

# Thinking Out of the Box in Literary and Cultural Studies

Proceedings of the XXIX AIA Conference

edited by

Rocco Coronato, Marilena Parlati and Alessandra Petrina

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Notes on Contributors</i>	9
Rocco Coronato and Marilena Parlati, <i>Introduction</i>	19
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	33

### I. A LONG NINETEENTH CENTURY

Elena Cotta Ramusino, <i>Generic instability: Gothic fiction from an Irish perspective in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century</i>	37
Greta Perletti, <i>'The stream of life that will not stop': the 'memory of places' and the palimpsestuous streets of the nineteenth-century city</i>	51
Andrew Brayley, <i>Shelley and Dante: translation and adaptation</i>	73
Maria Luigia Di Nisio, <i>'A woman's heart, with manly counsel fraught': A. Mary F. Robinson, Greek tragedy and poetry in The Crowned Hippolytus (1881)</i>	87
Daniela Francesca Viridis and Gabriella Milia, <i>Exploring feminized landscapes in Victorian erotica: ecocriticism meets sociology</i>	111
Francesca Guidotti, <i>Mashing up Jane Austen's classics: Pride and Prejudice and Zombies &amp; Mansfield Park and Mummies</i>	125

### II. TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF MODERNISM

Debora A. Sarnelli, <i>Crossing the great divide: the golden age of detective fiction as lowbrow modernism</i>	151
Annalisa Federici, <i>Was she really a snob? Virginia Woolf, the 'battle of the brows' and popular print culture</i>	171
Ester Gendusa, <i>Questioning the canon and re-writing/re-righting the female colonized subject: Mary Seacole's Wonderful Adventures and George B. Shaw's The Adventures of the Black Girl in Her Search for God</i>	193

Monica Manzolillo, <i>Back into the box: T.S. Eliot's preface to Djuna Barnes's Nightwood</i>	211
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### III. AN EXPERIMENT IN DIALOGUE: H.I.E. DHLOMO ACROSS GENRES

Giuliana Iannaccaro, <i>Introduction: reading Herbert Dhlomo out of the box</i>	223
Giuliana Iannaccaro, <i>The teacher and the bard: Herbert Dhlomo's historical drama</i>	225
Marco Canani, <i>Romantic polyphony in Herbert I.E. Dhlomo's Valley of a Thousand Hills</i>	243
Sara Sullam, <i>An experiment in reading: narrative composition in H.I.E. Dhlomo's short fiction</i>	265
Marta Fossati, <i>Literariness and genre mobility: journalistic features in the short stories by Herbert Dhlomo</i>	281

### IV. INTERMEDIATION

Andrea Fenice, <i>Questioning definitions: the challenge of rhythm analysis</i>	301
Emanuela Ammendola, <i>AVT: Britishness in Paddington</i>	321
Pierpaolo Martino, <i>From Velvet Goldmine to The Happy Prince: portraying Oscar Wilde's outsideness in contemporary cinema</i>	339
Luisa Marino, <i>Dis-Covered. Book covers and the representation of female narratives in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah and We Should All Be Feminists</i>	357
Eleonora Sasso, <i>Trespassing cultural boundaries in audiovisual media: aboriginal female discourse and cultural heritage in Maïna</i>	379

### V. BODIES

Anna Anselmo, <i>Reconfiguring the dead body. Shapes of the after-life in Gunther von Hagens and Seamus Heaney</i>	395
Maria Luisa De Rinaldis, <i>Skulls: from aids to meditation to fashion accessories</i>	417
Emilio Amideo, <i>Rethinking the human: the use of animal metaphors to language the utopianism of the black queer existence</i>	433

## VI. CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

- Maria Grazia Nicolosi, *'She lives now in two worlds': re-placing the embodied other in Caryl Phillips's The Lost Child* 457
- Carla Tempestoso, *Walking a thin gender line: transgender identity and gender fluidity in McCabe's Breakfast on Pluto* 477
- Maria Elena Capitani, *A tale of two countries: the shadow of Brexit in Ali Smith's Autumn (2016) and Amanda Craig's The Lie of the Land (2017)* 495



# MASHING UP JANE AUSTEN'S CLASSICS: PRIDE AND PREJUDICE AND ZOMBIES & MANSFIELD PARK AND MUMMIES

*Francesca Guidotti*

Drawing on the remix culture techniques and on fan fiction modes of engagement, mash-up literature declaredly transforms masterpieces of world's literature into something new and unexpected 'you'd actually want to read', which is necessarily a way of thinking out of the box. Literary mashups, resulting from the combined action of independent publishers and imaginative contemporary writers, arouse interest in readers as well as critics. Such direct mashups as *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2009) and *Mansfield Park and Mummies* (2009) include significant portions of Austen's original novels, with a parodic touch of horror added by co-authors Seth Grahame-Smith and Vera Nazarian. Even though the two books follow different approaches – Nazarian being a passionate Janeite, while Grahame-Smith a former detractor of Austen – and may be regarded either as irreverent reshaping, respectful revival, or both, they turn out to be uncannily consistent with the narrative project of the literary classics they draw from. These mashups heavily rely on Austen's nonreferential aesthetic, since the simultaneous denying and disclosing of crucial historical issues leave gaps in the text to be filled by far-fetched fantasy. As well as providing comic relief, zombies and mummies give shape to the authors' and the readers' anxieties. An analysis of the first chapter of the two mashups, with a focus on style, irony and characterization, will show how the distinctive features of the novel of manners are preserved and updated, to the benefit of a contemporary audience. At the same time, our reading will bring out the gaps that have been so incongruously filled.

*Mashup Literature; Pride and Prejudice and Zombies; Mansfield Park and Mummies; Jane Austen; Seth Grahame-Smith; Vera Nazarian*

## 1. *The novel as mashup*

The very recent phenomenon of mashup literature explicitly addresses the issue of 'thinking out of the box' as it creatively deals with both the enduring appeal and the restyling of literary classics. Originally pertaining to the jargon of web design and, above all, of the music and film industry,<sup>1</sup> the term 'mashup' refers to the blending of two or more sourc-

<sup>1</sup> Michael Serazio, 'The Apolitical Irony of Generation Mash-Up: A Cultural Case Study in Popular Music,' *Popular Music and Society* 31, 1 (2008): pp. 79-94.

es into a newly conceived and partly self-standing object. According to Landow, the practice of mashups has always been ‘central to our understanding of both media and transmediality’,<sup>2</sup> as can be seen in the transition from ‘ancient Greek literature, based upon orality, [to] Latin scribal culture’, and, eventually, to English printed texts; all the more so now, in the context of contemporary so-called convergence culture, ‘where old and new media collide’.<sup>3</sup>

A product of remix culture, now largely brought out of the fringe and into the mainstream, mashups assert their right to quote, remake and re-assemble pre-existing works.<sup>4</sup> They draw on fan culture for their modes of engagement with popular texts, and for their reception practices.<sup>5</sup> With increasing interest, contemporary readers turn to fan fiction ‘to explore the range of different uses writers can make of the same materials’, as well as ‘to see how familiar stories will be retold and what new elements will be introduced’.<sup>6</sup> When the corrosive attitude underlying mix and match techniques is applied productively to literary texts, a genre shift is likely to take place, as is the case of the so called ‘monster mashups’ *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*<sup>7</sup> and *Mansfield Park and Mummies*,<sup>8</sup> both of which add a touch of horror to the original Austen classics.

Jane Austen and Seth Grahame-Smith’s *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2009) is considered the first ‘novel as mashup’.<sup>9</sup> It arose from an idea of Jason Rekulak, the editor of the independent Philadelphia-based publisher Quirk Books, founded in 2002 with the mission statement of issuing ‘25 strikingly un-conventional books per year’, stories meant to be

<sup>2</sup> George P. Landow, ‘We Have Always Had Mashups, or Mashing Up Transmediality,’ *International Journal of Transmedia Literacy* 1 (2015): p. 67.

<sup>3</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Lawrence Lessig, *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), p. 56.

<sup>5</sup> Eckart Voigts-Virchow, ‘Pride and Promiscuity and Zombies, or: Miss Austen Mashed Up in the Affinity Spaces of Participatory Culture,’ in *Adaptation and Cultural Appropriation*, ed. Pascal Nicklas and Oliver Lindner (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), pp. 34-56.

<sup>6</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 177.

<sup>7</sup> Jane Austen and Seth Grahame-Smith, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (Philadelphia: Quirk Books, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Jane Austen and Vera Nazarian, *Mansfield Park and Mummies: Monster Mayhem, Matrimony, Ancient Curses, True Love, and Other Dire Delights* (Winnetka: Norilana Books, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> Carolyn Kellogg coined the term in her ‘Review: *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* by Seth Grahame-Smith,’ (*Los Angeles Times*, 4 April 2009, <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/la-et-zombies4-2009apr04-story.html>).

'bold, unprecedented, beautifully designed, and affordable'.<sup>10</sup> In imitation of YouTube mashup videos, Rekulak mixed and matched a list of 'popular fanboy characters like ninjas, pirates, zombies, and monkeys with a list of public domain book[s]'<sup>11</sup> until he came to the title *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, which he presented to Seth Grahame-Smith, 'a then-32-year-old aspiring screenwriter [who] had already written several books for Quirk',<sup>12</sup> including *How to Survive a Horror Movie* (2007). The writer took on this challenging task and re-read the Jane Austen novel, which he had not touched since he was about fourteen. Like many 14-year-old boys, he had not particularly cared for Elizabeth Bennet's love life and Regency mannerisms, nor for Austen's 19th-century prose, on his first readthrough. But as he 'combed through the text, [he] genuinely began to understand the power and appeal of Austen's work. [He] pasted the text of the original *Pride & Prejudice* into a document on his computer, and began adding in scenes and details – with his font coloured red, of course – to flesh out this alternate history world full of "Unmentionables" and ninja swords'.<sup>13</sup>

Mashup literature therefore stems from a far-sighted publishing industry, capable of imagining new formats and of predicting their profitability, from daring young contemporary writers, ready to provide their critical interpretation of the classics while reshaping them, and from a varied audience, used to re-reading – and sometimes to re-writing – the tradition, in accordance with the practices of the postmodern media circus and with the toolkit of fan culture.

*Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* has gained immense popularity, and its unexpected persistence on *The New York Times* bestseller list for more

<sup>10</sup> Quirk books website, <https://www.quirkbooks.com/page/about>. Quirk Books, now distributed by Penguin Random House, has so far been able to turn out a number of bestsellers, including Ian Doescher's *Shakespeare's Star Wars* pop series (2013-20) – George Lucas's epics retold in the style of the Bard (metre, and stage directions included) – and Ransom Riggs's *Miss Peregrine* series, which Tim Burton adapted into a film in 2016. As regards Austen, Ben H. Winters, *Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters* (2009) was published just a few months after Grahame-Smith's novel; a prequel and a sequel to *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* by Steve Hockensmith were written, respectively, in 2010 (*Pride and Prejudice and Zombies Dawn of the Dreadfuls*) and in 2011 (*Pride and Prejudice and Zombies: Dreadfully Ever After*).

<sup>11</sup> Camilla Nelson, 'Jane Austen ... Now with Ultraviolent Zombie Mayhem,' *Adaptation* 6, 3 (2013): p. 339.

<sup>12</sup> Tom Dunn, 'Pride and Prejudice and Zombies': part 1 of 3, <https://www.quirkbooks.com/post/pride-prejudice-zombies-part-1-3>.

<sup>13</sup> Dunn, online.

than 50 weeks, along with its film remediation in 2016,<sup>14</sup> sparked a lively scholarly debate. Most reviewers praised Grahame-Smith's prowess in preserving the original, while accentuating both the intrinsic comicality and the problematic nature of the source text.<sup>15</sup> It was recognized that 'the authors of these mashups are simply responding to something already present in Austen; making blatant what she so elegantly obscured'.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, 'the greater achievement' of a mashup was said to 'lie in the satisfying desire it awakens to read the remix and the original side by side'.<sup>17</sup> Grahame-Smith also had to 'face [...] the wrath of Austen fans on blogs',<sup>18</sup> who occasionally accused him of misinterpretation. Some claimed that he 'wrote the book [...] for teenage[rs]',<sup>19</sup> attempting 'to make Austen safe for audiences – read "boys" – raised on "Mortal Kombat" and "Evil Dead"'.<sup>20</sup> The author made no secret of it; in the back-cover of the mashup he acknowledged that he meant to 'transform [...] a masterpiece of world's literature into something you'd actually want to read'. Therefore, in stating that the mashup is designed both for those who like and for those who dislike Austen, positive and negative reviews have all their share of truth.

Many other mashups have been issued following the success of *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*. Published mainly by Quirk, Penguin, Norilana Books, and Total-E-Bound Publishing, these include some romantic and erotic expansions of Austen's novels – peeping through the keyhole, with no parodic intention at all. Interestingly, Austen's works, with their celebrated characterization and dramatic irony, are still the most frequent prey to these transformative aggressions. Various explanations have been put forth. In the first place, Austen's full-length novels are now all in the public domain, which makes it possible to avoid legal action or the payment of royalties to the copyright holder – a crucial issue since direct mashups

<sup>14</sup> In 2010 the book was also adapted into a graphic novel by Tony Lee (London: Titan Books).

<sup>15</sup> Nelson, pp. 342-3.

<sup>16</sup> Macy Halford, 'Jane Austen Does the Monster Mash,' *The New Yorker* (4 April 2009), <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/jane-austen-does-the-monster-mash>.

<sup>17</sup> Lisa Schwarzbaum, 'Pride and Prejudice and Zombies,' *Entertainment Weekly* (25 March 2009), <https://ew.com/article/2009/03/25/pride-and-prejudice-and-zombies/>.

<sup>18</sup> Nelson, p. 341.

<sup>19</sup> Vic Sanborn, 'Pride and Prejudice and Zombies: Review of a High Concept Parody,' *Jane Austen's World* (4 April 2009), <https://janeaustensworld.wordpress.com/2009/04/04/pride-and-prejudice-and-zombies-a-review-of-a-high-concept-parody/>.

<sup>20</sup> Jennifer Schuessler, 'I Was a Regency Zombie,' *The New York Times* (21 February 2009), <https://janeausteninvermont.blog/page/98/?archives-list>.

include between 60 and 85 percent of the original text.<sup>21</sup> Also, Austen's rewritings boast a long and encouraging tradition, from Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996) to Waterstones' *Austen Project* (2013-16), not to mention an exceptionally vibrant fanfiction online community.<sup>22</sup> The huge marketability of such adaptations 'draws attention to the diverse ways in which the cultural values attached to Austen's work are constantly being altered by the commercial demands of the media industry'.<sup>23</sup> Austen 2.0 belongs, so to speak, to 'intertextual "universes" composed of quotation, pastiche, parody, [and marked by] very little critical distance'.<sup>24</sup>

These explanations, however, account only in part for the preference granted to Austen by so many literary remixes stoked by the siren call of aesthetic contemporaneity. There is something more specific in Austen's masterly style that encourages such daring rewritings, something that makes the risk of impudent genre crossing worth taking. Monsters gain admittance because, in Austen's Regency fiction, there is room for them, there are gaps waiting to be filled. D.A. Miller maintains that Austen's style is 'the result of rigorous selection, exclusion, reduction',<sup>25</sup> and Anne Toner adds that this is 'observed most frequently in her descriptive omissions and evasions of broader socio-historical reference'.<sup>26</sup> Austen's narrative contains hints to crucial historical issues never directly addressed

<sup>21</sup> This is the case of all 'direct mashups', such as *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* and *Mansfield Park and Mummies*. The most popular monster and romance mashups belong to this category, which is therefore often identified with the very idea of mashup literature, not without reason. Strictly speaking, a mashup is made by the incongruous mixture of two or more recognizable sources, one of which, in this specific case, reproduces a large part of the text of one of Austen's novels. Mashup literature may then be considered a very specific phenomenon, different from all other forms of rewritings. Yet, broadly speaking, the label has also been applied to several other categories. They include 'variation mashups' which, at one point, depart from the source novel's narrative to envisage an alternative development. 'Prequel' and 'sequel mashups' include no sections of the original text, as they relate what happened before and after a 'direct mashup'. Other mashups are not based on fictional texts, as in Grahame-Smith's *Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Hunter* (2010, adapted into a film in 2012), which mixes historical figures and real events with horror formulas. See Amanda Riter, *The Evolution of Mashup Literature: Identifying the Genre through Jane Austen's Novels* (PhD diss., De Montfort University Leicester, 2017).

<sup>22</sup> Maddalena Pennacchia Punzi, *Adattamento, appropriazione, condivisione di un classico: Pride and Prejudice di Jane Austen* (Napoli: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 2018); Hanne Birk and Marion Gymnich (eds), *Pride and Prejudice 2.0: Interpretations, Adaptations and Transformations of Jane Austen's Classic* (Göttingen: Bonn University Press, 2015).

<sup>23</sup> Nelson, p. 341.

<sup>24</sup> Voigts-Virchow, p. 37.

<sup>25</sup> D.A. Miller, *Jane Austen, or the Secret of Style* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 34.

<sup>26</sup> Anne Toner, *Jane Austen's Style: Narrative Economy and the Novel's Growth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), p. 30.

in the text – in *Pride and Prejudice* the presence of the militia alludes to the French Revolution and to the Napoleonic wars, in *Mansfield Park* the plantations in Antigua recall the public and private debate on slavery and slave trade. Such issues are subjected to ‘the dynamic of denying and disclosing’, typical of the figure of apophasis, ‘which occurs when a speaker *tells* what they claim *not* to be telling’.<sup>27</sup> In Mary Poovey’s words this can be termed Austen’s ‘nonreferential aesthetic’, a way of ‘simultaneously [registering] and [deflecting] attention away from historical realities’,<sup>28</sup> which engenders anxiety in an audience ‘exposed to the possibility of a discussion of the most serious political and moral concerns’,<sup>29</sup> yet forced to recognize that such a discussion has to take place outside the text.

Present-day readers may not be able to identify what is lacking in Austen’s novels but are, nevertheless, intuitively aware of the presence of some textual gaps and, in most cases, ready to welcome new hole-filling inclusions. The omission of circumlocuted history can then lead to the incorporation of straightforward fantasy – two things apparently unrelated, though surprisingly interconnected, on a deeper level. Mashups, in fact, can be seen as strangely consistent with Austen’s original plan; they come to the reader’s aid by providing comic relief – in line with Austen’s ironic stance – as well as adding a touch of enjoyable escapism, while at the same time indirectly drawing attention to some crucial aspects of the Regency novels, including the eluded historical problems. But then, which features of the original texts are retained and which are reshaped? Do mashups really help us gain an alternative perspective? Do they shed light on any of Austen’s less obvious implications or subtle undertones? To answer these questions we shall examine the first chapter of *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* and *Mansfield Park and Mummies*, where the narrator forms and upholds a pact with the ideal reader.

## 2. *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*

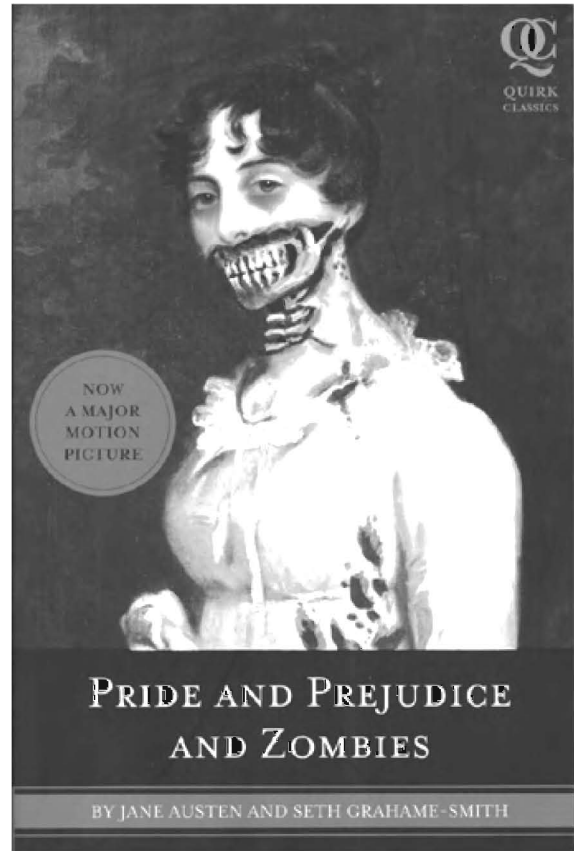
The cover image shows the ‘zombification’ of the *Portrait of Marcia Fox* by William Beechey, also featuring in the 1983 Penguin edition of Austen’s

<sup>27</sup> Toner, *Jane Austen’s Style*, p. 83.

<sup>28</sup> Mary Poovey, ‘From Politics to Silence: Jane Austen’s Nonreferential Aesthetic,’ in *A Companion to Jane Austen*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson and Clara Tuite (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. 252.

<sup>29</sup> Toner, *Jane Austen’s Style*, p. 82.

*Emma* [fig. 1]. The celebrated incipit of Austen's masterpiece is likewise 'zombified': the opening words, 'It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife'<sup>30</sup> now become '*It is a truth universally acknowledged that a zombie in possession of brains must be in want of more brains*'.<sup>31</sup> At a first glance, both sentences look plausible and straightforward, but they are not; they are ironic in so far as they contradict the reader's experience and expectations.<sup>32</sup> In Regency England the number of women far exceeded that of eligible men: 'odd women' were starting to become a social issue. It is therefore the spinster, and not the bachelor, who 'is in want' of a spouse, as will become apparent from the rest of *Pride and Prejudice*. As Isobel Armstrong puts it:



It seems that the feminine is an intrinsically disruptive category in this novel. [...] It signals excess: the awkwardly Malthusian Mrs. Bennet who can produce only five daughters and not a single son is one form of excess. [...] Too many women are in pursuit of too few men: Miss Bingley, Miss De Bourgh and Elizabeth of Darcy; Jane and Georgiana Darcy of Bingley; Lydia, Miss Bingley (and even Elizabeth for a while) of Wickham.<sup>33</sup>

The reference to zombies is equally misleading for a present-day readership. Readers may be familiar with the idea of zombies eating brains, which has been circulating since Dan O'Bannon's movie *The Return of*

<sup>30</sup> Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, ed. Isobel Armstrong (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> Austen and Grahame-Smith, p. 11. All changes and additions to Austen's original texts are italicized.

<sup>32</sup> The contradictory implications of this epigrammatic 'mock aphorism' have been widely discussed among scholars. See Miller, pp. 5-6; William Deresiewicz, 'Community and Cognition in *Pride and Prejudice*,' in *Jane Austen*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Infobase, 2009), p. 113.

<sup>33</sup> Isobel Armstrong, 'Introduction,' in Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. xxiv.

*the Living Dead* (1985), but they must surely be aware that zombies are mindless, unthinking, instinctive creatures: brainless beings, hungry for human flesh and bodily organs. Single men are paradoxically equalled to zombies in metaphorical terms, as both are marked by greed and, so to speak, mindlessness; or rather, these attributes are indirectly applied to women, here evoked *in absentia*.

Zombies give shape to present-day anxieties,<sup>34</sup> as well as to the reader's unease with the unfilled gaps in the original text. As in the case of mummies in the *Mansfield Park* mashup, they are not just an incongruous intrusion; for some reasons they are strangely compatible with the original project, as well as responsible for its irreverent actualization. Grahame-Smith playfully claimed that zombies were part of Austen's unconscious plan for the novel:

When you take a look at the original book, it's almost as if, subconsciously, Jane Austen is laying out the perfect groundwork for an ultraviolent bone-crushing zombie massacre to take place. For instance, there's a regiment of soldiers camped out near the Bennet household. In the book, they're just there for characters to flirt with. But it's not that big a leap to say, Okay, they're there because the countryside has been overrun with what they call the 'unmentionable men'.<sup>35</sup>

As Raymond Williams puts it, 'it is a truth universally acknowledged, that Jane Austen chose to ignore the decisive historical events of her time. Where, it is still asked, are the Napoleonic wars: the real current of history?'.<sup>36</sup> Other scholars, instead, maintain that 'contemporary readers would have understood from the presence of the army that this was a novel of the post-revolutionary period set during the Napoleonic Wars'.<sup>37</sup> The stormy relationship between Elizabeth and Darcy in some ways foreshadows the French revolutionary conflicts and the final marriage 'is effectively a political agreement between the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie, embodying a mutual adjustment in which power on the one hand and critique on the other are softened and aestheticized into a harmonious relationship'.<sup>38</sup> The happy union between characters of dif-

<sup>34</sup> Nelson (pp. 338-54) relates zombies to contemporary anxieties about class and race.

<sup>35</sup> Seth Grahame-Smith, 'Interview', cit. in Ann Marie Adams, 'A Quirk-y Mash-Up of "Two Kinds of Romance" Or, The Unlikely Reanimation of the "Gothick Story" in "Pride and Prejudice and Zombies"', *CEA Critic* 73, 1 (2010): p. 37.

<sup>36</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 132.

<sup>37</sup> Armstrong, 'Introduction,' p. ix.

<sup>38</sup> Armstrong, 'Introduction,' p. viii.



ferent classes can then be interpreted, figuratively, as a counteragent for revolutionary strife, which has induced critics to propose that Austen was probably consonant with Edmund Burke's famous condemnation of the French Revolution and with his promotion of conservative politics – although she wrote nothing explicit on the subject.<sup>39</sup>

If *Pride and Prejudice* can be read as a 'conservative and "anti-Jacobin" novel',<sup>40</sup> the mashup is even more so: greedy zombies are a degraded version of the Third Estate, symbolic villains with no property of their own, constantly and insatiably hungry. These zombies are presented as a mass underclass against whom people must fight; however, 'only the wealthy are able to build dojos, employ armies of ninjas, and devote their time training for combat'.<sup>41</sup> Class concern, a central theme in Austen, can then be put forward as a motivation for speaking of zombies. In the words of Grahame-Smith, 'people in Austen's books are kind of [...] zombies. They live in [a] bubble of extreme wealth and privilege,<sup>42</sup> and they're so preoccupied with the little trivial nothings of their lives'.<sup>43</sup> The zombie menace contributes to update Austen's characterization in ways that are both consistent with an unsophisticated reader's taste and, partly, with the original project, as is manifest right from the start. The first chapter relates mainly the exchanges between Mr and Mrs Bennet, who have utterly contrasting dispositions, as well as divergent world views:

Mr. Bennet was so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, *and self-discipline*, that the experience of three-and-twenty years had been insufficient to make his wife understand his character. *Her* mind was less difficult to develop. She was a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper. When she was discontented she fancied herself nervous. *And when she was nervous – as she was nearly all the time since the first outbreak of the strange plague in her youth – she sought some solace in the comfort of the traditions which now seemed mere trifles to others.*<sup>44</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) shaped subsequent conservative thinking. See Mary Spongberg, 'Jane Austen, the 1790s, and the French Revolution,' in *A Companion to Jane Austen*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson, Clara Tuite (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 271-81; Chris Danta, 'Revolution at a Distance: Jane Austen and Personalised History,' in *The French Revolution and the British Novel in the Romantic Period*, ed. A.D. Cousins, Dani Napton, Stephanie Russo (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011), pp. 137-51; Dani Napton and A.D. Cousins, 'Counter-Revolutionary Transformations of Charles I in Burke, Austen and Scott,' *Journal of English Studies* 14 (2016): pp. 137-54.

<sup>40</sup> Armstrong, 'Introduction,' p. vii.

<sup>41</sup> Nelson, p. 344.

<sup>42</sup> Speaking of 'extreme wealth and privilege' is even excessive and may therefore sound ironic.

<sup>43</sup> Dunn.

<sup>44</sup> Austen and Grahame-Smith, p. 12.

Mr Bennet is no longer the apathetic English country gentleman, driven to sarcasm and exasperation by his frivolous wife and difficult daughters; a catching, witty fellow, who turns out to be a weak father, woefully inadequate at coping with critical moments. In the mashup he becomes a man of action, hardened by the trials of war to the point of sounding rude whenever his wife fantasizes about love and marriages, manners and social duties: ‘*Woman, I am attending to my musket. Prattle on if you must, but leave me to the defense of my estate!*’<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, Mrs Bennet’s fondness for social conventions and her devotion to the cause of marrying her daughters are now driven by escapism. Her hysterical nervous fits are explained as the outbursts of a long-suffering person, prostrated by the zombie menace. So the couple’s contending opinions can be confirmed: ‘*The business of Mr. Bennet’s life was to keep his daughters alive. The business of Mrs Bennet’s was to get them married!*’<sup>46</sup>

The five daughters, so often described by their father as ‘silly’ and invariably defended by their mother, undergo a similar change. Mr Bennet would like them to withdraw from social life in order to fight the undead, as Elizabeth will very effectively do, having ‘*something more of the killer instinct than her sisters!*’<sup>47</sup> – which of course explains her father’s predilection. As is usual with fan fiction, the mashup ‘shift[s] the balance between plot action and characterization, placing emphasis upon moments that define the character relationships rather than using such moments as background or motivation for the dominant plot’<sup>48</sup> – a development much in line with Austen’s narrative approach.<sup>49</sup>

The distinctive features of the novel of manners are preserved and updated, to the benefit of a contemporary audience. In a parodic interplay with Austen’s novel, new meanings are ascribed to words that convey the ideas of property and propriety, typical of the original his-

<sup>45</sup> Austen and Grahame-Smith, p. 11.

<sup>46</sup> Austen and Grahame-Smith, p. 13.

<sup>47</sup> Austen and Grahame-Smith, p. 12.

<sup>48</sup> Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, p. 69.

<sup>49</sup> The treatment Austen reserved for plot and characterization is partly similar to that of fan fiction. Scholars have sometimes described her characters as ‘flat’, ‘types’ or even ‘caricatures’. See A. Walton Litz, ‘A Development of Self: Character and Personality in Jane Austen’s Fiction,’ in *Jane Austen’s Achievement. Papers Delivered at the Jane Austen Bicentennial Conference at the University of Alberta*, ed. Juliet McMaster (London: Macmillan, 1976), pp. 64-78; Rachel M. Brownstein, ‘Character and Caricature: Jane Austen and James Gillray,’ *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal* 37 (2015): pp. 81-105.

torical context.<sup>50</sup> So, for instance, when Mrs Bennet tells her husband that 'Netherfield Park is *occupied again*',<sup>51</sup> we wonder whether it has been taken by a 'horde of the living dead'<sup>52</sup> or by a wealthy bachelor, as is the case. Readers may or may not be aware of the ironical treatment reserved to old-fashioned social habits, much in line with Mr. Bennet's remarks about their unsubstantial conventionality. An overall look at the changes is quite revealing: the short opening chapter becomes even shorter in the mashup; dialogue is even more fast-paced, and characterization is clear-cut from the beginning. When set side-by-side to Austen's original, everything becomes even quicker, shorter, clearer, but then again *Pride and Prejudice* was already 'an experiment in brevity, a work of contraction'.<sup>53</sup> In its 'zombified' version, the mashup retains and emphasizes many of the features which made *Pride and Prejudice* the most celebrated of Austen's novels, including a perfect romantic comedy heroine who annihilates the zombies with her deadly martial arts moves, but must in the end recognize that love is the '*only force more powerful than any warrior*'.<sup>54</sup>

### 3. Mansfield Park and Mummies: Monster Mayhem, Matrimony, Ancient Curses, True Love, and Other Dire Delights

Vera Nazarian, a Russian-born American writer of fantasy and science fiction, wrote *Mansfield Park and Mummies* in open reaction to *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*:<sup>55</sup>

When that zombies parody of *Pride and Prejudice* came out, I was actually fired up. The idea was great but the execution sloppy. I knew I could absolutely do better, because I was [...] a true fan of classic literature [...], and I admired and loved the spirit of Austen, with every intention of retaining it in my mashup. [...] My primary goal [...] is to remain absolutely true to Austen in style and tone, while adding in the period-appropriate fantasy elements and enhancing

<sup>50</sup> Edward Neill, *The Politics of Jane Austen* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), pp. 51-69.

<sup>51</sup> Austen and Grahame-Smith, p. 11.

<sup>52</sup> Austen and Grahame-Smith, p. 11.

<sup>53</sup> Toner, *Jane Austen's Style*, p. 31.

<sup>54</sup> Austen and Grahame-Smith, p. 321.

<sup>55</sup> Nazarian, twice nominated for a Nebula Award, is also the independent publisher of Norilana Books. She has written and published several works of fiction, including three novels in the Norilana's 'Supernatural Jane Austen Series': *Mansfield Park and Mummies* (2009), *Northanger Abbey and Angels and Dragons* (2010) and *Pride and Platypus: Mr. Darcy's Dreadful Secret* (2012). Nazarian's novels sometimes react to erotic mashups by inserting 'scholarly footnotes', a sort of humorous admonishments to prurient readers.

and ramping up the already funny elements with a sense of sudden joyful mayhem.<sup>56</sup>

The choice of *Mansfield Park*, certainly not the easiest of Austen's novels, is noteworthy: Nazarian consciously opted for a work that, unlike *Pride and Prejudice*, had long been neglected and underrated by the general public, but which she liked the best.<sup>57</sup> The two books have in fact been compared and contrasted in a number of studies, which underline how their heroines – Elizabeth Bennet and Fanny Price – could hardly be more different.<sup>58</sup> According to Nazarian, Elizabeth corresponds to the 'feisty' heroine that 'modern readers tend to prefer': a 'sassy, outgoing, aggressive, and assertive [sort of] female super hero',<sup>59</sup> even more so in Grahame-Smith's mashup. Fanny is instead

not flashy, and her strength is quiet, humble, unassuming. She is not so much prissy or prudish [...] as simply unwilling to compromise her beliefs [...]. It's just that her *cause* is not as 'trendy' or *appealing* to our modern standards. Fanny stands up for spiritual and moral integrity, while Elizabeth for personal freedom and choices.<sup>60</sup>

Fanny has been described as 'almost totally passive', 'a girl who triumphs by doing nothing [, who] sits, [...] waits, [...] endures' and in the end is rewarded 'not so much for her vitality as for her extraordinary immobility'.<sup>61</sup>

In a novel about 'rest and restlessness, stability and change – the moving and the immovable'<sup>62</sup>, a revived mummy is quite apt and to the point. This is not, however, the only monster in the mashup: a werewolf and a vampire are listed among the 'Other Dire Delights' mentioned in its subtitle. These horrid intrusions are all, to some extent, consistent with the

<sup>56</sup> Emily C.A. Snyder, 'Teatime Ten: Vera Nazarian' (20 September 2011), <http://emilycasnyder.blogspot.com/2011/09/teatime-ten-vera-nazarian.htm>.

<sup>57</sup> Sanborn.

<sup>58</sup> Barbara K. Seeber, 'Mansfield Park/Pride and Prejudice,' *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 15, 2 (2003): pp. 324-26; Yuko Ikeda, 'From "Liveliness" to "Tranquillity": A Lexical Approach to Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park*,' in *Stylistic Studies of Literature*, ed. Masahiro Hori, Tomoji Tabata, Sadahiro Kumamoto (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 33-51; Julia Prewitt Brown, 'Questions of Interiority: From *Pride and Prejudice* to *Mansfield Park*,' in *Approaches to Teaching Austen's Mansfield Park*, ed. Marcia McClintock Folsom and John Wiltshire (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2014), pp. 116-22.

<sup>59</sup> Sanborn.

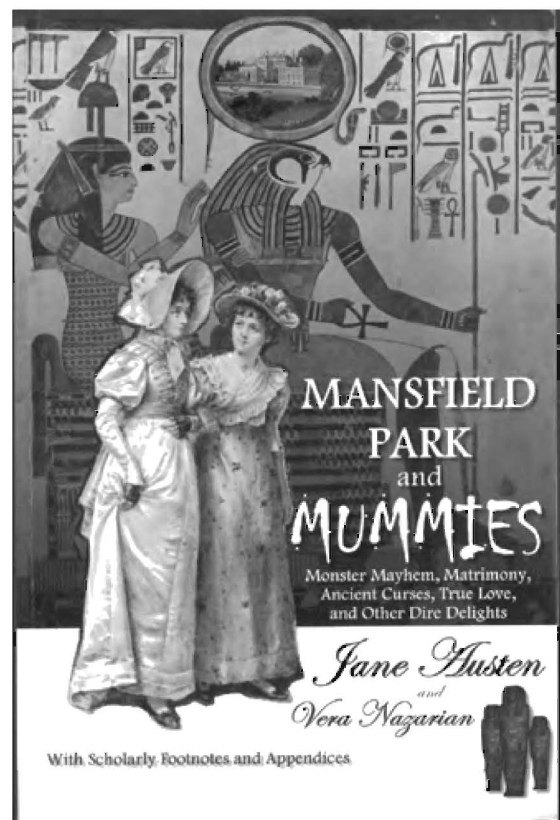
<sup>60</sup> Sanborn.

<sup>61</sup> Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen* (London: Palgrave, 2007), p. 143.

<sup>62</sup> Tanner, p. 145.

original project. Maybe Austen was preparing the ground for them when she expressed her dissatisfaction with *Pride and Prejudice* in the famous letter she wrote to her sister Cassandra at the time she was completing *Mansfield Park*: 'The work is rather too light, and bright, and sparkling; it wants shade; it wants to be stretched out here and there with a long chapter of sense, if it could be had; if not, of solemn specious nonsense, about something unconnected with the story'.<sup>63</sup> Yet Nancy Armstrong rightly maintains that, in that letter, Austen 'came no closer to identifying that missing element than expressing a regret that she hadn't included something external to the plot or even to the novel itself'.<sup>64</sup>

The title of the mashup heralds an incongruous juxtaposition, plainly exposed in the book cover illustration, drawn by Nazarian herself: in the foreground, two Regency women, taken from George Goodwin Kilburne's *Miss Pinkerton's Academy*; in the background, the images of Nefertari and Ra, with hieroglyphs, as painted on the Luxor tomb of the Ancient Egyptian queen [fig. 2]. Every monster in the mashup seems to offer an explanation for some of the characters' traits: Lady Bertram's unnatural placidity is allegedly caused by the mummy's magic spell; aunt Norris – a human being with an inner wolfish self – cannot of course avoid hypocrisy; Mary Crawford behaves quite predictably like a selfish and heartless vampire. And Fanny – the reincarnation of a deceased pharaoh's bride whom he longs to be reunited with, once restored to life – has to make a choice between two incompatible worlds, and several



<sup>63</sup> Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 4 February 1813, <https://www.pemberley.com/janeinfo/auslet22.html>.

<sup>64</sup> Nancy Armstrong, 'The Gothic Austen,' in *A Companion to Jane Austen*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson and Clara Tuite (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. 246. According to Toner, in the letter 'Austen [...] comments on [...] practical matters', such as 'the value or otherwise of matter extraneous to the story' (*Jane Austen's Style*, p. 2).

irreconcilable models of masculinity. As Nazarian points out: ‘the new inserted storyline must enhance the development of the existing characters. [...] To properly work on a deeper cohesion level, every appearance of these new elements has to be a logical and organic extension of the main plot’.<sup>65</sup>

Mummies also work as an open reference to Egyptomania.<sup>66</sup> In the aftermath of Napoleon’s expedition to Egypt, and on the eve of the opening of the Suez Canal, many antiquities had been brought to Europe and were displayed in public events, such as mummy unwrapping parties. That was also the time when the question of the race of ancient Egyptians was raised, with some scientists and archaeologists maintaining that the founders of such an impressive civilization must necessarily be the white descendants of a European Nubian population, while others asserted that they were an indigenous black offspring of the African continent. The mashup is set against the background of these historical issues, shedding more light on Austen’s ambiguously Eurocentric narrative set around the year 1807, when the slave trade in the British Empire was officially abolished and the debate on slavery was a hot topic indeed.<sup>67</sup>

In volume II, chapter III, Fanny reports that when she addressed Sir Thomas – an absentee plantation owner just returned from Antigua – asking about the slave trade, her inquiry fell into ‘dead silence’.<sup>68</sup> According to Toner, ‘that the subject is reported rather than dramatized makes the scene doubly reflective on the subject of closure and negation [as the] reasons for the ‘dead silence’ are left enigmatically unexplained’.<sup>69</sup> This is one more instance of nonreferential aesthetic, a new blatant historical

<sup>65</sup> Sanborn.

<sup>66</sup> For a discussion of Egyptomania as a Romantic, Regency and Victorian phenomenon, see James Stevens Curl, *Egyptomania: The Egyptian Revival, a Recurring Theme in the History of Taste* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994). Nazarian insists that zombies are not consistent with the original historical context, whereas mummies are: ‘During the nineteenth century, Egyptology was “all the rage”, and archaeology was just taking off in Britain and Europe. Unlike the more anachronistic and jarring silliness of other “creature” monsters, mummies actually made perfect historical sense and fit right in’ (Sanborn).

<sup>67</sup> Scholars maintain that the action takes place between 1803 and 1809. See Moira Ferguson, ‘*Mansfield Park*: Slavery, Colonialism, and Gender,’ *Oxford Literary Review*, *Neocolonialism* 13 (1991): pp. 118-39; Joseph Lew, “‘That Abolitionist Traffic’”: *Mansfield Park* and the Dynamics of Slavery,’ in Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson (New York: Norton, 1998), pp. 498-510; George E. Boulukos, ‘The Politics of Silence: *Mansfield Park* and the Amelioration of Slavery,’ *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 39, 3 (2006), pp. 361-83.

<sup>68</sup> Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson (New York: Norton, 1998), p. 136.

<sup>69</sup> Toner, *Jane Austen’s Style*, p. 81.

omission to interpret, or rather a gap to fill. Edward Said claimed that Austen was heavily involved in the 'domestic imperialist culture' and described her as 'white, privileged, insensitive, complicit',<sup>70</sup> while other scholars see things the other way round, considering Fanny – as well as the author – 'unmistakably a friend of the abolition'.<sup>71</sup>

There is an indirect connection between slaves and mummies since the arguments concerning the race of the ancient Egyptians were later resumed in the course of the debate over slavery in the United States, Nazarian's adopted country. The mighty pharaoh's mummy who, risen from the grave, bewitches the minds and ensnares the senses of an entire English household – possibly a symbol of reverse imperialism – is utterly powerless in the presence of Fanny, whom he leaves free to choose another partner.<sup>72</sup> The issue of race, then, is strictly intertwined with that of gender, as anticipated by the first chapter of the mashup.

As is typical of Austen's irony, the opening of *Mansfield Park* is marked by parallels and contrasts, which the mashup incorporates and further develops:

*About three thousand years ago, an Ancient Egyptian Pharaoh, with infinite riches of his kingdom surrounding him, had the bad luck to die, be embalmed, mummified and then sealed up in his great tomb among the sands of Lower Egypt, and to be thereby raised to the rank of eternity and, quite possibly, deity.*

About thirty years ago, Miss Maria Ward, of Huntingdon, with only seven thousand pounds *and nary a kingdom or sand granule in sight*, had the good luck to captivate Sir Thomas Bertram, of Mansfield Park, in the county of Northampton, and to be thereby raised to the rank of a baronet's lady, with all the comforts and consequences of an handsome house and large income.<sup>73</sup>

The incipit of *Mansfield Park*, sometimes described as Austen's most serious novel,<sup>74</sup> lacks the levity of *Pride and Prejudice*, although it explicitly addresses similar social issues. Fanny's arrival at Sir Thomas and

<sup>70</sup> Edward Said, 'Jane Austen and Empire,' in Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson (New York: Norton, 1998), pp. 492, 493.

<sup>71</sup> Brian Southam, 'The Silence of the Bertrams,' in Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson (New York: Norton, 1998), p. 498.

<sup>72</sup> As will be made clear, this is something more than just drawing a parallel between the condition of women and that of slaves. The problem here is not just female oppression, as in some other of Austen's novels. See Vivien Jones, 'Feminisms,' in *A Companion to Jane Austen*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson and Clara Tuite (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. 284.

<sup>73</sup> Austen and Nazarian, p. 7.

<sup>74</sup> Lionel Trilling, 'Mansfield Park,' in Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson (New York: Norton, 1998), p. 423.

Lady Bertram's estate is preceded by the report of what had happened, thirty years before, to the previous generation of women in her family, starting from the luckiest girl, Maria, who had married a wealthy baronet, also willing, in the mashup, to finance her expensive tastes in Egyptology. The added reference to ancient Egypt emphasizes the humorous detachment already implicit in the retrospective tone of the narrator: a third-person omniscient voice which questions the desirability of the social advancement the story ironically eulogizes. The prominence given to the term 'rank' in the two texts is symptomatic in this respect, for the 'rank of eternity' is compared to that of 'a baronet's lady', which suggests an analogy between marriage and death, along with that between marriage and deity. In terms that are reminiscent of the mythological contentions between Horus and Seth, the mummy's younger brothers are then set side by side with Miss Maria's sisters, who are less fortunate than she is: Mrs. Norris, married to a man of God, soon discovers that a satisfactory income is far more desirable than divine favour. Mrs. Price – Fanny's mother – who openly defies social norms and family expectations by wedding a penniless drunken soldier and subsequently giving birth to no less than nine children, is later forced to beg for her sisters' forgiveness and financial support. They are, of course, responsible for their own actions and choices, but destiny plays its part too.

A sentence in the mashup recalls the famous first words of *Pride and Prejudice*: 'But *whether three thousand or merely thirty years ago*, there certainly are not so many men of large fortune in the world as there are pretty (*and decidedly unummified*) women to deserve them'.<sup>75</sup> This sentence endows gender issues with new bodily and vital connotations: women are healthy, lively, energetic precisely in so far as they lack a class-defining status; this makes them apt to challenge the fossilized status quo. Nothing can be more unlike a mummified carcass than a 'robust living female',<sup>76</sup> as Fanny's story will later show. Somehow in between 'the physical and intellectual immobility of Lady Bertram and the restless energy of the Crawfords, Tom and Maria Bertram, and Mrs. Norris', Fanny will appear as 'the person who is mobile but who moves in such a way as to foster group harmony rather than to satisfy personal desires'.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Austen and Nazarian, p. 7.

<sup>76</sup> Austen and Nazarian, p. 9.

<sup>77</sup> David Monaghan, 'Reinventing Fanny Price: Patricia Rozema's Thoroughly Modern *Mansfield Park*,' *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 40, 3 (2007): p. 90.



A satire of public and private philanthropy is then implicit, as in the following passage where Mrs. Norris' feigned activism prompts her to a dramatic outburst about the disastrous consequences of her sister's behaviour:

Mrs. Norris had a spirit of activity, *not to mention a vaguely wolfish streak*, which could not be satisfied till she had written a long and angry letter to Fanny, to point out the folly of her conduct, and threaten her with all its possible ill consequences – *palsy, the poor house, rabid creature bites, the cut complete*.<sup>78</sup>

Mrs Norris, a lycanthropic personification of hypocrisy, refers to poor houses as a menace instead of as a source of charitable relief. In a chapter which describes Fanny's abrupt separation from her overburdened and destitute family as a solicitous act of kindness, opportunism and self-interest are always to the fore.<sup>79</sup>

In the mashup, Lady Bertram's ridiculous Egyptomania provides ample opportunities to unscrupulous profiteers. For instance, in her self-concerned reconciliation letter, Mrs Price casually mentions that her eldest boy longs 'to be out in the world, *sailing the seas or perchance digging up Egypt*',<sup>80</sup> and Mrs Norris, wishing to be dispensed from the burden of maintaining her niece, invites the Bertrams to 'give [the] girl an education, *by all means, then send her off to harvest Egypt if it pleases—*'.<sup>81</sup> It is by setting it against this background that Fanny's disinterested attachment and her devotion to common concern can be more clearly brought out.

In conclusion, we may say that the first chapter of *Mansfield Park* conjures up elusively ideological tangles which are crucial for the subsequent development of the story and therefore admit no substantial shortening. The opening paragraphs define Austen's work as a novel of manners dealing with social customs, values, and codes which present-day readers may perceive as distant in space and time.<sup>82</sup> In writing the mashup, Nazarian knew that the original horizon of expectations was not to be eluded, and yet the popular appeal could be enhanced by resorting to a

<sup>78</sup> Austen and Nazarian, p. 9.

<sup>79</sup> As Nazarian puts it, 'Fanny is genuinely perceptive, and able to 'read' the true character and motives of others' (Sanborn).

<sup>80</sup> Austen and Nazarian, p. 10.

<sup>81</sup> Austen and Nazarian, p. 11.

<sup>82</sup> The style of *Mansfield Park* is no longer marked by brevity, also because of the pervasive influence of Samuel Richardson, which Jocelyn Harris discusses in *Jane Austen's Art of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 44-5.

hybrid form, capable of addressing a wide variety of readers. She was therefore forced to anticipate a subplot which, at a later time, would be reconnected to the main narrative, but which, for the time being, might look incongruous. Hence the warning: ‘*But, speaking of mummies, dear Reader, we are getting somewhat ahead of ourselves—*’,<sup>83</sup> ‘*but oh, mustn’t get ahead of ourselves*’.<sup>84</sup> Such intrusions, or asides, break the narrative flow to address the readers directly; they take the audience’s expectations into due account, as they promise that the action missing so far will soon materialize. In the terms of narratology, these are instances of prolepsis, a flash forward. The intrusions work as an anticipation of things to come: readers may either decide to skip the first chapter, if they find it tedious or ill-suited to their tastes, or hopefully go ahead, knowing that mummies and mysteries will soon abound. Prolepsis emphasizes the novelties introduced in the mashup while confirming its substantial consistency with the original Austen classic.

The narrator’s intrusions make use of the rhetorical device of apophasis since these statements bring up the ancient Egyptian theme while, at the same time, denying that it should ever be mentioned. This is much in line with Austen’s style, which is permeated by ‘silence, reticence and omission’ and full of apophatic utterances.<sup>85</sup> At the level of both form and content, Austen’s narration constantly seems to pass by, or take no notice of, aspects that will later prove crucial to interpretation. Pretended ellipses are a major constituent of these classics, uniquely marked by ‘political silences, omitting, or submerging, an engagement with the most momentous or fraught political contexts of the day’.<sup>86</sup> Monster mashups heavily rely on that. Far from simply averting attention from what is omitted, they point at the gaps that have been so incongruously filled. And this, of course, means thinking ‘outside the box’, as mashups invariably do.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>83</sup> Austen and Nazarian, p. 8.

<sup>84</sup> Austen and Nazarian, p. 9.

<sup>85</sup> Anne Toner, ‘Apophasis Austen: Speaking about Silence in Austen’s Fiction,’ *XVII-XVIII Revue de la Société d’études anglo-américaines des XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* 73 (2016), <https://journals.openedition.org/1718/739>.

<sup>86</sup> Toner, ‘Apophasis Austen’.

<sup>87</sup> When asked to give some advice to contemporary writers, Nazarian said: ‘Be persistent and don’t be afraid to think outside the box’ (Lazette Gifford, ‘An Interview with Vera Nazarian’, *Vision: A Resource for Writers* 2002, <http://www.fmwriters.com/Visionback/issue8/Interview.htm>).

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### *Filmography*

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