"Completely without Sense": *Lost in Austen*

LAURIE KAPLAN

Laurie Kaplan, Professor of English and Academic Director of George Washington University's England Center, is a former editor of *Persuasions*. She volunteers at Harewood House—Pemberley in *Lost in Austen*.

The magical door, a staple of myth, children's literature, sci-fi and films, game shows, and time-travel tales, metaphorically holds realism, even the realism of fiction, at bay. Through that door an adventurer could find Romance—escape from boredom, loneliness, disillusionment, and unfulfilled dreams—or, alternatively, Disaster. In *Lost in Austen*, Elizabeth Bennet time-warps herself through a magical door and lands in a flat in twenty-first-century Hammersmith, where Amanda Price, a thoroughly modern Ms., routinely escapes from her boring job and unrewarding love life by re-reading *Pride and Prejudice*. On the night that Amanda's beery boyfriend pops the top of his bottle and burps out a "proposal"—"Marry me, babes"—, Amanda inexplicably finds Elizabeth Bennet, dressed in nightgown and nightcap, standing in her bathtub, surrounded by laundry. Elizabeth, who prides herself on her powers of observation, deduces that it is a "Miss Spencer" whose life she has entered (Amanda's underwear carries the Marks & Spencer label). Pointing to the very ordinary shower panel fitted up with all the requisite plumbing, Elizabeth explains that "there is a door . . . , a door completely without sense." At this point, Janeites must suspend disbelief. The urge to demand "fictional realism" or "adaptive fidelity" of a classic text must be rejected, for in this series the plot absurdities are more *Life on Mars*, *Cold Comfort Farm*, and *Kinky Boots* than the plot, backstory, and character development of a most cherished 1813 novel.

A view of the South Front and formal gardens of Harewood House in Yorkshire, the property that stood in for Pemberley in Lost in Austen. *Photo by Laurie Kaplan.*

The next night Elizabeth returns to Hammersmith, this time outfitted in an early-nineteenth-century walking dress. Amanda finds Elizabeth, the character who represents everything that is absent from ugly, urban London life, amusing herself by switching the bathroom light on and off. Elizabeth is captivated by electrical appliances; Amanda, by the magical door. When Amanda steps into the shadowy passage and time-warps into Longbourn, loud with the lamentations of Mrs. Bennet, Elizabeth puts on her bonnet. The door swings closed; the cultural exchange is complete. Amanda Price, dressed in her twenty-first-century "otter-hunting kit"—black leather jacket, red high-heeled boots, low-cut purple blouson top, and tight jeans—exchanges places with Elizabeth Bennet and changes the course of *Pride and Prejudice.* As Elizabeth disappears into the netherworld of bendy-buses, macrobiotic diets, computers, and global warming, *Lost in Austen* becomes Amanda's story.

Devoted as I am to Jane Austen's novel, I fretted about the time-travel premise of this new series, even before I discovered that the plot of *Lost in*

Austen includes a new main character—*not* created by Austen—who creates cultural and meta-fictional chaos. As soon as Elizabeth and Amanda begin to converse, however, Janeites will recognize that the game is afoot. With its complex intertextual connections and irreverent attitude, *Lost in Austen* is a hybridized riff on Austen's plot and language and on twenty-first-century "lost-the-plot" metafiction and slang. Viewers of this unique "adaptation," a term I am using in a most general sense, will note that jokes thread through the series—there are running jokes about balls, for example, and about fish, buttresses, hairdos, and tooth-brushing techniques. By making visual and verbal connections between popular entertainment (films and sitcoms) and British "high culture" (classic novels), the series not only spoofs the plot and characters of *Pride and Prejudice*, but also subjects Austen's other novels to satirical commentary; it burlesques Heritage films in general, but skewers more specifically scenes from Joe Wright's film *Pride & Prejudice* and Andrew Davies's hugely popular serialized *Pride and Prejudice* with Colin Firth and Jennifer Ehle. This magical mystery tour could be seen by some fans of Jane Austen's novels as a "parody of a pastiche of a mockery of a sham" (Coren 18),[1] but *Lost in Austen* is a rich intertextual document that comments on such issues as love, kindness, trust, female friendship, feminine desire, and personal and social anxiety.

But what is most radical is the writer Guy Andrews's willingness to defy the viewer's plot expectations and to include a new character who features in almost every scene, her constant presence offering a metafictional writerly or authorial point of view. A Janeite who knows every element of *Pride and Prejudice*, Amanda tries to redirect the plot as it transmogrifies into a contemporary adventure/romance, part farce, part social commentary, part chick-lit. She tries to corral Austen's characters into their established personalities, to get Austen's "real people" to conform to the roles they inhabit in fiction, and to force the "right" matches. The name "Amanda Price" echoes "Fanny Price," but the sensibilities of this character recall Marianne Dashwood, in that she often says and does the wrong thing. "Elliptical" and "oracular," she predicts events—"It's what happens," she tells Elizabeth, and then she bemoans the fact that "Nothing's happening the way it should." Her tendency to blurt inappropriately—"Mr. Darcy doesn't float my boat"—adds to the linguistic and cross-cultural complexity. Her "radical manners" buttress the cross-cultural havoc and support the verbal and visual comedic structure.

Aimed primarily at a new generation of Janeites, *Lost in Austen* is a cleverly updated comedy of manners and a compelling retelling of a well-known

girl-meets-boy story. The series interweaves a variety of texts not only to satirize the ostensibly refined cultural landscape that spreads out between the covers of what is deemed the British reading public's favorite novel, but also to comment upon the contemporary British (and American) middle-class social "scene," which abounds with anxieties about romantic relationships and marriage. The absurd juxtapositions of contemporary cultural artefacts—cell phones, cigarettes, and lip gloss, for example—with the well-known images and themes of Jane Austen's novels—stately homes, rituals of courtesy and courtship, and elaborate Regency costumes—provide comic fodder for an exploration of what Austen's classic plot means in today's world. With Amanda on the wrong side of the magical door, the plot of *Pride and Prejudice*, as Amanda, film buffs, informed readers and fans, and members of Jane Austen Societies know it, goes pear-shaped.

Broadcast on ITV in the UK during the autumn of 2008, *Lost in Austen* is aimed at a large, cross-over, and trifurcated (but overlapping) viewing public. The primary audience is the twenty-somethings familiar with magical doors, time-travel tales, and cultural absurdities. These Generation-Y viewers recognize the classic Elizabeth and Darcy love story from assigned readings in schools and universities, and from films and television. They are *au courant* with text messaging, urban slang, high street fashion and accessories, and the rituals and problems of twenty-first-century romantic relationships. The second target audience, a more general group that incorporates the first, primarily younger, segment, is made up of viewers familiar with (and likely enamored of) Colin Firth's wet shirt scene in Andrew Davies's 1995 series, with the Bridget Jones books and films, and with Elizabeth Bennet's glamorous incarnation as Keira Knightley in Joe Wright's 2005 film *Pride & Prejudice*. These viewers may be slightly older than twenty-anything; it may have been awhile since they have read *P&P* or any of Austen's novels; and they are bound to be baffled by some of the contemporary women's magazine expressions, silly jokes and contemporary references, and the occasionally rude vocabulary. The third segment of the target audience is the Janeites, of course, and they may well be the viewers most inclined to resist this sort of over-the-top pastiche. If Janeites are too fussy about textual fidelity, however, they risk missing something they will actually end up appreciating more than the other demographics.

For these groups, the most common denominators are Austen's novels and the recent bio-pics; Davies's television/DVD series and Wright's award-winning film; and the Bridget Jones novels and films, which capitalized on Davies's iconic images by transforming and ironizing them. The combination

of so many texts creates an expanded visual and verbal vocabulary for *Lost in Austen*. Carol M. Dole points out that Wright's film is "a hybrid that embraces both an irreverent realism to which younger audiences are accustomed . . . and the classic heritage film's reverence for country houses, attractive landscapes, and authentic period detail." While *Lost in Austen* exploits this juxtaposition of irreverent realism with reverence for authenticity, the series adds components of fantasy and wish-fulfilment to appeal to an audience comfortable with magical doors, Daleks, Harry Potter's sorcery, and plot implausibilities—with the absurdity of Jane Austen showing up alongside Doctor Who's Tardis, for example, and with the out-of-kilter sequences of the award-winning series *Life on Mars*, which Andrew Billen calls "a clever cop show parody set in the sexist Seventies but with a Noughties sensibility" (9). Set in the Regency, *Lost in Austen* also has a Noughties sensibility, a sensibility that Andrews uses to satirize such components of modern life as the contemporary tolerance of surliness, boorishness, and unkindness in everyday twenty-first-century public and private interactions.

Lost in Austen opens in a modern London that evokes a physical, cultural, and social landscape more reminiscent of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* than Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. Amanda dreams of something beyond her boyfriend Michael (not unlike the carbuncular, fumbling young man in Eliot's poem), a boor whose idea of a good time is drinking beer and burping appreciatively, then falling asleep (and snoring) in front of the telly. Does it matter that he has cheated on Amanda—twice? with the same waitress? (It does.) Has Elizabeth Bennet shown up in Hammersmith at a time conducive to changing Amanda's expectations? (She has.) Reviewing the series for the *Sunday Times*, Roland White concedes that Amanda's world is off-putting; he asks, "Is there something about the modern world that repels us?" Is Amanda's unromantic relationship with Michael the essence of twenty-first-century urban courtship for twenty-something professionals and pre-professionals? Why does Amanda put up with this man? Perhaps it is for the same reason that the Bennet girls have to put up with Mr. Collins: he is marriageable. In fact, Amanda's mother promotes Michael's case because he at least does not take drugs or "knock [her] about." But for fourteen years Amanda has been in love with Austen's novel, with Elizabeth Bennet, with Darcy's life; she wants principles, integrity, and appropriate matches. Amanda asserts that Jane Austen has defined who she is, and she shows that she is not a "delicate escapist" (Johnson 212) who disappears into the novel. By engaging with some of the issues underscoring relationships in a contemporary urban world—boorishness, for example, and

the extreme familiarity that permits a boyfriend's slurping and burping—*Lost in Austen* suggests that the prevailing social codes deaden the spirit and that the twenty-first-century language of "love" ("Marry me, babes") repels feelings of desire.

Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* has reinforced for Amanda the concepts of friendship and common courtesy, the need for personal and social standards, and the desire for romance and love matches. Kathryn Sutherland points out that, "[a]ccording to Q. D. Leavis, along with Richardson, Scott, and the late eighteenth-century novelists, Austen drew upon 'an idiom for common standards of taste and conduct,' an accessible and 'urbane shorthand' which represented a generally held stock of values . . . " (269). Although Amanda (played by Jemima Rooper, a popular actor from the Poirot series, *Silent Witness*, *Black Dahlia*, and *Kinky Boots*) is the epitome of trendy chic, she loves those standards of Regency taste and "gentlemanlike" conduct implicit in Austen's values; she despises the urban (as opposed to urbane) and ungentlemanlike shorthand of the Noughties. Part of the comedy of *Lost in Austen* results from the fact that Amanda uses her own urban shorthand when she is on the other side of the magic door. She calls Darcy a "total git" and a "miserable sod"; at Netherfield, she gives an ailing Jane some Paracetamol to bring her temperature down; in a verbal battle at Longbourn, Amanda and Mrs. Bennet demonstrate that they speak the same rather rude language.

Elliot Cowan (*Foyle's War*) portrays an austere, mean-spirited, and "unfriendly" Mr. Darcy—part Matthew Macfadyen (2005), part Colin Firth (1995), and part David Rintoul (1980). Darcy is a character who is at first so off-putting as to shock, primarily because he is judgmental, arrogant, and humorlessly cruel. He dances with Amanda at the Meryton Assembly, but he stalks off in the middle of the set, leaving her alone—humiliated—on the dance floor. Miss Price, he says, is the "instrument of Satan" and the Bennets are all "tainted"; he deplores "the sewer that is existence outside society." Darcy is completely over-the-top in his denial of his attraction to her. He is "toxic," she says, and not the character—"the real you"—she thinks she knows from the book. But when he is properly humbled by Amanda, the serious Mr. Darcy replays Colin Firth's sexy wet shirt episode in what is at once a gesture of love on his part and an ironic comment on the sentimental romanticism of Firth's plunge. In her analysis of the original scene in the adaptation by Davies, Lisa Hopkins says that "[t]he fever-heat of his passion, it seems, is still in need of cooling" (118). *Lost in Austen* takes this scene and turns it into a gift of sorts for Amanda. If, as Hopkins points out, *Pride and Prejudice* "is

unashamed . . . about fetishizing and framing Darcy and offering him up to the female gaze" (112), in *Lost in Austen* the gaze is turned onto Amanda. She has asked Mr. Darcy to "do something" for her, and we watch her as she gazes out into the distance, at what turns out to be an ornamental pool, from which, Darcy, like some wild sea creature, emerges slowly in his breeches and loose white, wet shirt. Replaying the scene in this stylized form creates what Amanda calls a "postmodern moment," not only because it mocks Firth's iconic image of romantic love and sexual frustration but because it is not in the least bit ironic.

The intertextual mix adds to the richness as well as the comedy of *Lost in Austen.* The sexually uptight but horribly predatory Mr. Collins (Guy Henry) contrasts not only with the exuberant Mr. Kohli in *Bride and Prejudice*, hilarious in his red-white-and-blue underpants, but also with David Bamber's portrayal of the uptight, impatient husband in Davies's Firth/Ehle series. The inclusion of "Lady Ambrosia"—the corpulent female pig in *Lost in Austen*—refers visually to the handsome male specimen that parades himself through Longbourn in Wright's film. Amanda, with her straight bob, provides a visual response to critics who complained about the muddy skirts and wind-blown hairdos in the film of *Persuasion*, as well as to those critics who pointed out that Gwyneth Paltrow's hair in *Emma* was too perfect and that in the Andrew Davies *Pride and Prejudice* Jennifer Ehle's wig was a burden—a big dark cloud—for her head.

Pride and Prejudice fans and Janeites will be amused or dismayed when the characters in *Lost in Austen* run amok. The classic plot may be mangled, but *Lost in Austen* retains what Ashley Tauchert, in *Romancing Jane Austen: Narrative, Realism, and the Possibility of a Happy Ending*, calls the "'romance' mode [that] is shown by Austen to be structurally conducive to feminine wish-fulfilment" (92). Amanda wants the plot to follow the Austenian lines; her wish is that all the correct matches will be made. But this modern tale gets more convoluted when she tries to intervene as matchmaker. Amanda's ill-timed intervention results in the marriage of Jane and Collins, sends innocent Lydia running off with a drunken Mr. Bingley, and makes the match between Mr. Darcy and Caroline Bingley, even though Caroline has revealed to Amanda that she is a lesbian. Ultimately, however, it is a relief to learn not only that the Collins's marriage has not been consummated and that Lady Catherine will arrange a divorce, but also that Bingley and Lydia have spent their time talking about philosophy, and that Mr. Darcy and "frosty knickers" Miss Bingley do not marry. Even Georgiana Darcy—sexually precocious and perhaps a little mad—presents surprises for viewers.

Does the viewer need to know every detail of *Pride and Prejudice* to enjoy the series, or to see that events are far from mirroring the ideal? Hugo Rifkind, writing for the *Times* of London, found *Lost in Austen* to be a "stupid, stupid programme" because "99.9 per cent of the potential audience" will say, "Who the hell is Elizabeth Bennet?" *Pride and Prejudice*, an "English A-level set text," is by implication a book that is deadly boring. Rifkind, admitting that he "Googled a plot summary," says the novel

> is basically about some chippy tart in a big crumbly house, mooning over a soggy stuffed shirt. . . . You need to know details: that Bingley is supposed to fancy Jane; that stuff happens at a dance; that Jane sets off for Netherfield in the rain, the works. And, while knowing all this, you still have to be stupid enough not to have minded all that crap about the secret door in the shower cubicle. . . .
>
> As a whole, though, the thing is smug nonsense.

In more ways than one, Rifkind has obviously lost the plot. Reviewing the first episode of *Lost in Austen* for the *Times* on 4 September 2008, Tim Teeman says that the series "is a funny, clever breeze. . . . It is a culture-clashing, time-clashing Walnut Whip of frothy nonsense with the intriguing proposition that Amanda may be able to change the outcome of her fictional touchstone." The new generation of Austen fans is not at all bothered by secret doors.

Furthermore, Janeites understand the significance of the inclusion of Austen's name in the title of the series. Claudia Johnson points out that Jane Austen has become "a commercial phenomenon and a cultural figure" subject to "faddish commodification by publishers and marketers" (211-12). The face of Keira Knightley as Elizabeth Bennet has indeed been turned into a commodity. Featuring as it does on billboards and bendy-buses from West London to North Yorkshire, Knightley's beautiful, sad face reflects contemporary emotions; she portrays female desire and longing. The book that Amanda reads and re-reads is not something found only in a swotting student's book bag or in a Bluestocking's library. In her "diary" (published in 1996; the popular film appeared in 2001), Bridget Jones reveals her psychological dependence on *Pride and Prejudice* and on Mr. Darcy. *Pride and Prejudice*, in fact, consistently comes in as #1 or #2 in The Big Read and in Woman's Hour (Radio 4) polls.

On the surface, Amanda's middle-class life is comfortable, not unlike the lives of many who make up the target audience. She has a job that pays £27,000 a year (more than Mr. Darcy's annual income, as everyone at Longbourn and Netherfield notes); she shares a nice flat in west London with a girl-

friend; she has received a marriage proposal (of sorts). With her henna-tinged bob, Topshop and Marks & Sparks apparel, and urban middle-class slang, she is today's "Everygirl," an important fact that Rifkind ignores when he dismisses Amanda as "a boozy slapper with a passion for, yes, *Pride and Prejudice*." In fact, Amanda is a modern woman tired of being treated shabbily by an uncouth man who takes her for granted and who is clueless about the importance of manners, courtesy, and romance. She is saddened by her divorced mother's dreary and self-defeating advice that she should marry a man she does not love, who does not love her. She longs for beauty and grace.

It is important to recall that the series is aimed as well at Janeites, that group of readers described by Claudia Johnson as a kind of "cult" that exudes a "self-consciously idolatrous enthusiasm for 'Jane' and every detail relative to her" (211). Johnson asserts that "Austen is a cultural fetish" (212), and it is exactly this "Janeitism" that Guy Andrews dissects in the character Amanda Price. Even though she is an outspoken and self-aware "modern" woman, she depends upon *Pride and Prejudice* to "patch up" her life. In *Lost in Austen*, Andrews explores why Amanda might want to jettison twenty-first-century rudeness for "Austenian" manners, language, codes of behavior, and courtesy. Amanda says that *Pride and Prejudice* has become part of who she is: "I love a love story. I love Elizabeth Bennet." In terms of Janeite wish-fulfilment, to have Elizabeth Bennet appear in one's bathroom is second only to winning the heart of Mr. Darcy—which, of course, in this topsy-turvy adaptation, Amanda Price manages to do.

Janeites, according to Johnson, focus on "the ideas about culture Austen has been thought to represent" (212), and the satire of *Lost in Austen* is apparent every time Guy Andrews dismantles those cultural assumptions and iconic motifs. The comedic brilliance of the series lies in the multiple cross-cultural, cross-class, cross-text, cross-media, and cross-linguistic references. *Lost in Austen* makes the audience care about a girl who "snogs" a lovesick Mr. Bingley at the Meryton assembly and then, to put him off, declares she is attracted to women, and who violates the propriety of the Netherfield ball when she knees the odious Mr. Collins in the groin. When Miss Bingley demands that Amanda demonstrate her accomplishments at the pianoforte, which, of course, she cannot play, the viewer squirms as Caroline tortures Amanda with her particular kind of social cruelty. If she cannot play, she must sing, Miss Bingley

asserts, so Amanda belts out Petula Clark's "Downtown," seemingly an absurd choice, but the 1964 lyrics, which include references to loneliness, "worries," troubles, and cares, resonate with the older segment of the audience. To sing "Downtown" in the drawing room at rural Netherfield, in front of the censorious Mr. Darcy, mean-spirited Miss Bingley, and generous Mr. Bingley, who bobs his head in time to the music, is to set cultures clashing. The song is ludicrous, the scene hilarious; but "Downtown," silly as it is, fits into the series because it expresses social as well as personal insecurities.

In *Lost in Austen*, Mr. Darcy appears at first as an alternative version of the iconic hero, certainly not the kind of aristocratic gentleman that Janeites have constructed imaginatively. In an ugly exchange, Darcy tells Amanda that she is "an abomination," that he despises her "mendacity, disorder, and lewdness." Amanda accuses a "relentlessly unpleasant" Darcy of being a huge disappointment because he is "supposed to be incandescent with integrity" yet constantly misjudges everybody. If in the novel Mr. Darcy was preoccupied with the fact that his sister had very nearly been the victim of Mr. Wickham, in this series the darkness behind Mr. Darcy's grim outlook on life and his distrust of relationships may arise from his uneasiness about his promiscuous sister. The turn of the plot here provides a psychological rationale for his depression and his misanthropy. This Mr. Darcy is so repressed, so judgmental, so bound to the duties of his class, that even Jane, who sees kindness in everyone, finds him insufferably proud.

Wickham may be the most surprising character of all, for his character is a complete reversal of his appearance in the novel. In *Lost in Austen*, Amanda, misjudging George Wickham, tells him that she knows what he is up to with Georgiana and Lydia and that she will be right behind him with a big neon sign saying that he is not a man to be trusted. Wickham takes no offence; he merely asks, "What's neon?" Engaging in a battle of wits with Amanda, Wickham reveals to everyone at the Netherfield ball that Miss Price's fortune has "oceanic origins" and that her fishmonger father drank it all away. With this announcement, Wickham sets an elaborate, silly joke in progress, but the rumor gets results. Mr. Collins confronts Amanda with the idea that her "piscatorial" connection would be inappropriate for his "episcopal" expectations and that he therefore withdraws his proposal. By engaging herself to Mr. Collins, Amanda has tried to "save" Jane; by conjuring up the fishy tale about Mr. Price (certainly an oblique reference to Mr. Price's affinity for the sea in *Mansfield Park*), Wickham "saves" Amanda. Furthermore, when Mr. Collins rebukes Amanda for her "unseemly" attempts to associate with people above

her class, she assaults him, with the result that Darcy ejects her from the Netherfield ball, underlining via punning and repetition what Mr. Bennet later calls the "gruesome" melodrama of balls.[2] This scene will perhaps be apprehended in different ways by the segments of the targeted audience. Literary costume dramas, as Dole points out, must have "crossover appeal—even at the risk of losing some of the traditional heritage audience." Card-carrying Janeites may not find *Lost in Austen* as comedic as the youngish professional/pre-professional audience does, but it is important to acknowledge that the humor in this series depends on absurdity, that the characters never use truly offensive language,[3] and that the linguistic repetition creates a cross-cultural connection between Austen's society and Amanda's.

Cross-cultural comedy relies on the implicit and explicit discrepancies between life in two different centuries and environments. Houses, clothing, hairdos, transport, dating customs, medicine, singing as an evening's entertainment—these images and activities are radically different for Elizabeth and for Amanda. In *Lost in Austen*, however, many of the social and gendered attitudes of the earlier society are still evident in today's assumptions and aspirations, and this cultural connectedness is part of what makes the series appealing to a young audience. While Heritage films like Wright's *Pride & Prejudice* cast "age-appropriate actors" and stress the central love story (Dole), *Lost in Austen* stresses everything *except* the central love story of Elizabeth and Darcy. The charm of the series evolves in part from Amanda Price's refreshingly improper behavior, especially because she keeps trying to make two different kinds of messy reality—both her own twenty-first-century life and her life once she goes through the secret door—conform to fiction. Amanda has the verbal tools to undermine Caroline Bingley, Lady Catherine, and Mrs. Bennet; she acts out against the horrid Mr. Collins; she rebukes Mr. Bingley when he gives up his pursuit of Jane, asserting that "it was badly done," and she will not allow his excuse that his friend Darcy is too strong for him. Frustrated, Amanda blurts out for him a description of Mr. Collins's "hands slithering all over" Jane. It is a gross image, but Amanda says aloud what many readers have been thinking about poor Charlotte for two hundred years.

Lady Catherine's dinner parties offer readers and viewers peculiar insights into class relations and personal insecurities, and in *Lost in Austen* Guy Andrews interjects as well some rather juvenile humor directed, once again, at a young audience. Sitting next to Darcy and listening to Lady Catherine soliloquize to Mrs. Bennet about "breeding" and the Bennet "offspring," Amanda challenges Mr. Darcy about his class's lack of occupation, function, and purpose. His class, he

explains, "must be seen to be unoccupied," but Caroline interrupts what appears to be yet another argument between the two to suggest that Amanda should sing as part of the evening's entertainment. Interpreting Caroline's interference as part of her own plan to capture Darcy, Amanda thinks (in a voice-over): "you conniving, smirking. . . ." Suddenly she completes aloud the sentence she was composing in her head—"Bumface"—and then asks quickly, "Did I say that?" The scene, juxtaposing elegance and rude language, imitates the opening pages of Morris Gleitzman's 1998 edgy juvenile novel *Bumface*, aimed at readers aged 9-12. In Gleitzman's book, Angus Solomon, day-dreaming that he, like his own creation the pirate Bumface, is bold and brave, blurts out "Bumface" when his teacher calls on him in class. He has to backtrack to assure his teacher that he is referring not to her but to an imaginary pirate. Similarly, Amanda backtracks, claiming that Lady Catherine might know the card game Bumface as "Humpty Dumpty." When Amanda "teaches" Lady Catherine and her guests the rules (making them up as she goes along), she notices that Lady Catherine cheats at cards. More important, however, Amanda stops the game and saves desperate, drunken Mr. Bingley the humiliation of losing his heirloom watch. Darcy notes Amanda's kindness in intervening when the more rapacious characters want to pocket all the coins, and his transformation seems to begin at this point. In quick succession, he apologizes for misinterpreting Bingley's love for Jane, and he invites Amanda to Pemberley. Kindness, eloquence, and politeness—these qualities will help transform the ending as well.

Some Janeites may feel about *Lost in Austen* the way that Anthony Lane feels about Roland Joffé's film of *The Scarlet Letter*, which is, he says, "in the words of the opening credits, 'freely adapted from the novel by Nathaniel Hawthorne,' in the same way that methane is freely adapted from cows" (152). Other viewers will respond happily to the anarchy of the writer's vision. Tim Teeman, TV critic for the *Times*, as caught up in the drama as any twenty-something and/or Janeite, "marvelled at the sharp yet frothy, subversive-yet-utterly-respectful-of Austen brilliance" of the series:

> the music had me welling up, Amanda's love for Darcy had me welling up; and the seeming impossibility of Jane and Bingley finding happiness almost set me over the edge, especially when he wounded lovely Mr. Bennet in a duel. Did you cheer when Mrs. Bennet (Alex Kingston, a bustling flurry of sighs and tears, a high

class Miss Piggy), tore into Lady Catherine de Bourgh (a demonically acidic Lindsay Duncan). For so long Mrs. Bennet had tried to make herself socially acceptable. Now she told Lady Catherine to get out of her house: "You are a common bully and you cheat at cards."

How clever to turn the time travel question to a radically conclusive purpose and for Andrews to discover that by recasting *Pride and Prejudice*, he could—convincingly and with feeling—change its central romance. . . . Those performances and the music zinged. It all zinged. (25 September 2008)

Is Jane Austen, as Amanda asks, "spinning in her grave, like a cat in a tumble dryer"? By taking *Pride and Prejudice* off-plot through time-travel, mixed genres, and brilliant characterizations, Guy Andrews has opened up a new way of attracting a twenty-first-century audience to the works of Jane Austen. Extra characters, absurd plot twists, reversals of fortune—all the elements of melodrama add up to an unsentimental retelling and a satisfying ending that unites two worlds, two cultures, and two lovers. In terms of wish fulfillment, Darcy tells Amanda everything women have always wanted to hear. And the added plot twist is the fact that Elizabeth Bennet, who says that she was born out of time and place, chooses to remain in Hammersmith, happily ensconced as a nanny for a hyper-green family, where she can text for taxis and Google to find out that she has been married to Darcy for nearly two hundred years. What could be more satisfying?

NOTES

1. Giles Coren is referring to Guy Ritchie's forthcoming *Sherlock Holmes* with Jude Law as Dr. Watson, but the ironic designation would seem to fit, if very loosely, *Lost in Austen* as well.

2. In fact, this scene is part of the extended rather rude word play. Amanda tells Darcy, "You're throwing me out for kneeing Collins in the balls."

3. When Wickham uses "spunky" to describe Amanda, he tells her it is "soldiers' slang"; since he repeats the word, thereby calling attention to it, the viewer must question whether there is a Joycean joke implanted in this conversation.

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