions and biting remarks about her education and situation in life do not intimidate her. Elizabeth's firm but polite opinions astonish Lady Catherine and show the readers that Elizabeth does not care how high-ranking one is. Elizabeth says, "There is a stubbornness about me that never can bear to be frightened at the will of others. My courage always rises with every attempt to intimidate me" (*Pride and Prejudice* 320). Although she says this to Mr. Darcy, it also is

a reflection of how she dealt with Lady Catherine and others in a high position. She is strong in character and will not be intimidated by others, only because of money and title.

Along with the realistic growth of love, Austen's heroines themselves are never perfect. As Cecil notes, they can be laughed with and, more importantly, laughed at, making them ultimately human (Cecil 146). These strong heroines solve their own problems before marrying the hero of the novel. Rather than a dominated relationship with their husbands, the heroines have an equal, almost fraternal sense of respect and love (Kirkham 32). The heroes of the novels are not perfect either. They must overcome their personal faults just as the heroines do (Harding 174). Mr. Darcy for example, is rude to Elizabeth Bennet and her family, as he suffers from great pride. However, Elizabeth also has pride in her unfaltering negative view of Mr. Darcy. Both Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy are responsible for the mistakes that keep them apart. They both experience the title's traits, pride and prejudice, towards each other, which causes the chaos throughout their relationship and the plot as a whole. Elizabeth remarks to Mr. Darcy, "'and your defect is a propensity to hate everybody.' And yours,' he replied with a smile, 'is willfully to misunderstand them'" (*Pride and Prejudice* 106). While Mr. Darcy is unceasingly proud of his rank, status and obligations, Elizabeth is continuously prejudiced against his class, her bad first impression of him, and his titled connections. However, being human, Elizabeth realizes her mistake in judging Mr. Darcy so harshly and believing the playboy Wickham. She is too full of pride, vanity and cleverness to see the truth, until Mr. Darcy reveals it. The character flaws they both exhibit have a deeper affect on the plot. Elizabeth's pride keeps her from telling her family about the true character of Wickham, therefore she blames herself for Lydia's elopement and ruin. It takes a family scandal for

Elizabeth to finally come to terms with her guilty and romantic feelings with Mr. Darcy. Putting pride on the back burner, Darcy pays Wickham to marry Lydia in order to save the Bennet daughters from a life of scandal. Only thinking about Elizabeth's future, Darcy pays out a large sum, even though he has been refused by her and has almost not hope for a change in her heart. This selfless action shows Elizabeth Darcy's change of heart and, in fact, changes her prideful heart in the process. Both hero and heroine feel shame and remorse for their past actions, they must face up to their flaws in order to realize the true love that they have for each other.

Like Elizabeth, the heroine in *Emma* is a character who is far from perfect. *Emma* is about a young woman, who seems to have everything but then realizes she does not and has much to learn (Emsley 129). Flirty, fun, good-natured, and little bit vain, Emma is the only heroine that Austen named a novel after. Emma's youthful vanity and personal flaws stem from her intelligent nature and doting father. "Emma is spoiled by being the cleverest if her family," says Mr. Knightley (*Emma* 31). No only is her conversation and wit under-appreciated in her household, but also her beloved governess, Miss Taylor, is more of a friend than an authoritative figure. She is able to have her way in almost everything and thought very well of herself. She enjoys the power of being the mistress of her father's house, especially after the marriage of her governess to Mr. Weston. Out of all of Emma's family and friends, "Mr. Knightley, in fact, was one of the few people who could see faults in Emma Woodhouse, and the only one who ever told her of them" (*Emma* 10). Mr. Knightley knows her faults but also, more importantly sees her potential for goodness and maturation. Emma considers Mr. Knightley intelligent, sensitive and a great judge of character, especially after the Mr. Elton proposes to her instead of Harriet.

However, she continues to disregard his advice as she continues her matchmaking. Although she admits her mistake in interfering with Harriet and Mr. Elton, she still stands by her decision to tell Harriet to refuse Mr. Martin. Status and title is still an issue for Emma, who being a spoiled younger daughter has nothing or no one to humble her. Mr. Knightley remains the only voice of reason in Emma's small world. When the debonair Frank Churchill comes to Highbury, Mr. Knightley once again uses his superior mind to judge the newcomer's disposition. He predicts the foolishness in Frank's character, since he neglects his father (*Emma* 117). However, Emma does not see this and welcomes him whole-heartedly. When Jane Fairfax, Mrs. and Miss Bates' niece, comes to town and Emma immediately dislikes her. Jane is quiet, mysterious, and discreet. Therefore, Emma cannot get any information from her about her former acquaintance Frank Churchill. When Frank spends time with Emma, they gossip and flirt, thinking up scandalous things about the quiet and mysterious Jane, who has received a pianoforte from a mysterious friend. Emma's shallow actions lead to disappointment on Mr. Knightley's part, who expects better behavior and respectability from Miss Woodhouse. He knows that Frank Churchill is no-good and thinks he is using Emma for some ulterior motives. But once again Emma is more interested in matchmaking Harriet, this time with Frank. Even though these are Emma's intentions, she and Frank flirt together openly. Without thinking about the repercussions, Emma lives in the moment and thinks only of her self. Although her matchmaking seems selfless, she only follows what she wants and not the person matched. But just as any woman learns from her mistakes, so does Emma. After a cruel insult to Miss Bates and thus disappointing Mr. Knightley and his high expectations he held for her, Emma comes to a personal realization of her flaws and their

devastating effects on the people around her. After righting her wrongs, Emma matures into a caring and graceful young woman, worthy of Mr. Knightley's gentlemanly affections.

Fanny Price, the heroine of *Mansfield Park*, is one of the hardest to understand, or perhaps to relate to the modern woman. This is because Fanny is thought of as too proper, uninteresting, and already virtuous and having nothing left to learn in the course of the novel, according to Sarah Baxter Emsley (Emsley 107). However, Austen clearly disapproves of physical and mental weakness in her heroines and young women, in general. Miss Price may seem weak but Austen requires critical reading and intelligent readers to see that she is most definitely not. Austen also objects to heroines and women in general to have angelic characteristics, like Virginia Woolf's "Angel in the House" idea (Kirkham 233-7). Emsley explains that although Fanny is emotionally and morally strong, even at the beginning of the novel, she also represents growth and development of the mind through her constant education and thinking (Emsley 117-20). Mary Crawford, the more likely heroine of the novel, has not the moral fiber that Fanny contains. Mary is lively, witty, smart, beautiful and strong – all traits that Austen uses in her typical heroines. Although a prime candidate for a "leading lady," Mary's pride, unlike Elizabeth's, gets away from her and she cannot see past connections and money. However, Fanny, through her brief friendship with Mary, learns to be more spirited and active from her, yet keeps her morals intact (Gilbert 165). Unlike Mary, Fanny considers her independent spirit, as well as her obligation to her family, when she makes judgments. Seemingly quiet and reserved, to almost an extreme, Fanny provides readers

with an entirely different heroine, showing audiences that any type of woman could be an Austen heroine.

Although she does not say much, Fanny is portrayed as very smart and wise, even a feminist, as she is a supporter of equal and civil rights and highly disapproves of her uncle's slaves in Antigua. Kirkham states, "It is a great comic novel, regulated by the sane laughter of an impish, rational feminist. The pricelessness of Miss Price is its heart – and head," (Kirkham 246). Austen even gives Fanny a room of her own, in the attic of the Mansfield Park great house, much like the concept of Virginia Woof's "Room of One's Own," giving women a chance to create and be true to one's self in a space of their own (Emsley 128). At first glance, Fanny Price may not be the stereotypical Austen heroine, or relate to many women, but given a closer look, Fanny has the qualities that many intelligent women have today. Her "Cinderella story" shows that a woman with higher character will be rewarded in life, whether it is marriage to a good man, like Fanny's case, or happiness within themselves (Harding 173). Combining intelligence of all the educational opportunities women have in modern times, with dedication to family and friends, Fanny is an example of virtue for those who read *Mansfield Park.*

Anne Elliot of *Persuasion* is a different kind of heroine, as she is much older and more experienced than Elizabeth, Emma and Fanny. Anne matures with age, from nineteen to twenty-seven, and learns to make decisions about life and love for herself. She begins to judge for herself rather than blindly follow Lady Russell's opinions (Wright 150). Although her chance at love seems lost throughout most of the novel, Anne finds her own happiness, showing readers that she can be content without the love of a man. She makes the best of the situation she finds herself in, including her selfish

and sometimes mean family members and her silly acquaintances. Even though most of the time she is treated badly by her family and her heart is broken, Anne is strong, patient and adapts her life to the present instead of wallowing in the past. Sarah Baxter Emsley points out that throughout the novel Anne never despairs and always has hope, not for Wentworth's love but for happiness in life and her society (Emsley 149-51). While all the other Austen heroines are on the "hunt" for a husband, Anne has had her chance at love and has lost. This different approach to a romance plot shows readers that Anne, although still in love with Wentworth, has moved on with her life and has pursued her own happiness. This is definitely more relevant to modern times, as women are opting to put romantic relationships on hold for careers and other goals.

As a more mature woman, Anne is has a more calm, cool and collected personality in a crisis. She is also able to handle problems and can take the lead without being anxious (Wright 148). For example, she is good with her sister Mary's children and can get them to behave while the children's parents spoil them. She is of great help to her sister, especially when her nephew gets injured and must take care of everything - she calls for the doctor, soothes the child and of course, calms hysterical Mary. When Louisa falls and is unconscious, Anne once again takes over and is calm and in control while everyone else is too upset to function. Even Wentworth, still angry at Anne, sees how "proper and capable," Anne is and that she should be the one who stays with Louisa until the doctor arrives (*Persuasion* 111). Just like Elizabeth, Anne is independent and lively, as she is active, animated and loves being outside.

Although she has all these good qualities, Anne also has to deal with the emotional turmoil within her when Captain Wentworth comes back to town and they

meet again after eight years. She does not realize the continued feelings she has for him until she sees him. However, she wants to control her emotions and seem indifferent. Anne is clearly very emotional but does not want to seem weak and show her heart. "Once so much to each other! Now nothing!" Anne says as she thinks back on the relationship they once had and the cold conversations they now have (*Persuasion* 61). "Anne did not wish for more of such looks and speeches. His politeness, his ceremonious grace, were worse than anything" (*Persuasion* 70). Although Anne tries to keep the love she has kept for Wentworth for eight years hidden, she shows her heart through her actions. Wentworth learns that Anne refused Charles Musgrove as a husband right after Wentworth was sent away, showing that Lady Russell's persuasions were never a personal attack and that Anne did not settle for anyone else. Anne also does not become engaged to Mr. Elliot because she cannot love him, as her heart is stuck on another.

Yet even more relatable than her good sense on love, is her good sense on women's rights and class. She can hold deep and intelligent conversations on women and men's view of love, books and education. "Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands. I will not allow books to prove any thing," Anne tells a group of men on the topic of books and woman and men writers (*Persuasion* 224). Anne's statement on men and books is a clear feminist remark, as she believes that women have not been given the chance to express themselves through writing. She also has no qualms sharing her opinion in front of gentlemen, namely a friend of Wentworth (Kirkham2 147). Ian Watt believes, in his book *The Rise of the Novel*, that Austen herself, through

this quote and Anne's thinking, challenges that a woman writer is better at writing the complexities on human relationships and consequently, a better novel (Watt 298). Anne also cannot stand the vain and pretentious ideas and opinions of her father and sister Elizabeth. She, being friends with women lower than her in class, has no time for people who judge merely on rank and status. "I certainly am proud, too proud to enjoy a welcome which depends so entirely upon place" (*Persuasion* 144). Anne's qualities, including her independence, maturity, good sense, and feminist thinking, and the love-lost-and-then-found plot relates very well to modern women. It comes as no surprise that many readers find that Anne and the actions in *Persuasion* are good models for living out a single life until Mr. Right comes back into their life.

In their most basic form, Jane Austen's fiction is love stories. But they also tell the stories of smart and complex women living in a limiting world. Finding Mr. Right from all the Mr. Wrongs, keeping Mr. Right, and keeping their "self" intact through the process is what each heroine is basically doing throughout the novels. This familiar idea and relatable topic is what makes her novels immensely popular two hundred years later, as well as spurring numerous media adaptations. This includes film (period and modern), novel continuations, books and websites.

What keeps Austen readers coming back through decades and decades is what she writes about. Her subject matter and how she writes it allows readers to relate even when empire-waist gowns and carriages are far from the present. Her subject matter is simple but read deeper, it is often more complex. It left out important world events, such as the Napoleonic Wars threatening the English Empire, religious issues, slavery, or even much on death. Austen kept her novels light and comic because that was her goal. However

they were more than a light love story. Elizabeth Bowen said," She writes big truths about little scenes" (Botton 72). Although she wrote about little scenes, she knew the larger picture, yet focused on what was pertinent to women during a time of war – they did not discuss politics but instead took care of a home or waited to get engaged. According to V.S Prichett, a biographer of Austen, Austen was in fact, a war novelist. She stressed the shortage of men during the time, the financial woes because of the war, and the importance of the British Navy (Auerbach 39). But many critics did and do not agree with this sentiment. Anthony Burgess, one of these critics, did not take Austen's work seriously, saying:

> But now having formed my sensibility a different way, I recognize that I can gain no pleasure from serious reading (I would evidently have to take Jane Austen seriously) that lacks a strong male thrust, an almost pedantic allusiveness, a brutal intellectual content. (Ellmann 23)

This strong anti-Austen remark is common among male critics who tend to dislike her detachment from the Napoleonic Wars during the time of her writing. Like Burgess, Charlotte Bronte also agreed Austen's writing lacked passion. "I should hardly like to live with her ladies and gentlemen, in their elegant but confined houses," she said in relation to Austen restrained and observant style (Republic of Pemberley). However, according to the book *Thinking About Women*, Austen is read to find "definition of delusions" and not ideals, such as opinion on war and religion (Ellmann 42, 212). Austen wrote her novels to see through those things to what was actually happening in the day-to-day lives of the genteel people of England. Although they might have been concerned with war and suffering abroad, they were more concerned with making matches and

navigating the tough society with grace and wit. Even Austen herself knew her limitations to her "little bit of ivory," when she said:

> I could no more write a [historical] romance than an epic poem. I could not sit seriously down to write a serious romance under any other motive than to save my life; and if it were dispensable for me to keep it up and never relax into laughing at myself or other people, I am sure I should be hung before I had finished the first chapter. (Botton 41)

Mark Twain was another critic who was very vocal on his dislike of Austen's work. He very gruesomely and humorously claimed that, "Every time I read *Pride and Prejudice* I want to dig her up and beat her over the skull with her own shin bone" (Botton 94). Yet even in saying that, Twain admits to reading Austen, more than once in fact, suggesting that he may have admired her more than he wanted to admit.

However, for every negative critic of Austen's there are many more positive ones. Virginia Woolf, another famous female writer, admired Austen's calm observing style because she did not allow her own strong feelings to get in the way of the goal of the text. She said, "Here was a woman about the year 1800 writing without hate, without bitterness, without fear, without protest, without preaching, that is how Shakespeare wrote, I thought" (Fowler 267). Woolf's ideas, like "the angel in the house," and a private room for a woman, are touched on in Austen's text, particularly in *Mansfield Park*, yet Austen was before Woolf's time. Both women, as writers, were able to influence not only readers, but also other women to express themselves through writing. Willa Cather, another famous female writer, also respected Austen as a writer who paved the way for many others, "They are so few[writers], the ones who really did anything

worthwhile;… There was Jane Austen who certainly had more common sense than any of them and was in some respects the greatest of them all" (Fowler 264). Not all male writers refused to understand Austen's prose, for Thorton Wilder predicted that the events in her novels would outlast George Elliot, Dickens and Fielding. E.M Forster claimed he read and reread her novels, "shut up in measureless content," (Botton 49,101). With all the talk surrounding Austen's work, the good and the bad, it is no wonder she has remained on the radar for so long. Her works have been translated into about thirty-five languages, and have never been out of print (Botton 117). Her timeless stories can cross cultures, time, and media – attracting new fans all the time.

Austen's themes and how she approaches them are relevant even to other cultures, far different from the society in which she wrote about in her six novels. While the nineteenth century English gentry might not seem the most relatable topic, Austen focuses on her characters rather than on the history of a time period or culture. Because of that, her stories become timeless. Her universal points can translate well into any type of community, country or religion.

An example of such a cross cultural adaptation is in the film "Pride and Prejudice" made in 2003. This movie tells the story of Elizabeth Bennet, a modern day female college student in Utah, hoping to get her romance novel published. The Bennet sisters are replaced as college housemates, but the dynamic is the same. Lydia is still the silly flirt, and Jane is Elizabeth's best friend and confidante. Instead of a carriage ride to Scotland to elope, the playboy Jack Wickham and Lydia run off to Las Vegas to get hitched. When Elizabeth learns her mistake in judging Darcy and his actions, she copes with excessive ice cream eating, TV-watching and basic exclusion from the outside world

– a typical "break-up" reaction. This film has a few feminist undertones, especially when William Collins, the pastor, bitterly speaks of Elizabeth as a feminist since she is focused on her education and career instead of getting married. "The Pink Bible," the dating guide popular in the film represents the social expectations of the women in the town; Lydia follows every step, of course. While the time period is noticeably different, the culture of college and the movie's strong religious influence is also seen through out. This Mormon film used its own religious society to represent the proper society in which Jane Austen's heroines' could have related to. Instead of meeting at a ball, Darcy and Elizabeth meet at a church youth party. Also, while no pre-marital sex or kissing is even thought of in Jane Austen's novels, these Mormon characters feel the same way about physical contact between the sexes. While the story of Elizabeth and Darcy might have played out a bit differently in the rest of modern American college culture, Austen's popular *Pride and Prejudice* relates well to the conservative religious groups, as the romance is proper and respectable, yet still challenges some of conservative ideals through a heroine who is attending to college.

In the same way, "Bride and Prejudice," the Bollywood retelling of the famous romance, shows how any society can make for a great adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*. In this film, Elizabeth is Lalita, a young Indian woman who struggles with her feelings of hate and love for the British William Darcy. Filled with the usual Bollywood song and dance numbers, the film also shows how Jane Austen's plot can still resonate in a culture so different from the regent society of the 1800s. Once again the movie adapts well to the conservative views on physical contact between the sexes. Also the Indian mother's preoccupation with matching her daughters with successful Indian, English or American

men is eerily similar to Mrs. Bennet's meddling in her daughters' affairs. Although once a colony of the Great Britain, India is so vastly different from the time and place Austen was writing about in her novels. Yet somehow the film relates the story of Elizabeth Bennet to a smart and beautiful Indian girl trying to find her true love and remaining independent.

Another culture that takes to the adaptation of Austen's work is the Chinese film "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon". Ang Lee, the director of the 1995 "Sense and Sensibility" film, called this movie, "*Sense and Sensibility* with martial arts" (Decent Film Guide). Just as in the Austen novel, the main characters are two women of different temperaments; one full of restraint and the other full of passion. In the end, just like Marianne and Elinor, the Chinese women learn the value of each other's way of thinking. Not many authors can have their novels translated into a culture so far from their own, yet Austen's novels can reach many cultures because of her focus on the internal of the characters and not the importance of the time history of which she wrote; something she was criticized for greatly.

On screen, Austen's world seems peaceful compared to today's chaos and lack of romance. DiPaolo asserts:

> Such critics and Austen fans often spoke in highly nostalgic terms, mourning the passing of a bygone age (that never actually existed, even in Austen's time/novels) in which politeness, intelligence, and generosity of spirit were the order of the day, not the rudeness, ignorance, and self-interest of today. (DiPaolo 94)

In this light, many adaptations that stay relatively close to Austen's own vision can be found, most notably the BBC collections. The most recent *Pride and Prejudice* period film adaptation was in 2005 with Keira Knightley as Elizabeth Bennet. Two others preceded it, the 1940 Laurence Olivier version and the popular BBC mini-series starring Colin Firth as Mr. Darcy. When Austen is made into film, the beautiful settings, strong characters and the romance plot bring in new viewers. With new fans of the films, it is only natural that they become fans of the books that started it all (Krystal).

While Jane Austen's favorite novels are adapted well into film, they also adapt well into modern retellings. Modern adaptations are very popular when it comes to Austen literature. This only works because Austen talks about universal truths of people and society in general. Her shrewd observations about life and love allow her works to continue to be relevant. The class issues that Emma struggles with in the course of *Emma* are what tie this Austen classic to a modern movie, *Clueless*. It's hard to believe that a 1995 movie about Beverly Hills teenagers could possibly relate to a classic piece of literature. However, Amy Herckering, the director of the film, used Jane Austen's *Emma* as a basis for her girl-power movie. The heroine of *Emma* is transformed into Cher, a rich teenage girl in Beverly Hills. Spoiled, fashion forward, and self-obsessed Cher takes on the task of reinventing the poor Tai. In the process, Cher convinces Tai to ignore the boy she really likes, the cute skater kid, and go for the suave and rich Elton. After Elton declares his love for Cher, the heartbroken Tai falls for Josh, Cher's smart and sweet ex-stepbrother. With this new development, in between mall runs, high school parties and report cards, Cher realizes her love for Josh. Cher's vanity and class snobbery is tested and she grows from it, just as Emma finally sees her mistakes in her character and grows

up. DiPaolo concludes that, "*Clueless* successfully demonstrates that 'any small affluent universe of taste and opinion can be anatomized as a series of Jane Austen characters," (DiPaolo 126-7).

For the more cynical and older female set is the Bridget Jones series. A book series and then two feature films, the character of Bridget Jones is a modern Elizabeth Bennet in a world full of deceitful Mr. Wickhams. In her thirties, single and slightly over-weight, Bridget is set up by her silly mother with a childhood friend, Mr. Darcy. Snooty and rude at first, Bridget decides she hates him and falls into the arms of Daniel Cleaver, her womanizing boss. After he cheats on her, Bridget finds out that it was Daniel who had an affair with Darcy's wife, not the other way around. Feeling bad about her misguided first impression, Bridget ends up with the noble and loyal William Darcy. What makes Bridget Jones a great adaptation is that is directly written for the modern woman. While the romance of Austen's world is enticing, it does not happen like that in the modern world. For Bridget, she experiences the ups and downs of a real woman, before getting her happy ending with her Mr. Darcy. While Elizabeth Bennet had to deal with Lady Catherine and her obnoxious sister Lydia, Bridget has to deal with public speaking and facing married couples who always ask why she's single. Hilarious and relatable to every woman, the series follows the essential plot of Jane Austen's work and her original theme – finding a good man to marry.

Combining both cultural and modern retelling, "Sense and Sensibilidad," an upcoming film featured on the Jane Austen Society of North America website, is an adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility* in the Latino community of modern day Los Angeles,

California. Another coming attraction featured on the website is "Emme," a hip hop musical in an urban high school that retells the classic Austen story of *Emma*.

A trend in Hollywood, and literature alike, is the vampire or monster theme. Seemingly far removed from Jane Austen is the gruesome idea of bloodsucking vampires and zombies. But surprisingly her stories can even relate to that set. *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* by Seth Grahame-Smith is a new retelling that has Elizabeth Bennet and her sisters as trained zombie killers. The society issues are still present, as is the romance between the two main characters; he claims that 85% of the novel is the same, while the rest is zombie killing action. "She's razor-sharp and isn't afraid to cut the wealthy and privileged down to size. I just sharpened the razor," Grahame said of his already best-selling novel and future feature film starring Natalie Portman (Goodwin). Even the most recent popular book and film *Twilight* is said to be modeled after Elizabeth and Darcy's story. According to the JASNA website, "Stephanie Meyer, an avowed admirer of Jane Austen, bases *Twilight* on events and characters in *Pride and Prejudice*." A new audience has been taken with the romance between the vampire Edward and beautiful Bella – an almost gothic spin-off of the original Austen love affair between brooding Darcy and witty Elizabeth.

Hollywood has been continuing and escalating the trend of sequels, remakes, movies, as well as new and classic novels. So it's no surprise that Austen's novels are a popular choice for modern interpretation. Not just for profit, but there is a "genuine respect" for the source itself to create the best film adaptations possible (DiPaolo 14-15). With all these continuing adaptations that pop up amidst all the other profitable action

and romance movies, it is clear that Austen's themes hold fast and can relate to just about anyone.

Even when readers finish the novels of Jane Austen, many feel the need for more – what will their marriage bring, how many children will they have, what happens to the rest of the characters? For those readers, novel continuations are a saving grace. One of the only classic authors to have a large collection of fan fiction and creative writing attached, Austen's novels bring out the passion in her fans and readers, according to O'Connell of *The New York Times*. (O'Connell).

One author in particular chooses to write about a subject that Jane Austen never had experience with - sex. Jane Austen's novels end with the heroine happily married. With a few loose ends tied up, the endings are chaste and simple; never talking about the wedding night, something Jane, could not write from experience or observation. Linda Berdoll decided to take *Pride and Prejudice* and continue where it left off; focusing on the passionate love between the two main characters in *Darcy Takes a Wife*. A certain fascination with the sensuality of the characters is what draws the readers to Berdolls' fiction. While Austen politely spoke of Elizabeth and Darcy's love for each other, Berdoll explicitly describes how they act out their love in their marital bed. She describes the wedding night and many nights after, as the couple goes through family troubles and a war abroad but still keep their passion alive. "But the throbbing that we first encounter is not the cry of a passionate heart. Another part of her anatomy is grieving Elizabeth Bennet Darcy," (Berdoll preface). Andrew Davies told *The New York Times*, "Sex is the engine of the plot in 'Pride and Prejudice,' Darcy finds himself sexually attracted to Elizabeth before he even knows her. When he does get to know her,

he doesn't like her, but he still can't keep away from her," (James). A writer of four Masterpiece Theater Austen films, Davies knows the modern audience and how Austen's subtle sex appeal in her plots attracts audiences. Although not as bold as Berdoll's romance novels, other authors and filmmakers have been able to use Austen's keen eye for romantic relationships between men and women and apply it to modern day. "We consider Jane Austen the first romance novelist," a spokeswoman from the national headquarters of the Romance Writers of America (Garber 202). Countless other books have surfaced, including ones that give the hero's point of view instead of the heroines.' Even other minor characters, such as Jane Fairfax and Lydia Bennet, are targets of Austen enthusiasts and their quest for a never-ending story. One can scarcely go through the fiction section of any bookstore without seeing numerous retellings and continuations of Jane Austen's classic novels on every shelf.

Even fascination with Austen's relationships in her own life has reached modern audiences in the form of the film, "Becoming Jane." Anne Hathaway, as young Jane Austen, plays out a semi-fictional and romanticized relationship with an Irish young man. Although only briefly mentioned in a letter to her sister Cassandra in real life, Jane's affair is exaggerated for the film to make a beautiful and heart-breaking film. With Austen's universal observations about society and relationships in all six of her novels, it is no wonder that her wisdom is a prime candidate for dating and life advice. Books like *Jane Austen's Guide to Dating* by Lauren Henderson and *Jane Austen's Guide to Good Manners* by Josephine Ross are just a few in the guidebook section that cite Austen as a source for wise advice on romance and living a respectable life. On the internet, quizzes are abundant on the topic of Jane Austen. People can test their knowledge on the novels,

or ask, "Which Austen Heroine Are You?" One search on YouTube and any viewer can see that Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is a popular novel and film to parody. "Pride and Prejudice" movie lines are synched to the characters in the "Harry Potter" film and the quick-witted Gilmore Girls. Even the song SexyBack by Justin Timberlake is played to a montage of Austen film heroines, showing modern audiences that these characters are here to stay and continually gaining in popularity.

Austen's fiction has a great romance plot, sharp social observations and most importantly, heroines who can be relevant two hundred years later. With countless books, many film adaptations, and modern retellings, the novels surrounding Austen's heroines, their fiery spirits and their relationships with men and women is a draw for many people. All want to be just like the independent minded women and experience the Austen way of life. "I think that the novels are so open-ended and subtle that they allow us to speak to ourselves," says Tara Ghoshal Wallace, an associate professor and Austen scholar at George Washington University. "People love the novels and they can't get enough of new versions of them" (Krystal).

As one reads any of the six completed novels that Austen wrote in her short lifetime, it is easy to see how her heroines and her ideas can connect two hundred years later. Austen's heroines choose love and equality over money in their marriages, refusing to settle for anything less than their soul mate. Not just looking for a man, these women seek independence and are smart and lively. Just as women today, they strive on their friendships with other strong women but also crave the friendship of men, allowing them different views on things in the world. All these ideas can constantly be related to the modern day woman. Self-sufficiency, intelligence, and an active lifestyle are common in

most women, as are friendships that cross not only the sexes but also race, religion and class. These modern day women also are on the lookout for love, not just a man to help them pay the bills – because women are paying the bills themselves. Austen, in the nineteenth century, may have had no idea that her novels would hold so much truth for years to come, but the fact remains. Because of this relevancy, media has taken Austen to a whole new level. Crossing cultures and time, continuing stories and her wisdom for life advice, the novels of Jane Austen have and will stand the test of time. With no end in sight, Austen's universal ideas on love, status and friendship, and her strong heroines will continue to impact modern readers and audiences for years to come.

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