

## Jane Austen's Life and Romance

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### ABSTRACT

In 1995, the American magazine Entertainment Weekly published an article on the “Top 10 Entertainment Personalities of the Year”, in which Jane Austen took one of the top spots and was accompanied by a picture of her modern self (below, Westenberg). With a laptop next to her, a copy of *Pride and Prejudice* in one hand, and a mobile phone, with which she is most likely talking to her publisher, in her other, Austen is suddenly turned into a stereotypical twenty-first-century author. While it can be said with certainty that Austen did not spend her time chatting on the phone next to a swimming pool, it is still a mystery what this world-famous author really looked like and what kind of a person she was. Though the world has about 160 letters written by Austen herself during her lifetime, two authentic, but slightly unclear, portraits and several biographies written by family members closely after her death, there are still numerous questions left unanswered. These particular gaps, such as the questions of how many lovers she might have had or how she came up with the ideas for her stories, are extensively discussed and elaborated upon in numerous fictional works, which will be focused upon later in this thesis. In this particular chapter, however, the actual facts the world has of Austen's person and life take on a central role, because it is these specific details which form the foundation for all other tales on Jane Austen's life. Austen's name that is often mentioned as a cure for lovesick and hopelessly romantic young women after another heartbreak, together with chocolate and a box of tissues. Guides such as Lauren Henderson's *Jane Austen's Guide to Dating* (2005) portray Jane Austen as a dating expert, with whose advice and tips any girl can find her own Mr. Darcy. It seems to be a given that Austen must have been an expert on love if she was able to write about it in such a realistic and convincing way.

**KEYWORDS:** *Biographies, life, romance*

### 1.A THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

When the name of a famous author like William Shakespeare or Jane Austen is mentioned, numerous people automatically conjure up a specific image in their mind of this particular person. This portrayal can be based on existing material, such as portraits and films, which provide the audience with an indication of what this author might have looked like, but it can also be influenced by a person's own imagination. While one particular generation may think of Shakespeare as the slightly balding man depicted on the cover of their English

Literature book in secondary school, countless people living in this day and age prefer thinking of Shakespeare as resembling Joseph Fiennes, who played the role of the famous author in the popular film *Shakespeare in Love* (1998). Likewise, while some may picture Jane Austen as the actress Anne Hathaway after the release of the film *Becoming Jane* in 2007, others might think of Austen as how she was once sketched by her sister Cassandra. All these different portrayals are an important part of how a society remembers these authors, and therefore, its past; a process which is also known as cultural memory. This important keyword, which has emerged over the last decade, is now widely used as an umbrella term which focuses on different acts of remembrance using a variety of media. Not only stories, both written and oral, but also images, museums, and monuments work together in the constantly continuing process of creating and changing cultural memory.

World-famous authors, such as Austen and Shakespeare, are an important part of the cultural memory of literature in general. They belong to a group of authors whose texts, as well as themselves, have an important place in cultural memory: two different, but certainly interdependent, aspects. There is an interesting dynamic between the author as a figure of memory on the one hand, and his or her written texts on the other. These two aspects both have their own particular place in cultural memory, but at the same time cannot help but influence each other constantly. It is also in these cases that the borders between an author and his or her own fiction slowly fade, and it is important to rethink these limits and see how they are used and changed in modern-day literature. An important part of this evolution is memorial dynamics: the process of how a literary artefact can relate to other memorial media. A novel may be seen as a cultural memory on its own, but this memory evolves constantly and is influenced by the cultural memory of the author and adaptations in which the story is looked at from a different perspective. For example, Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) is based on Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre* (1847) and after having read Rhys' prequel a reader will most probably look at Brontë's original differently. This process also works the other way around: the cultural memory of an author can be influenced by numerous examples of memorial media and the memory that exists of his or her own written work. In her article "Portable Monuments: Literature, Cultural Memory, and the Case of Jeanie Deans", Ann Rigney writes: "Cultural memories have their own histories and continue to evolve in the course of time" (367), which also applies to the cultural memory of an author like Jane Austen, which is still constantly changing. In this process, the borders between author and text are often crossed and especially in cultural memory it appears to be quite challenging sometimes to keep the two apart.

## II. AUSTEN'S LIFE

Jane Austen was born on 16 December 1775 at Steventon in Hampshire, in the south-east of England. Her father, the Reverend George Austen, was Rector of Steventon church. Both his family background and that of his wife Cassandra (*née* Leigh) were in the rural landowning classes, but his father was a mere surgeon (a much cruder and less prestigious profession than it would later become), while Cassandra's lineage ranged much higher. Paying posts in the Church of England, known as church 'livings', were at this time in the gift of the

landowners on whose estates the parishes lay. The Steventon estate was owned by George Austen's wealthy second cousin, completed another novel, 'Susan', which would be published after her death as *Northanger Abbey* (1817).

In 1801 Austen's father retired, and his son James, who was already looking after Deane as its curate, took over the duties of Steventon as well. The income from the parish remained George's for his lifetime, and he took his wife and daughters with him to Bath, then a fashionable resort to which many professionals chose to retire at the end of their careers, quite independently of their hope of any good effects from the supposedly healing waters of the spa. The Austens had several practical reasons for the move, but biographers often speculate that they may also have wanted to increase Jane and Cassandra's chances of meeting potential husbands (Halperin 1984:124; Tomalin 2000:174; Spence 2003:132). In 1795–6 Jane had slipped into a serious relationship with Tom Lefroy, another family friend, but his relatives made sure this did not get as far as a proposal of marriage from a very young and penniless man. It was not at Bath, however, but on a visit to James at Steventon in 1802 that the eldest son of a wealthy local landowning family called Bigg-Wither, old friends and neighbours of the Austens, proposed to Jane and was accepted. The following morning she withdrew her acceptance. This vacillation is usually read as being between the substantial financial comfort that marriage to Bigg-Wither offered Jane, and her realisation that she could never love him, between material self-interest and romantic principle, although Bigg-Wither seems to have been a man very hard to like, let alone love (Halperin 1984:134–5; Honan 1997:193–7; Nokes 1997:251–3).

It was also while living at Bath that Jane first succeeded in selling a novel, 'Susan', receiving £10 for the manuscript from the publishing firm Crosby & Co. This was not a great sum even then, but probably a typical payment for a two-volume novel from an unknown writer: Frances Burney (1752–1840), the most financially successful female novelist of the period and much better connected than Austen in London publishing circles, received only £20 for the manuscript of her first, three-volume, novel, *Evelina* (1778) (Turner 1992:114).

But although advertised, 'Susan' was not published, and having sold the manuscript outright Austen could do nothing about this. Austen's publishing options will be discussed later. George Austen died quite suddenly

in Bath in 1805, and with him went the £600 a year that was his income from various sources at this time. Mrs Austen, Jane and Cassandra hung on in Bath for another year or so, living now on Mrs Austen's private income of £210 a year, supplemented with remittances from the more prosperous of her sons. In 1806, the Austen women moved in with sailor Frank, his wife Mary and their little daughter, in Southampton. In 1809 Mrs Austen's second son Edward, who had been adopted as heir by Thomas Knight (the son of George Austen's cousin and patron of the same name), invited them to settle at Chawton Cottage, back on the Hampshire estate on which the two girls had grown up.

Yet her first visible move towards resuming her career as a published novelist, an angry letter to the publisher Crosby demanding that he either publish or return 'Susan', is not made until April 1809, *after* the move to Chawton had been decided on and thus a return to more comfortable circumstances already assured (Le Faye 1995:174–5).

### III. AUSTEN'S RELATION WITH LOVE AND ROMANCE

It is not a real surprise that most of these retellings focus on one specific element of Austen's life, namely the role of love and romance, which is the topic she continues to be linked to most often and which still raises the most frequently asked and discussed questions. Did she have her own Mr. Darcy? What role did Tom Lefroy really play in her life? Should one not know love in order to be able to write about it in such a specific way? What Austen may have missed in real life when it comes to love, is definitely made up to her in all the novels based on her life story, in which she is given numerous lovers and romantic adventures. However, it is not only love that plays a central role in these biographical novels. In her afterlife, Austen embarks on several different adventures, such as solving murder mysteries and becoming part of a vampire clan. As a result, while one of the most central, but questionable, topics in her own novels, love, seems to be unconditionally linked to Austen's own life, people also portray her in completely diverse, and sometimes even unexpected, ways, which not only tells us more about the constantly changing cultural memory of the author Jane Austen herself, but about our own modern society as well.

### IV. JANE AND ROMANCE

Rudyard Kipling's short story "The Janeites" (1924) is headed by a poem, of which these are the first two paragraphs:

Jane went to Paradise:  
That was only fair.  
Good Sir Walter met her first,  
And let her up the stair.  
Henry and Tobias,  
And Miguel of Spain,  
Stood with Shakespeare at the top  
To welcome Jane –  
Then the Three Archangels  
Offered out of hand  
Anything in Heaven's gift  
That she might command  
Azrael's eyes upon her,

Raphael" s wings above,  
Michael" s sword against her heart,  
Jane said: "Love."

The poem appears to be Kipling" s own tribute to Jane Austen, in which he gives her something many people think she never experienced, but only wrote about: love. This is also the topic that returns in all of her novels, and the subject she is most well-known for. Next to being considered one of "the masters of the romance novel genre" (Regis 75), it is also Austen" s name that is often mentioned as a cure for lovesick and hopelessly romantic young

women after another heartbreak, together with chocolate and a box of tissues. Guides such as Lauren Henderson" s *Jane Austen" s Guide to Dating* (2005) portray Jane Austen as a dating expert, with whose advice and tips any girl can find her own Mr. Darcy. It seems to be a given that Austen must have been an expert on love if she was able to write about it in such a realistic and convincing way. Therefore, it is no surprise that when a new representation of Austen is brought into the world, a little bit of romance is often added to the plot: "Eagerness to inject passionate romance into Jane Austen" s life is nothing new" (Klingel Ray par. 1). This seems to be done with the thought in mind that someone must have experienced something in order to be able to write about it persuasively. However, does one also expect a crime novelist to have committed and/or solved murder cases? When one looks at Austen" s biographical facts, it can almost certainly be said she remained a spinster all her life. However, the specific role the subject of romance and love played in her life remains discussable: did Austen never experience passion herself and did she compensate for this in her fiction, or did she have one or more affairs of the heart, but never reached the happy ending she did give the heroines in her novels? When it comes to love, what is the specific link that can be made between Austen" s true life and her fiction, and why do authors pay such a large amount of attention to this specific issue in their representations?

#### **Nancy Moser – *Just Jane* (2007)**

Nancy Moser" s *Just Jane: A Novel of Jane Austen" s Life* looks like a journal written by Jane Austen herself, starting when she was 20 years old up until her late 30s, when she has published her first works. The story includes the same events that have been recorded in numerous biographies, such as her pleasure in, but also sometimes difficulty with, her writing, the move to Bath, and the death of her father. Moser uses much real material in her novel, such as excerpts from Austen" s letters, and it can therefore be seen as a collection of facts, which is filled up with some fictional elements to make her story more coherent and fascinating. There is, however, an important focus on Austen" s own encounters with love during her lifetime, in which Moser definitely uses her imagination to describe how Austen experienced it all. However, while Moser describes several romantic encounters between Jane and various men, the main message at the end of the novel and behind

this specific representation is the fact that Austen may not have found true love in her life, but because she did not, the world now has her amazing novels instead.

The novel starts with the most famous sentence from Austen's classic love story, *Pride and Prejudice*: "It is a true thing everyone knows that... I scratch out the words, dip my pen into the well of ink, and try again" (11). It is significant that Moser uses this scene, in which Jane tries to come up with a first sentence for her story, as the start of her novel.

The aspect of love already clearly comes forward, since the reader knows it is this very moment that Austen starts writing one of the most famous love stories of all time. It soon becomes clear where Austen found the inspiration for her story, since she describes having found love herself: "I myself can say with some measure of pride that at age twenty, I have prospects. Or at least one prospect. And after all, a woman only needs but one if he be the right one. His name is Tom Lefroy. He is a charming Irishman, the nephew of a neighbor I saw at a ball last Christmas. His eyes are as blue as the Hampshire sky..." (12).

#### **Syrie James – *The Lost Memoirs of Jane Austen* (2008)**

A fascinating and entertaining example of bio-fiction on the figure of Jane Austen is Syrie James' *The Lost Memoirs of Jane Austen: A Novel* (2008). The novel starts with a short introduction by an academic who has stumbled upon the secret memoirs of Jane Austen that were hidden somewhere in Chawton Manor House, and the pages that follow are a large part of the text of this memoir. James herself researched Austen's life and the Regency era extensively before she started writing this particular story, and on one of the first pages of her novel, she mentions one of the most burning questions among Austen readers, which also seems to form the starting point for her book:

How could this *spinster*, this woman who, to all appearances, never even *courted* – who never felt that wondrous connection of mind and spirit between a man and woman, which, inspired by friendship and affection, blooms into something deeper – how could *she* have had the temerity to write about the revered institutions of love and courtship, having never experienced them herself? (7-8)

James is one of the novelists who took the task upon herself to provide the world with an answer to this burning question, which is why she decided to write these memoirs of Austen that include an account of a romance between Austen and a man called Ashford, someone she never met in real life. James based this on the mystery man Austen supposedly met when she was visiting the seaside around 1800, who was, according to James Edward Austen Leigh, an important person in Jane's life, as mentioned before. James decided to use this specific detail of Austen's biography as the foundation for her own version of Austen's personal love story.

James' story is a mix of historical facts and fictional elements, in which especially Austen's own novels play an important role. James seems to believe that Austen might have based most of her writing on real-life experiences, because elements from all six of her novels come back in this account of her life. For example,

Mrs. Austen, Jane" s mother, strongly resembles Mrs. Bennet: continually wishing her daughters to marry and harassing them about it (33). At one point, a conversation between Jane and her father about future husbands reminds one of a conversation Sir Thomas Bertram has with Fanny in *Mansfield Park*; Jane and a group of people go on a picnic at Netley Abbey, which is reminiscent of the picnic at Box Hill in *Emma*, and like Louisa Musgrove in *Persuasion*, Jane falls down a set of stone stairs in Lyme. There are also mentions of haunted stories, which refer back to *Northanger Abbey*, a couple which plans to run away to get married like Lydia Bennet and Mr. Wickham do, and Jane visits the estate of the man she is in love with, Ashford, which is called Pembroke Hall, which seems to be based on Fitzwilliam Darcy" s Pemberley. Next to these numerous fictional events, James does use some events that really happened to Austen, such as the marriage proposal by Harris Bigg-Wither, and she quotes some of the letters written by both Jane and her sister Cassandra.

What is, however, most striking about James" novel is how she manages to turn Austen" s life into a stereotypical, entertaining, modern romantic "chick lit" novel, which is all based on the idea of Austen finding true love with her own Mr. Darcy. On a visit to Lyme, Jane is saved by a mystery man after falling down a set of stairs at the seaside. This man turns out to be called Mr. Frederick Ashford and, from the start, there is obviously a connection between him and Jane. They start talking and it does not take long before they even begin finishing each other" s sentences by quoting Wordsworth (49). Jane starts to fall in love with Ashford, but as in any romantic tale, there are obstacles that prevent the couple from being together. When Ashford has to leave Lyme suddenly, he and Jane lose touch and Jane is heartbroken. Cassandra tells her to forget about Ashford, but she wants to believe in the possibility of true love: "„Not every one has a chance at true love, Jane." „But every body has the right to *seek* it, to *believe* that she can and should marry for love, at least once in her life, does she not? Must I sacrifice all my hopes?" " (78) When Jane is at a dinner party a couple of month later, she suddenly bumps into Mr. Ashford, who happens to be one of the guests as well. Romantic encounters follow: a picnic where they spend hours telling each other stories, their own bench in Kensington gardens, and so on. However, once more the blooming romance is obstructed when Jane hears Ashford is actually engaged to someone else. She is, yet again, alone and heartbroken, and tries to distract herself by going on a trip with her friend, Alethea Bigg-Wither. During this trip she visits Ashford" s estate, Pembroke Hall, where she unexpectedly bumps into him for a second time. It takes a while before everything has been cleared up, but eventually Ashford chooses Jane and proposes to her. Everything seems to be ready for a perfect ending, but James has to stay true to at least one detail of Austen" s life story, which is that she never married. Instead of following the family myth of the man at the seaside who unexpectedly died, James keeps Ashford alive and as an alternative makes Jane decide it is better for him to marry a rich woman instead of her, because he deserves a better future. Jane ends up alone, with only the memory of the perfect man, who inspired her to write her novels and, most specifically, who figured as the foundation for her famous character Mr. Darcy.

**Sally Smith O'Rourke – *The Man Who Loved Jane Austen* (2006)**

In her 2006 novel *The Man Who Loved Jane Austen*, Sally Smith O'Rourke turns one of the most frequently asked questions in regard to Austen's real life romances into a story: what if Mr. Darcy was actually a real person who was Austen's true love? Various people believe that a character like Darcy, who is the ideal man for women all over the world, must have been based on a man Austen knew during her lifetime. O'Rourke deals with these beliefs and speculations in an interesting way in her novel, which has two main storylines. The novel starts with Austen's own point of view: "She was thirty-four years old – an unremarkable spinster who lived an unremarkable life in a house provided by her devoted brother and shared with her elder sister and their aged mother. And, until fewer than twenty-four hours ago, she had never known a lover's caress" (2). Not much specific information is given by O'Rourke, before she switches to the modern-day storyline. Eliza Knight, an artist from New York, one day buys an old vanity table at an antique warehouse, having no idea to whom the table used to belong. As soon as she gets home, she finds two letters tucked behind the mirror: one sealed, the other one dated May 1810 and addressed to "Dearest Jane" from "F. Darcy." Eliza immediately thinks of Jane Austen and her most famous character, Fitzwilliam Darcy, but cannot believe the letters are real: "The relationship suggested by the enigmatic address on the letter was flatly impossible. Darcy was, after all, a fictitious character, wasn't he?" After scientific testing by a Jane Austen scholar, the sealed letter appears to have been written by Jane herself and Eliza's world is turned upside down. However, instead of handing over the letters to scholars, Eliza is drawn to Virginia, where a man named Fitzwilliam Darcy lives, at his estate Pemberly Farms, who will do everything to have these letters in his possession before they go to auction. The letters still leave Eliza with unanswered questions: "If Darcy had been a real person, she wondered, were they in love, how did they meet, why didn't they marry?" (27). She has a feeling Fitzwilliam Darcy knows more about this, and eventually he decides to tell her his story. While riding his horse one morning in England, he fell off and when he woke up, he found himself in nineteenth-century England. He was brought to a house nearby, where two girls named Cassandra and Jane took care of him. He was specifically taken in by Jane: "Her best feature, he thought, was her large brown eyes, which sparkled in the light and seemed to contain infinite depths of intelligence and understanding" (127). It took some time for him to recover, and also to realise where he had ended up and with whom. While he tried to find out how to get back to his own time, he fell in love with Jane, who also developed feelings for this stranger.

Darcy confided in Jane and told her how he needed to go back to his own time, where she happens to be incredibly famous. After several kisses in the moonlight and attempts to go back, Darcy realised he had to do exactly the same thing he did to end up in the past, to travel back to the future. Jane helped him, realising there was no place for him in her world and no place for her in his world, and said to him: "I shall dream of a man who loved me once," she vowed in return, "if only for a moment. And in my dreams, dear Darcy, you shall be ever strong and kind and most exceedingly noble" (221). It is his visit that inspired Jane to re-write her tale *First Impressions*, in which Darcy plays the role of the romantic hero; the only memory of their short love story.



**Jill Pitkeathley – *Cassandra & Jane* (2004)**

In a letter written soon after Austen's death in 1817, Jane's sister Cassandra tries to explain how she is feeling: "I have lost a treasure, such a Sister, such a friend as never can have been surpassed, -- she was the sun of my life, the gilder of every pleasure, the soother of every sorrow, I had not a thought concealed from her, & it is as if I had lost a part of myself" (Le Faye 267). From remaining personal letters such as this one it becomes clear what a special and close relationship Jane and Cassandra Austen had with one another. They were sisters, but also each other's best friend and confidante.

In her novel *Cassandra and Jane*, Jill Pitkeathley tries to capture this special sisterly bond by filling in the missing gaps in Austen's life story by looking at it all from Cassandra's perspective, instead of Jane's. While this piece of biographical fiction is also a blend of facts and fiction, the book is certainly different from the novels already mentioned, because it looks at Austen from the viewpoint of the person who was closest to her and knew her best, namely Cassandra. It is also this special sister-to-sister relationship between Cassandra and Jane that plays a central role in this specific representation and that proves most important in Austen's life, according to Pitkeathley, more important than any man could have ever been.

The novel starts and ends with the same event: the burning of most of Austen's letters. Pitkeathley describes Cassandra as a 70-year-old woman, still living at Chawton cottage, who has kept all the letters her sister once wrote her safely hidden in Jane's own rosewood trunk. She fears that when she is not around anymore, family members will make sure every detail of every letter will be published, all for a profit. She remembers Jane's own words, which Pitkeathley mentions in her introduction: "No private correspondence could bear the eye of others" (xi), and as her responsibility to her sister, Cassandra only saves some letters and burns the rest. This event is the start of a trip down memory lane for Cassandra, as she takes the reader back to Jane's birth, childhood and older years. While Cassandra appears to be the docile, silent older sister who watched out for and took care of her younger siblings, Jane is portrayed as a witty free-thinking young woman, critical of the limitations of the society she lived in, searching for her own place in the world. Two roles which remind one of Austen's famous sister couple in *Sense and Sensibility*, Elinor and Marianne Dashwood.

In her late teens, Jane is becoming more and more interested in the opposite sex, as described by Cassandra: "Am I not becoming the most prodigious flirt?" she asked me one evening on the way home from Manydown House. "Did you see how so many competed for a place in the line with me? I had not one but two invitations to walk in the conservatory." I did not respond because I had noticed and had not been very pleased to overhear one of the older ladies who was chaperoning describe her as "*madly husband hunting*". (39)

**Veronica Bennett – *Cassandra's Sister* (2006)**

In *Cassandra's Sister*, which is seen as a young adult novel, Veronica Bennett tells the story of the nineteen-year-old Jane Austen, named Jenny by her family and friends, and her search for love. When taking a look at the short description of the novel on the cover of the book, it already becomes clear what the main theme of this work is, namely love:

As Jane Austen writes the novels that will become such classics as *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*, she despairs of ever finding a Mr Darcy of her own among the closed circle of her rural acquaintances. But, in the winter of 1796, the handsome Tom Lefroy enters Jane's quiet life. At a time when money conquers love, can the happy ending Jane wrote for her characters be hers in real life?

The young Jenny really admires her worldly cousin Eliza, who has just lost her French husband in the war. Eliza has everything: the right attitude, beautiful clothes, and men admiring her everywhere she goes. It is Eliza who gives Jenny ideas on how wonderful it would be to be admired by men everywhere she goes, how she should behave around men, but also the one who inspires Jenny to take up writing more seriously.

When Jenny and her family and friends are at a ball, she meets a young man named William Heathcote, whom she is immediately enchanted by: "Mr Heathcote was the most beautiful man Jenny had ever seen" (64), but while he promises her the last dance, it is her friend Elizabeth Bigg-Wither who eventually captures his eye and his heart. It is Jenny's first disappointment in love, and from this moment on she starts to wonder whether true love is really something she will ever find in life. However, her feelings change as soon as she meets a young man named Tom Lefroy at another ball: "When Tom Lefroy led her out onto the floor her heart felt as if something heavy were pressing it. She could not feel her legs at all. She executed the steps without knowing it, aware only of how naturally her hand fitted into her partner's" (119). In a letter to Cassandra, Jenny declares her love for Tom and how she hopes for a possible proposal, but once again, she is disappointed. It seems, however, that this particular displeasure scars Jenny for the rest of her life, because she cannot forget Tom Lefroy and her memories of him continue to haunt her and come back throughout the entire novel: "Jane, after two years without a word, had accepted that Tom Lefroy was lost to her. Was she indeed left behind, doomed to spinsterhood by association? Would she forever be one of the Misses Austen, invited out of politeness?" (177).

## V. CONCLUSION

When one does a search for the author „Jane Austen“ on the Internet these days, millions of search results and completely different websites pop up: from how to make your own Jane Austen Regency dress to Austen-inspired recipes to quizzes in which the results reveal what Austen heroine you are most like. While characters such as Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy continue to live on through the retellings of their love story and the various actors and actresses who take on these specific roles, the mastermind behind the stories, Jane Austen, has managed to build up an impressive afterlife as well: not just with her novels, but as her own person. While at

first her written work did the talking for her, there came a moment in time when people started to wonder who exactly the lady was who came up with these tales and, most specifically, what her own story looked like. The game of searching for old family documents, hidden journals and remnants of burned letters occupied the world; “an exercise akin to ransacking an author’s bureau drawers and drawing conclusions from piles of neatly folded handkerchiefs or worn gloves” (Shields 10). When it turned out that Austen’s life story would quite possibly never be completely known to the public, numerous authors and film makers saw it as a challenge to fill these gaps with their own imagination and conclusions. This resulted in a wave of fictional works not based on Austen’s classics, but on her own life and personality instead. All these different novels and films heavily influenced the cultural memory the world has of the author and person Jane Austen, and the result was numerous different representations, which have played a central role in the re-creation of Jane Austen’s cultural memory, which was the main focus of this particular research project.

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