

Austen and Woolf Revisited: Muddy Petticoats, Sally's Kiss,
and the Neoliberal Now

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The Hours, *Becoming Jane*, *Longbourn*, *Vanessa and Her Sister*

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ABSTRACT

This project examines the implications of mythologizing women writers, specifically Woolf and Austen, and transforming them into their own famous characters. Using various writings that theorize women's voices, sense of agency, and political autonomy in relationship with the public/private dichotomy, this project argues that women writers are often appropriated and fictionalized in this way because of a patriarchal cultural understanding that women are associated with the private, personal, and domestic spheres. More importantly, it argues that this increasingly frequent treatment aligns with and forwards a neoliberal political and cultural agenda. The politics of the last twenty or thirty years, in short, are shaping interpretations and adaptations of major works of the English canon, specifically *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Pride and Prejudice*. Particular examples of such adaptations include *The Hours*, *Vanessa and Her Sister*, *Becoming Jane*, and *Longbourn*. This project ultimately analyzes these and a select number of other texts in order to show that these contemporary treatments of two of the most famous female writers from the English canon reveal quite a bit about current attitudes within the United States about gender (in)equality, care work/dependency, and sexuality.

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Introduction Tocqueville's America Revisited

Using a particular interpretation of neoliberalism and the public and private spheres, over the course of this project I will examine contemporary treatments of Virginia Woolf and Jane Austen's work in popular culture in order to reveal that women writers are appropriated and fictionalized partly because of a patriarchal cultural understanding that associates women with the private, personal, and domestic. More importantly, I hope to prove that this increasingly frequent treatment aligns with and forwards a neoliberal political and cultural agenda. Within the last twenty years, Jane Austen and Virginia Woolf have become contemporary cultural icons in America—the result, I will argue, of the relationship between a variety of recent adaptations or spin-offs of their work and current attitudes about universal privatization and cultural libertarianism. They and their work are everywhere; movies and TV miniseries have been made about their lives or based on their novels (*Becoming Jane*, *The Hours*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, *The Jane Austen Book Club* etc.) and contemporary pop novelists have imagined these authors' lives in a number of biographies or works of fiction, have attempted to create sequels to their great novels, and have adapted the original plots of these novels to better appeal to modern-day interests or hot-button issues. Before looking at some of these particular pastiches, however, it is important to establish the relationship between the public/private spheres and neo-

liberalism and, in particular, to explore neoliberalism as a *cultural* (as opposed to merely economic) concept.

The dichotomy between the public and private spheres, in which the private sphere encompasses the home life or life of the family and the public sphere the political and cultural, has been the subject of many feminist critiques. This is largely because the public sphere has been historically—as is clear in our culture, our society, our laws, and even our language—construed as dominant or superior to the private sphere, because it is seemingly more relevant to citizens or humanity as a whole; as Mary P. Ryan argues in “Gender and Public Access: Women’s Politics in Nineteenth Century America,” “the word ‘public’ has long served as the placemaker for the political ideal of open, inclusive, and effective deliberation about matters of common and critical concern” (259). The public sphere, in other words, could be called the “citizen sphere”; it encompasses those lofty arenas of social and intellectual life called politics, business, and culture—such arenas, in short, that are the domain of the full, equal citizen, that are only accessible to those who have been given legal and cultural status as participants. So where (white, property-owning) men have had a long history of public interaction in which great legal, philosophical, and political decisions have been made, women, on the other hand, have been historically separated from public life. Linda K. Kerber, in “Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History,” points to Tocqueville’s observations of the American woman as being the foundation from which feminist theorists and scholars have taken their understanding of this divide between the public and private: “[Tocqueville] had urged that the ‘circle of domestic life’ be searched for the distinguishing characteristics of American women, and once we looked, the separation of spheres seemed everywhere underfoot, from crocheted pillows reading

Woman's Place Is in the Home to justifications for the exclusion of women from higher education, to arguments against birth control and abortion" (10). Kerber, in this interpretation of the 20th century feminist approach to the separate spheres, is calling attention to the reality that the various economic and social transformations that occurred throughout the 19th and 20th centuries did little to alter this divide between public and private, between men and women; seemingly outdated arguments supporting that women should stay "in the home" continue to appear in discussions about contemporary social and political issues.

Of course, it is important to recognize that the public sphere has acknowledged women throughout history; what is important is not that they were denied recognition but that they were (and often are) denied *participation*. Women have had a long and illustrious role in public policy, philosophy, and culture—just never with their consent, or using their own voices. Rather, they have been "symbols," scapegoats, and myths. Ryan points to an important aspect of this phenomenon: the public/private divide, and in particular popular and social understandings of what the "private" constitutes (the home, childbearing/rearing, etc.), is largely racialized and classed. The ideal woman in the public/private dichotomy is one that stays home, raises moral, patriotic, and God-fearing children, supports her husband in his career, and gives back to the community in various charitable ways—in short, the ideal woman is one with money and time, something that historically has been linked to the white, middle- to upper-classes. Thus the divide between the public and private does more than deny women participation in politics and culture, it also reinforces divides between class and race: the ideal, private woman is one that can afford it and the objectionable, public woman is one who, for legal or economic reasons, cannot.

Ryan argues that the public/private divide is not only connected to economic issues that are inscribed in class structure, but is actually embedded in large, economic systems like capitalism itself: “The historical transformation of the public [in the early- to mid- 20th century] did little to accommodate women, who were constrained just as tightly with mass welfare-state democracy. Their sex was the special target of consumer culture, yet they were poorly represented among those who wielded power in both the state and the capitalist sectors” (260). Implicit in this statement is a Marxist understanding of the separation of the public and private spheres; during the 20th century many feminist scholars began to apply “Friedrich Engel’s conceptualization of the dichotomy between public and private modes of life” to gender issues (Kerber 13). Kerber recalls Juliet Mitchell’s argument that “the contemporary family [...] can be seen as a triptych of sexual, reproductive, and socializatory functions (the woman’s world), embraced by production (the man’s world)—precisely a structure which in the final instance is determined by the economy” (14). In short, as both Kerber and Ryan have shown, the implications of this public/private dichotomy go beyond a simple divide between citizenship and domestic dependency and reveal a large, patriarchal power structure that not only intentionally relegates women to the private sphere and reserves the public for full, (white) male citizens, but that does so in order to *maintain power*. This dichotomy is a matter of concern because it relegates women to a sphere where they cannot speak to “matters of common and critical concern,” and because it reinforces hierarchical, patriarchal divides based on gender, race, and class.

Thus several contemporary feminist critiques, rather than focusing on what constitutes the public and private spheres, focus instead on the illegitimacy of a divide between the public and private at all. Iris Marion Young, for example, in *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, ar-

gues in favor of introducing the “private” into the political or judicial sphere, claiming, “the ideal of partiality generates a dichotomy between universal and particular, public and private, reason and passion. It is [...] an impossible ideal, because the particularities of context and affiliation cannot and should not be removed from moral reasoning” (97). Young’s argument points to the necessity of difference for true democracy; what constitutes the “impartiality” of the public sphere is, of course, determined not by everyone but by those in power—no person can be truly unbiased, and so, in this public/private hierarchy, the “unbiased” exerciser of power continually recreates the dominant power structure by “impartially” executing “justice.” Ryan, too, challenges a strict divide between the public and private, in part because such an understanding ignores “the women’s politics of the last century [...] which] warns against a spatial or conceptual closure that constrains the ideal of the public to a bounded sphere with a priori rules about appropriate behavior therein. Feminists and female citizens played for high stakes in a real world of politics and would find far more comfort in a plural and decentered concept of the public” (285). For Young and Ryan, then, a divide between the public and private is inherently problematic: the public is elevated above the private and, as both spheres are very clearly gendered, men are thus considered dominant over women.

Though a “plural or decentered” version of the historical private and public divide may be desirable, the current blend of these spheres has done little to promote gender equality and, if anything, has counteracted much of progress made by social and feminist activists in the 60s and 70s. This is because today’s public and private are shaped by a neoliberal economic and political framework, which, with its emphasis on privatization, market rationality, and cultural libertarianism, has masked public power within the “private” and evacuated all social collectivity or pu-

blic responsibility for social change or reproduction. Nancy Fraser, in her prologue to *Fortunes of Feminism*, notes the recent rise of neoliberalism and particularly traces its effects on feminism:

early second-wave feminists sought less to dismantle the welfare state than to transform it into a force that could help to overcome male domination [...] By the 1980s, however, history seemed to have bypassed that particular project. A decade of conservative rule in much of Western Europe and North America, capped by the fall of Communism in the East, miraculously breathed new life into free-market ideologies previously given up for dead. Rescued from the historical dustbin, “neoliberalism” authorized a sustained assault on the very idea of egalitarian redistribution. The effect, amplified by accelerating globalization, was to cast doubt on the legitimacy and viability of the use of public power to tame market forces. With social democracy on the defensive, efforts to broaden and deepen its promise naturally fell by the wayside. Feminist movements that had earlier taken the welfare state as their point of departure, seeking to extend its egalitarian ethos from class to gender, now found the ground cut out from under their feet. (3-4)

By increasing the power of market forces and revitalizing “free-market ideologies,” the culture and politics of the last thirty years have managed to minimize and delegitimize much of the progress that various “egalitarian redistribution” groups—the labor movement, feminists—made prior to the 1980s. The state no longer feels specifically responsible for the welfare or care of their citizens; in today’s culture, the citizens, as free and independent consumers, have the right and opportunity to maintain their own welfare. The private has thus been valorized over the public, posing difficulties to feminists not merely because it redirects the focus of the movement, but because universal privatization has already and will likely continue to negatively affect women’s daily lives and, to use Ryan’s words, their capacity to act in “the real world of politics.”

Of particular concern to feminists is how neoliberalism has affected political and cultural understandings of “care work,” and how these new attitudes have worked to create greater inequalities along gender, race, and class lines. Meg Luxton, in “Feminist Political Economy in Ca-

nada and the Politics of Social Reproduction,” explains the relationship between “care work” and social inequality:

Tracing the effects of neoliberalism on laboring populations internationally since the 1970s, feminist political economy has documented their disproportional impact on women, maintaining or even increasing women’s subordination. Neoliberal policies [...] assumed that women could intensify their subsistence and domestic labor to offset the cutbacks to social reproduction in both the labor market (with reduced prices for subsistence products, pay cuts, job losses, and the expansion of contingent work) and the state (with cuts to welfare payments, education and healthcare, and new or increased user fees). The more responsibility for social reproduction is imposed on private households, where it is accomplished through unpaid household labor or purchased, the more uneven are its standards and material practices, resulting in growing inequalities of gender, race, and class. (39)

Especially in a post-2008 economy, jobs are harder to come by, are more competitive, pay less, and offer less flexibility, etc. Simultaneously, assistance or public programs are becoming scarcer and less accessible, and so many women find themselves stuck in a precarious situation—they need to work in a culture and society that increasingly expects women to maintain the same kind of career trajectory as men and are dealing with a state and culture that denies them any assistance. There’s a message circulating today that women can do it all—be the CEO, be the soccer mom—but someone needs to be performing basic household labor, and very often it is hired (immigrant, minority, or lower class) help. This reality emphasizes some of the essential issues embedded in neoliberal ideology: who benefits from this kind of economic and political framework? Who is necessarily exploited or denied access to the benefits of this kind of structure? Somewhat disturbingly, the answers to these questions do not differ much from what they would have been when Tocqueville first located women in the “circle of domestic life”: people of privilege benefit—white or wealthy or male or educated *citizens* benefit—and those who fit outside these classifications, those who are immigrants or people of color or poor or female, often serve

as the foundation on which these people of privilege build their success. As Sedef Arat-Koc asserts in “Whose Social Reproduction? Transnational Motherhood and Challenges to Feminist Political Economy,” “in many liberal societies, middle-class women’s exercise of citizenship rights, their access to the public sphere as men’s equals, has been achieved only on the condition that their labor-market participation resembles that of men. ‘In order to participate like men women must have workers who will provide the same flexibility as wives, in particular working long hours and combining caring and domestic chores.’” Because care work must be a private, familial concern in today’s society, women who want to be high-flyers must act the part of the historically privileged male, must participate in a centuries-old tradition: they are having to hire “wives” in order to maintain their role in the public sphere, and in doing so they are only reaffirming the seeming dichotomy between private and public, only recreating a society that looks increasingly more like that Tocqueville observed in 19th century America.

It would be misleading, however, to imply that neoliberalism enforces a divide between the public and private spheres. Instead, as briefly mentioned above, contemporary culture and politics can be characterized as a blend of these spheres, though likely not the sort of blend that Ryan envisioned for female citizens who “played for high stakes in a real world of politics and would find far more comfort in a plural and decentered concept of the public.” In “Someone to Watch over You: Gender, Class, and Social Reproduction,” Susan Braedly uses the neoliberal reconfiguration of care work as evidence of this blended private and public:

The application of [...] various processes of management to interventions in unwaged care construct a private sphere that is considered to be self-maintaining, but is all the while maintained as ‘self-maintaining’ by strategies of management. It is as if a private sphere of social reproduction were suspended as a discrete bubble within the public sphere, increasingly penetrated by rationalities and techniques of management that have develo-

ped in the surrounding public sphere of production. This management constitutes social reproduction in particular ways and keeps it always under the gaze of the public sphere. (217-218)

Thus the private sphere, though celebrated in today's culture, is not-so-private; it is managed, watched, governed, permeated by outside, public interests, but this happens in such a way as to create the illusion that the private is, in fact, private and, more importantly, in such a way as to evade any real public responsibility for these "private" problems. The divide between public and private is therefore not nearly so rigid as using such dichotomous language might indicate.

Rather, the lines between these spaces or concepts are constantly being redrawn, blurred, or violated to suit those who have been historically associated with the public sphere—especially in regards to private life and public life. Partly because the private/public is perpetually reshaped or manipulated, long-standing structures like patriarchy, nationalism, racism, homophobia, etc. are maintained and in turn used to maintain power—the private receives no help from the public but is still managed or scrutinized, and thus women, homosexuals, immigrants, nonwhites, etc. (those who, for example, are fully responsible for care work within this social structure) are placed in the precarious position of attempting to straddle a line that is not quite a line (that is, the line between these public and private spaces).

Using this understanding of the public/private and neoliberalism, it becomes clear that Jane Austen and Virginia Woolf, as women writers, have been historically and culturally appropriated by neoliberal interests/politics (politics that are, as explored above, anti-feminist, despite their representation in the media) in many contemporary pastiches of their work; they have been

reformed to serve today's purposes, have been reshaped into icons of (homonormative¹) homosexuality or mental illness in the case of Woolf or feminism or romance in the case of both. The Woolf and Austen that emerge in the study of their lives and times or in close readings of their major works have been lost and are increasingly "found" by voices other than their own; they have been brought back to life in the form of their characters—characters that themselves have been repurposed to emphasize certain themes (present or not present in the original texts). Austen is not Austen but Elizabeth Bennet (and sometimes Emma or Fanny). She is not a social satirist or great Regency novelist but the inventor of the Rom-com or chick lit; she, according to our popular culture, is the intellectualized, the academic, the *respectable* version of Danielle Steele or Nicholas Sparks. Likewise Virginia Woolf has been transformed into a gay rights spokesperson, into the voice of early feminism; she is the transcendent Clarissa Dalloway or the insane Septimus, depending on the particular pastiche.

The implications of mythologizing women writers like Woolf and Austen and transforming them into their own famous characters are unsettling, particularly because many of these recent adaptations and pastiches of their writing create a politicized lens with which many readers now read Austen and Woolf's *original work*. The last twenty years of Western culture and policy, as I have briefly explored above, have been marked by a shift towards universal privatization and, consequently, away from the government-supported social engineering (for lack of a better term) that characterizes concepts and policies such as affirmative action and labor unions.

¹ Homonormativity, characterized by Gavin Brown in "Homonormativity: A Metropolitan Concept that Denigrates 'Ordinary' Gay Lives" as the "sexual politics of neoliberalism," defines a particular lifestyle. In this version of gay living, two people live together in a committed relationship and are usually white, upper-middle or upper class, urban, and highly educated—are, in short, the same as the popular version of heteronormative couples (with, perhaps, the exception of the urban location) (1066).

Arguably this tendency towards libertarianism has helped support certain socially liberal movements gain the traction they have—the gay rights movement comes to mind—but in many senses this pro-capitalist, fiscally conservative, anti-“dependency” trend has forced many economic and social movements which gained so much ground in the 60s and 70s to take several steps backwards (a recent article in *the Atlantic*, for instance, discussed the re-segregation of public schools in many parts of the country). Prominent among these movements or ideas is, of course, feminism; there’s this idea within popular culture that, as with racism, sexism is something of the past and therefore many government-sponsored programs or leftist ideologies are somehow outdated or—even more confusingly—themselves discriminatory. Gay rights, too, have been shaped by this neoliberal discourse—something I will explore in my discussions of *The Hours* and the role homonormativity plays in shaping characters like Clarissa Vaughn. In short, neoliberal politics permeates more than law making, and is shaping how a new generation views everything from the government to the fast food industry. More importantly (to me), the politics of the last twenty years are shaping interpretations and adaptations of major works of the English canon, specifically *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Pride and Prejudice*. It is for this reason, then, that I find it problematic that Austen and Woolf are being increasingly associated with their characters; whereas many male writers are generally associated with the public sphere, and are thus detached as individuals from their characters and plot (Dickens is not Scrooge, nor is he struggling with his value system during the holiday season, just as Faulkner is not Joe Christmas or Darl, nor is he struggling with his internal racism) and understood to be talking about *others*, women like Woolf and Austen are, in the minds of many viewers of *Becoming Jane* or *The Hours*, their characters—an interpretation that, on some level, reduces their genius and places them squarely in the home. Because we—

meaning contemporary culture—feel like we “know” these writers (because we know Dalloway and Bennet), we are able to control them, make them into representatives of particular issues, beliefs, or movements, because it seems clear that this is what Lizzy or Clarissa would do or believe.

My hope is that my research and conclusions reveal a literary and cultural tendency that, though not entirely specific to women, is at least representative of larger political and social attitudes towards women’s issues and feminism. This private/public dichotomy evident in the treatment of specific canonical English texts is problematic not only because it undermines the value of women’s creative work, but also because it reinforces stereotypes about the roles of men and women and lends these stereotypes a sort of historical/intellectual credibility. If the literary canon, as it is, is understood as an accurate depiction of literary history, and if Woolf and Austen’s creative work is understood as representative of themselves and not of the human experience, then it is easy for our culture and society to argue that women are rightfully associated with the private sphere; because of the authority the canon possesses it can operate as a sort of policing/legitimizing force in terms of gender.

This phenomenon of reductive contemporary representations of Austen and Woolf is most obviously seen in the treatment of their lives in the film *Becoming Jane* and the novel *The Hours*, though other texts and films such as *Longbourn*, *Vanessa and Her Sister*, and the films *The Hours* and the 2005 *Pride and Prejudice* also provide strong examples. Even with Cunningham’s ineffective attempts to separate his character-Woolf from Clarissa Vaughan or the original Dalloway, it is clear that *The Hours* is a novel that, in the end, is about Clarissa Dalloway; it attempts, in appropriating Dalloway and fitting her to contemporary political and social issues (gay rights,

HIV/AIDS) to use the thoughts and themes associated with her character in order create a lens with which contemporary readers can view popular culture and late-90s and early millennium culture in the United States, and, of course, Woolf's original text. That this is a novel about Clarissa—and, by extension, about a Woolf that is a restructured Clarissa, that is framed or defined by her—is made clear by examining aspects of the novel ranging from the fairly surface recognition that the majority of the novel is dedicated to the “Mrs. Dalloway” narrative sections to the less-obvious ways in which the story of Clarissa shapes the story of characters separated from her by both time and place. For instance, both Laura Brown's and Virginia Woolf's sections are driven by arguably more urgent plotlines than Clarissa's and yet despite this, it is Clarissa Vaughan's (Dalloway's) plot that controls the pace and space of the novel. It is her contemplative, meandering, internal action—framed within such mundane actions as buying flowers, preparing food, visiting a friend—that is emphasized and that infiltrates the other narrations. Dalloway is the keeper of the action, is the character/text that informs the more time-sensitive decisions and thoughts of everyone else.

It seems Cunningham intended this relationship between character-Woolf and Mrs. Dalloway to indicate some relationship between the plot of *Mrs. Dalloway* and Virginia Woolf's personal experiences: to indicate, in other words, that Woolf was writing about herself—because, as a prisoner and hero of the private sphere, she cannot possibly be writing about the human experience, about someone other than her. Cunningham's character-Woolf decides that Clarissa Dalloway will be good with servants unlike herself, that her character will live in London because she herself is cut off from society in the suburb of Richmond, that someone in the novel—initially Clarissa, later Septimus—will commit suicide because she herself has suicidal thoughts. And yet

this relationship as it is presented in *The Hours* feels contrived. Undoubtedly *Mrs. Dalloway* is in part fueled by Woolf's own experience, but as it is presented Cunningham's novel it seems more likely that the character-Woolf sections are shaped to fit within *Mrs. Dalloway's* (and Clarissa Vaughan's) framework, and not the other way around.

But it is not only through character and plot that Cunningham fictionalizes and mythologizes Virginia Woolf; particular themes from *Mrs. Dalloway* are either ignored or highlighted in *The Hours* order to create a contemporized critique of certain political or social structures in the United States (as opposed to one that reflects more closely the original text and therefore issues contemporary with post-WWI England). This is not an unusual move for a postmodern writer like Cunningham to make; as Mary Joe Hughes argues in "Michael Cunningham's *The Hours* and Postmodern Artistic Re-Presentation," "much has been written about giving voice to the silences within the tradition, about opening it up to alternative perspectives [...] the attempt to highlight the perspective of 'other' underscores the postmodern preoccupation with difference. But"—and this is the critical point—"these gestures toward pluralism, however desirable and effective, reduce the postmodern aesthetic to a largely political or ethical purpose" (Hughes 350). There is still significant political "reduction" evident in *The Hours*, which, by ignoring themes evident in *Mrs. Dalloway* such as trauma related to shell-shock (despite the opportunity, with Laura Brown's character, to explore the aftermath of World War II and its effects on soldiers like her husband) and class issues related to the gradual collapse of the old aristocracy, is able to instead emphasize more minor themes from the original text, such as homosexuality. These themes just so happen to align with neoliberal politics—the homosexual relationship between Clarissa Vaughn and Sally Seton is perfectly homonormative, Richard's deviant (non-monogamous, non-

bourgeoisie) homosexuality is aptly punished by his illness, Laura Brown's dislike and distrust of her close-knit, suburban community appropriately elevates the private and familial, etc.

Priya Parmar's forthcoming novel *Vanessa and Her Sister* is equally framed by neoliberalism and also features a fictionalized Woolf, though her model is a much more aggressive, manipulative, unlikeable one. What makes Parmar's novel stand out within a neoliberal context is how she treats the issue of care work; Vanessa Bell, née Stephens, struggles throughout the story with guilt and confusion about how she treats her sister's recurring mental illness. She, like many women today, feels external pressure to take care of Virginia *privately*, internally, to keep the problem within the family—even as she feels inadequate and, at times, unwilling, to take charge of her unruly and often selfish sister. In parts, it feels as though Parmar is intentionally and vehemently dismantling the sort of popular romanticized view of Virginia Woolf that appears in *The Hours*, as though she, whether intentionally or not, is subverting the larger, political narrative that has shaped Woolf and is instead demanding that the reader return to Woolf's source texts without using the lens provided by Cunningham, Nicole Kidman, or Meryl Streep, demanding that readers approach *Mrs. Dalloway* without inserting Woolf herself—volatile as she is—into Clarissa.

Julian Jarrold's 2007 film *Becoming Jane*, like *The Hours* and *Vanessa and Her Sister*, also transforms author into character, with the difference being that this film, as opposed to the *The Hours*, is entirely biography; characters and plot from Austen are not used explicitly in the story in the same way that Cunningham uses *Mrs. Dalloway*. And yet, in some ways, *Becoming Jane* is an even more obvious instance of a female writer being colonized by her own characters. This is because the plot and characterization in *Becoming Jane* mirrors that of Austen's *Pride*

and Prejudice in such a way that at times it is unclear if a particular scene is meant to be a re-enactment of Austen's novel or if it is a representation of her actual life. *Becoming Jane* opens in much the same way that *Pride and Prejudice* does: with the arrival of an unknown, distant male relation of a local family and that young man's initial interaction with a close-knit, genteel family also living in the area. In both stories, the heroine and hero dislike each other from the start, and only gradually—through battles of wits and a series of misunderstandings, etc.—fall in love. Truly the biggest difference between *Pride and Prejudice* and *Becoming Jane* is that *Pride and Prejudice* ends happily; Bennet and Darcy marry, whereas Austen decides she cannot run away with and marry Lefroy. Thus *Becoming Jane* leaves audiences with the distinct impression that Austen, because she could not have her own happy ending, spends the rest of her life writing stories in which her characters do. Like Cunningham's *The Hours*, then, *Becoming Jane* seems to argue that the lines between the author's life and the lives of her characters are completely blurred; just as *Mrs. Dalloway* seemed to write Virginia Woolf's character, so does *Pride and Prejudice* seem to write the 2007 Jane Austen.

The feeling that *Becoming Jane* is just a "biographical" re-working of the story of *Pride and Prejudice* is only amplified when comparing *Becoming Jane* to Joe Wright's 2005 film *Pride and Prejudice*, which stars Keira Knightley as Lizzie Bennet. Many of the changes from novel to film that can be seen in *Becoming Jane* stem directly from the changes made in the 2005 *Pride and Prejudice*. The 2005 Lizzie Bennet, unlike any before her, is muddy—she walks out in the dew and mud, she ponders her sadness about missing her sister while sitting on a swing in her home's farmyard, she screams at Darcy in the rain. She is earthy, independent, even masculine, and thus she is the direct influence on Anne Hathaway's sassy Jane Austen. It is important to note

here that both Knightley and Hathaway lend a certain star-power to their roles; both, because of their past roles (Knightley as the masculine-yet-sexualized lover of Orlando Bloom in *Pirates of the Caribbean* and Hathaway as the innocent-yet-charming late bloomer in *The Princess Diaries*), not only attracted younger, less patient audiences to films that, in terms of genre and history, could have been significantly stuffer, but also influenced that audience's understanding of Lizzie Bennet and Jane Austen themselves. Given that *Becoming Jane* was released only two years after Wright's *Pride and Prejudice*, which was extremely successful commercially and, for the most part, critically, it seems quite clear that the writers and actors in the film had the 2005 version of *Pride and Prejudice* in mind—*Becoming Jane* seems to be an attempt to remake *Pride and Prejudice*, to capitalize on its success and the subsequent interest many young people had about Austen and her works. And it certainly seems to be capitalize on the general feeling that Austen, as the writer of Lizzie Bennet, must have *been* Lizzie Bennet; the film, by emphasizing aspects of Austen's private, familial self, is able to make use of both Hathaway and Knightley's acting histories and success in order to create a new, marketable, hybrid Lizzie-Jane.

But it is not only because of trendy actresses like Knightley and Hathaway that these films feel contemporary—their backdrop and plot, too, feel appropriate to the early millennium. As explored above, neoliberalism has largely determined how we as a culture think of the home and family today; as Braedly succinctly explains, “neo-liberal ideology assumes that care work is a family responsibility, and this notion is deeply and increasingly embedded in public policy discourse and practice. This ‘family responsibility paradigm’ (Beauvais and Jenson 2001) reflects an individualization and familiarization of social reproduction in which the responsibility to ensure well-being through the life course is placed in the private sphere of home and family and is

excised from the sphere of state responsibility” (216). Home, in today’s popular thinking, is a site of enormous responsibility that depends on the action of a care-worker (in popular thinking almost always a woman, and usually in practice too) in order to sustain a healthy, productive life. Interestingly, this view of the home mirrors that of the Regency era in more than a few ways; as Gary Kelley, in “Jane Austen, Romantic Feminism, and Civil Society” explains, women, during Austen’s era, were even more “restricted to domesticity” than seems logical given that their time was post-Revolutionary and post-Enlightenment, but in some ways, this lent women a certain kind of power:

Women were called to heroic defense of the ‘national’ culture, identity, and destiny within and from the ideological and cultural bastion of the home [...] woman [...] was made the presiding genius of a domain outside a public sphere now characterized as antidomestic, of a domain figured as the source and inspiration for reform of extradomestic civil society and the public and political sphere. (22)

The home, in Austen’s era, had the power to reproduce the political. So too do contemporary homes in the United States, as Inderpal Grewal explores in her article “‘Security Moms’ in the Early Twenty-First Century United States: The Gender of Security in Neoliberalism.” According to Grewal, “In the public realm of defense, the state remains powerful and uses female subjects within the private sphere, such as the mother, to produce soldiers and patriots, as well as to become both subject and agent of security through new surveillance technologies that emphasize the governmentality of security” (28). Women, then, both historically and now, have often served as private vehicles for imperial goals. As mothers and caregivers, women have the capacity to influence future citizen-subjects. This particular blend of public and private can be found throughout Austen’s fictional world, in which families take responsibility for themselves and keep their issues private, and yet are still subject to outside, public criticism or shame if they

“fail” to do so, if they fail to uphold British ideals or values. Perhaps this version of the family and home as presented Austen’s novels explains their current popularity; they treat subjects like honor, marriage, love, propriety, etc. using the drawing room as the backdrop. They talk about important ideas that need to be reproduced in order to, as Braedly would argue, “ensure well-being through the life course” (and to ensure that the current empire/culture/society is reproduced), and they do so in the setting that they should—the home. They are novels of family name and internal, domestic successes; as such they are perfect for a culture that demands family responsibility—or so they can be easily construed.

Jo Baker’s recent novel *Longbourn* also fits neatly within contemporary neoliberal contexts. *Longbourn* is basically the *Downton Abbey* of Austen’s fiction; Baker, unlike many Austen fan writers before her, does not choose to appropriate the main characters from *Pride and Prejudice*, but instead unravels the story of the servants who work in the Bennets’ home. In fairness to Baker, she began her novel before the immense success of BBC’s *Downton Abbey*, but it seems significant that both the television show and her novel are experiencing the popularity that they are. Again, neoliberal economic and political policy has created stronger class and gender lines while claiming to open the door to greater freedoms, opportunities, and equalities, and so our cultural fascination with *Longborne*, with up close and personal accounts of the lower, domestic working class—which we as readers either identify with or, as is perhaps more likely, are curious about—or else with books or films that feature upper class women conducting their lives with little real thought about how their meals get prepared or their homes clean, seems to make sense. Austen and Baker, in this sense, serve as both a lens with which to examine both a distant historical time and our present day.

Over the course of this project, I hope to show, by analyzing these recent texts and films, that popular culture often colonizes, appropriates, and reshapes certain women authors to fit within a contemporary political and social framework. More specifically, I intend to reveal how these reshapings in turn color how many modern readers approach these pastiches' source canonical texts. The result of my examination will uncover an under-acknowledged instance of cultural patriarchy capitalizing upon and controlling the voices and texts of women writers and the potential consequences that this control could have for the future of these women's works.

Chapter One

Mrs. Dalloway's Unexpectedly Riotous Future

Tory Young, in her book *Michael Cunningham's The Hours*, claims “the fact that Cunningham kills off both his author characters (one doesn’t even survive the prologue) [is] playfully in line with the New Critics’ rejection of ‘authorial intention,’ ‘the death of the author’ as Roland Barthes so compellingly summarized it” (Young 34). According to Young, by beginning *The Hours*, a pastiche of Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*, with Virginia Woolf’s real-life suicide, Cunningham immediately declares the post-modern birth and triumph of the reader. In some senses, this is true. Woolf *is* stripped of her author function, but Woolf the person or historical figure-writer does not disappear. She is instead appropriated; she is characterized and fictionalized, and therefore her name and her words become malleable. Rather than remain the contextualized, historical figure that cannot, for obvious reasons, speak on her own behalf, Woolf is reworked within *The Hours* into her characters (Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus) or else a popular culture character—and perhaps caricatured—Woolf.

As a result of these transformations, Woolf and her work are made into frameworks which illuminate and consequently represent the pervasiveness of neoliberal ideology in contemporary politics and culture. *The Hours*, like many contemporary pastiches of classic or well-known texts or authors, commodifies the source text’s author and transforms her into a sort of celebrity/legend. It is worth noting that literature, film, and other related entertainment forms are industries, and thus are in the business of commodification, especially when it comes to characters. It is not so much that *The Hours* participates in commodification, then, but that it commodi-

fies a person and not just a character; Woolf's name is taken at the expense Woolf herself. *The Hours* does more than commodify Virginia Woolf; it capitalizes on her. Cunningham's novel uses Woolf's "pop" history (the genius who killed herself, the stream-of-consciousness writer who heard voices) and those admittedly numerous references to homosexuality and women's struggles within Woolf's work in order to lend a sort of elite, intellectualized, historically authoritative voice to contemporary concerns. More importantly, his story does so in a way that not only associates her writing and life with issues more related to late 20th, early 21st century United States as opposed to early 20th century England, but that also reveals the somewhat troubling ideological narrative that shapes and guides these current issues. Woolf the author, then, is not so much killed or removed in Cunningham's novel as she is colonized—she is stripped of her independence and controlled by outside, political forces.

Before highlighting those ways in which Michael Cunningham's *The Hours* appropriates and transforms Virginia Woolf, it is necessary to establish how his novel relates to Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. The novels largely share the same plot. Although *The Hours* is narrated by three historically distinct characters—Laura Brown, a housewife in the suburbs of 1949 L.A.; Clarissa Vaughan, an editor with a flexible schedule living in New York City during the end of the twentieth century; and Virginia Woolf herself, narrating mostly from Hogarth House in Richmond, where she lived in 1923—the action for each character takes place over the course of a single day, as it does within *Mrs. Dalloway*. The major events of the day captured in Woolf's novel play out most obviously in Clarissa Vaughan's section; her actions mirror almost exactly the actions of Mrs. Dalloway herself. She begins the day by buying flowers for a party, she reflects often upon an experience at her friend's lake house which is not unlike Mrs. Dalloway's experience at

Bourton, she is not invited to a luncheon and feels, like Mrs. Dalloway after a similar rejection, “trivial, endlessly trivial,” and her party is, in the end, altered by suicide (Cunningham 94). There are some shifts in characterization; Clarissa Vaughan is married to a woman named Sally (after Sally Seton, the minor love interest of Clarissa Dalloway in Woolf’s novel) and not to Richard who, in *The Hours*, is her one-time lover whose kiss lives on in her memory not as “the beginning of happiness” but the *moment* of happiness. Vaughan’s thought “the entire experience lay in a kiss and a walk, the anticipation of dinner and a book” parallels almost exactly with Clarissa Dalloway’s feelings about her kiss with Sally Seton (Cunningham 98). Many major plot points are not isolated in Clarissa Vaughan’s sections but appear in the sections narrated by Laura Brown and Virginia Woolf as well. Moreover, the style of the narration and some of the themes present in *The Hours* mimic that of *Mrs. Dalloway*; most of what happens is communicated via the internal, stream-of-consciousness thoughts of the characters and such issues like suicide, homosexuality, trauma, and femininity appear throughout the novel.

Hermione Lee, biographer of Woolf, praises Cunningham’s novel as “a bold invention, in which Woolf’s presence and writing haunts all three of the intertwined stories.” Yet she still cannot help but feel reservations about attempting to “pursue a real person into fiction’s territory of made-up thoughts and speeches... [Lee finds it] hard to accept a Virginia Woolf who thinks to herself: ‘She would like to write all day... but she worries that if she pushes beyond her limits she will taint the whole enterprise’; or who says to her husband: ‘If you send Nelly in to interrupt me I won’t be responsible for my actions’” (Lee). This apprehension cuts directly to the heart of the issue; once words are put into Virginia Woolf’s mouth, once ideas are placed in her thoughts, she ceases to be the author of the source text, the writer of letters and essays and novels, and be-

comes instead a character and therefore is vulnerable to potentially invasive political and social forces.

Yet fictionalizing—even mythologizing—a famous writer is not inherently problematic. Telling stories about historical figures is one of the best ways to keep history alive, and Woolf and the rest of the Bloomsbury group certainly deserve attention from contemporary authors and filmmakers, if not only because of their significant contribution to literature and art than because of their unconventional lifestyles, which highlight perfectly the shifts in cultural attitudes during the early 20th century. But recent adaptations of Woolf’s work and life do not just draw attention to her life and times; rather, they blend her fact (the details of her life, the voice found in her letters and diaries) with her own fiction. Cunningham, in particular, weaves together a sort of hybrid Woolf-Dalloway, where Woolf’s life informs and is largely interchangeable with the character she creates in *Mrs. Dalloway*. This overlap between what we know of Woolf herself and what we know of her character Clarissa is most obvious when comparing Clarissa Vaughan’s plot in *The Hours* to the story lines of Laura Brown and Virginia Woolf and to the plot of *Mrs. Dalloway* as a whole. In the opening chapter of this project, I briefly discuss the degree to which Clarissa’s story controls the pace and action of Cunningham’s novel. For instance, though the book begins with a very short prologue (five and a half pages) featuring Woolf at the end of her life, Clarissa’s chapter is when the novel truly begins. This is partly because hers is the first time readers are introduced to an original character and also because this chapter is set during the day in which the rest of her story will unfold. The chapter is written in third person limited (in the sense that only one character thinks/speaks at a time, though like Woolf, Cunningham jumps from psyche

to psyche during Clarissa's—and only Clarissa's—sections) and begins with a sentiment very familiar to readers of Woolf:

There are still flowers to buy. [...] It is New York City. It is the end of the twentieth century. The vestibule door opens onto a June morning so fine and scrubbed Clarissa pauses at the threshold as she would at the edge of a pool, watching the turquoise water lapping at the tiles, the liquid nets of sun wavering in the blue depths. As if standing at the edge of a pool she delays for a moment the plunge, the quick membrane of chill, the plain shock of immersion. (9)

Cunningham's introduction of Clarissa Vaughan—in a chapter labeled, as all her chapters are, "Mrs. Dalloway"—is a beautiful, Americanized, updated riff on the beginning of Woolf's novel ("Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself. [...] What a lark! What a plunge! [...] How fresh, how calm, stiller than this of course, the air was in the early morning; like the flap of a wave; the kiss of a wave; chill and sharp...") and so, ignoring the brief and unrelated prologue, *The Hours* begins with her, begins, as only seems natural to the reader, with a city, a June morning, a mission to buy flowers (3). And it is not only the first few pages of Vaughan's story that closely follow that of Woolf's original character; as discussed above, Cunningham clearly intended to have Vaughan serve as the modern, New Yorker Dalloway—who also buys flowers, hosts a party, meets old friends, questions her role as a wife and mother.

Clarissa takes an early lead, then, as contender for the main protagonist of the novel; though there are three women characters, all distinct in terms of their age, stage of life, location, and time period, and though their stories are logically interspersed and woven together, it seems clear that it is *her* story which dictates the shape and flow of the others' stories, her story which essentially constructs the whole novel. Because Woolf and Brown are not truly author and reader (respectively) only, however they might be presented: they, too, interact with flowers, organize

small parties, muse about the past and love and death. Their stories are echoes of Dalloway's, and of the alpha-echo Vaughan, who mirrors the original Dalloway so closely. Why else would something as specific as an unexpected kiss that is at once taboo and life-affirming appear in all three narrative sections of *The Hours*, beyond that such a kiss plays a significant role in the plot and characterization within *Mrs. Dalloway*, when Sally Seton kisses Clarissa? Why else would the notion of motherhood be a source of discontent, confusion, and helplessness for both Laura Brown and character-Woolf if not because, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Dalloway herself is unsure how to handle her academically minded and headstrong daughter Elizabeth? Is it likely, really, that Woolf was contemplating motherhood in relationship to herself—as Cunningham imagines in *The Hours* when Vanessa's children visit and host a funeral for a dead bird found in her garden—when she wrote *Mrs. Dalloway* (considering she was childless)? Is it not more likely that she *created* Dalloway's concerns regarding motherhood, that she imagined a kiss between two young women half in love but destined to marry ““suitable” men”?

This is not to say that these ideas—womanhood and motherhood as a struggle, sexuality as fluid and love between women as ignored or repressed—have no tie to Virginia Woolf's own experience, because they very clearly do. Woolf's sister, Vanessa, had several children with whom Virginia was close. Many of Woolf's letters to Julian Bell (Clive and Vanessa Bell's oldest son) concern his writing and his experience at school, and she and Quentin (the Bells' youngest son) cowrote several satiric plays together and generally seemed to enjoy a fun relationship. Woolf seems to have been committed to being an engaged, approachable aunt, and as such she surely had at least some insight and personal experience with the difficulties and stresses of loving and raising a child. In terms of female sexuality, *Mrs. Dalloway* was written the year Woolf

met Vita Sackville-West who later became her lover. More significantly, Woolf mused on the merits of Sapphism and on the attractiveness of women in many letters and diary entries written throughout her life and particularly during the period that she was writing *Dalloway*, but it is crucial to note that her attitudes towards and experiences with homosexuality do not necessarily indicate that she intended audiences to believe that her created character Clarissa wanted to spend her life with Sally (if such a thing were possible). Woolf clearly states that she prefers the company—maybe socially *and* sexually—of women. In a 1925 letter to Jacques Raverat she describes a boring party overflowing with men, and states “much preferring my own sex, as I do, or at any rate, finding the monotony of young mens’ conversation considerable, and resenting the eternal pressure which they put, if you’re a woman, on one string, find the disproportion excessive, and intend to cultivate women’s society entirely in future” (164). Yet she also explicitly states that she tends to think of “loving one’s own sex” rather silly—or, if not that, then as something that was secondary or peripheral to marriage; in a slightly earlier letter to Raverat, she writes

Have you any views on loving one’s own sex? All the young men are so inclined, and I can’t help finding it mildly foolish; though I have no particular reason [...] Then the ladies, either in self protection, or imitation or genuinely, are given to their sex too. My aristocrat (oh, but I have now 2 or 3, whom I’ll tell you about—they interest me) is violently Sapphic, and contracted such a passion for a woman cousin, that they fled to the Tyrol, or some mountainous retreat together, to be followed in an aeroplane by a brace of husbands [...] I can’t take either of these aberrations seriously. To tell you a secret, I want to incite my lady to elope with me next. Then I’ll drop down on you and tell you all about it. (156)

Here, Woolf openly admits to the pervasiveness of homosexuality within her social circle and to her own relationship with Sackville-West (and, perhaps, with other women from her past or

present), and yet she does not seem to think these occurrences or relationships merit much gravity.

This is not to say that she thought all of these men were guilty of following a particular trend, or that her own feelings towards Sackville-West were passing or flighty, but rather that she seemed to feel that at least some of the members of her set were guilty of taking themselves and, perhaps, their sexuality too seriously. Certainly her passing comment that she will “incite my lady to elope with me next” seems more in jest than in seriousness, and also feels rooted more in a feeling of adventurousness, rebelliousness, and fun than in any sort of fundamental sense of injustice or marital dissatisfaction. Indeed, in one letter to Sackville-West herself, Woolf states “I am very sorry for you—really—how I should hate Leonard to be in Persia! But then, in all London, you and I alone like being married” (221). Leonard, as he appears in her letters and diary entries, seems like a kind of rock or foundation for Woolf, is her home, and someone like Sackville-West an exciting and passionate diversion.

In no way am I trying to argue that Woolf believed homosexuality in general to be something silly or diverting or deviant, but rather I am trying to show that in her *own* life, she was quite satisfied in her marriage and had license to pursue—or not pursue—homoerotic relationships. She did not seem to feel trapped by her marriage in the sense that Laura Brown does in *The Hours*. In short, given that some of these letters were written during the months when Woolf was completing *Mrs. Dalloway*, it is not clear that the characters Clarissa and Sally (who are often interpreted as representing a sexuality that is denied, ignored, or repressed) were intended to mirror Woolf’s own life and, if they do in some small way, it still seems unlikely that their relationship represents a sort of “what could have been”. Rather their shared kiss, which Clarissa

remembers for the rest of her life, seems like a fairly innocent celebration of excitement and sexual awakening, of youthful joy. After all, as Woolf writes to her friend Philip Morrell, “I meant Richard Dalloway to be liked” (195). Briefly: Cunningham’s decision to appropriate the kiss scene from *Mrs. Dalloway* and use it as a major plot point in all three of his main characters’ story lines seems to ignore the context and significance of the original moment. By the time viewers of the film adaptation of *The Hours* watch Nicole Kidman desperately kiss the woman playing Vanessa Bell or Julianne Moore clutch her neighbor to her, the joy of that moment—the youthfulness, the ecstasy, the innocence of Clarissa and a girl named Sally—is lost and replaced by something politically and socially charged.

These repetitive plot points in *The Hours* not only mimic and emphasize aspects of *Mrs. Dalloway*, but also establish broad themes for the novel and film, sometimes instead of the themes that were more prevalent in Woolf’s text. This colors how contemporary readers and viewers read Virginia Woolf herself and, perhaps more concerning, *Mrs. Dalloway* itself. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, tensions related to shell shock or PTSD are a significant theme, as is the role of and changes in the upper classes in a post-World War I England. In Cunningham’s novel, though, these themes are virtually ignored; even though Laura Brown’s and her neighbor Kitty’s husbands fought in World War II, the effect of battle on their psyches is almost never acknowledged, and the few times the war is mentioned are more related to its effect on Laura than on her husband Dan. The War seems to serve only as an excuse or explanation for why Laura married Dan and for why she is unhappy in that marriage now:

[Dan] seemed to have returned [from the war], still sweet-tempered, still smelling like himself, from the realm of the dead [...] and when he came back to California he was received as something more than an ordinary war hero. He could [...] have had anyone

[...] but through some obscure and possibly perverse genius had kissed, courted, and proposed to his best friend's older sister [...] What could she say but yes? How could she deny a handsome, good-hearted boy, practically a member of the family, who had come back from the dead? (40).

Dan returns happy and whole and blends in seamlessly with the America he left behind for war; he marries the girl he loves, establishes a life with a house and child and steady job. How different is his post-war life from that of former soldier in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Septimus—Septimus, who, in his grief following the death of Evans, disappears to an Italian village and marries Rezia because, it seems, he does not know what else to do. Septimus who, after his return to an England which, when he left for France to defend it, “consisted [in his mind] almost entirely of Shakespeare's plays and Miss Isabel Pole in a green dress walking in a square,” cannot blend seamlessly, cannot return to his job and establish a perfect post-war life, cannot have children or a marriage in which he is comfortable (130). Septimus, in *Mrs. Dalloway*, is not merely representative of an unhappy marriage as Dan is in *The Hours*, is not only a symbol of some kind of repressive or stifled culture, but rather is, as Woolf says in her own letter to Gerald Brenan in 1925, “the most essential part of Mrs. D [...] this I certainly did mean—that Septimus and Mrs. Dalloway should be entirely dependent upon each other—if as you say he ‘has no function in the book’ then of course it is a failure” (189).

Cunningham does, for the most part, maintain the dependency between Septimus and Mrs. Dalloway—Richard, in the Clarissa Vaughan sections, is absolutely critical for the development of the novel and her character. Yet Richard in *The Hours* is a sort of blend of Septimus and Peter Walsh, and his trauma and genius is not rooted in war, but instead in his difficult childhood (his mother—Laura Brown—abandoned her family) and his battle with AIDS. PTSD and

war-related trauma is, in short, moved to the background of Cunningham's story, as is anything to do with class divides or pressures. The only real mention of class appears in Vaughan and Woolf's sections of the novel; Vaughan is temporarily distracted by the appearance of celebrities on a street in New York and later considers how lucky she and Sally are to have such a beautiful home in the Upper East Side of Manhattan, and Woolf struggles at various points with how best to deal with servants. Cunningham makes these choices, it seems, so as to better emphasize a minor theme present in *Mrs. Dalloway*—that is, homosexuality and sexuality in general.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa Dalloway reminisces about her time at living at Bourton when she was a young woman. Sally Seton, a friend of her family's around her age, stayed with them at Bourton frequently. Sally was, according to Clarissa, an eccentric, tomboyish girl who was outspoken, passionate, and independent. Clarissa falls a little in love with her and recalls—forty years later, as she prepares for her party—"the most exquisite moment of her whole life" in which Sally, while walking with Clarissa along the terrace, "stopped; picked a flower; kissed her on the lips [...] and she felt that she had been given a present, wrapped up, and told to keep it, not to look at it—a diamond, something infinitely precious" (Woolf 52-53). This is the essential moment: the seed from which much of *The Hours* grows. In Cunningham's novel, Clarissa Vaughan is married to a Sally (she is a bisexual in a lesbian relationship) and her one-time lover, the one with whom the "most exquisite moment of her whole life" occurs, is Richard. Moreover, as mentioned above, the moment between Sally and Clarissa (of *Mrs. Dalloway*) is reenacted in both Laura Brown and Virginia Woolf's sections. In Laura Brown's section, she is comforting a female friend whose struggle with having children (another call-back to the theme of motherhood as connected to femininity; as related to pain) may be explained by a cancer diagnosis

when, while embracing her, “Kitty lifts her face, and their lips touch. They both know what they are doing. They rest their mouths, each on the other [...] Laura releases Kitty [...] it is Kitty whose terrors have briefly propelled her, caused her to act strangely and desperately. Laura is the dark-eyed predator [...] Laura and Kitty agree, silently, that this is true” (Cunningham 110). In character-Woolf’s section, too, a kiss between women constitutes a major moment of the Woolf narrative. As her sister, Vanessa, prepares to leave after a visit, “although it is not at all their custom, Virginia leans forward and kisses Vanessa on the mouth. It is an innocent kiss, innocent enough, but just now, in this kitchen, behind Nelly’s back, it feels like the most delicious and forbidden of pleasures” (Cunningham 154).

So homosexuality—however innocently expressed—plays a significant role in all three narrative sections. In two of the three moments the kisses are illicit, are between two women, are, fairly obviously, moments of escape, of desperation for truth or rightness, and the third kiss is one between a bisexual woman and gay man who have already “escaped,” already found their sense of rightness. And yet this last is not entirely true. If Clarissa Vaughan were truly free, if Richard had truly found rightness in expressing, publicly, his sexuality, then why, for both of them, would this kiss they shared thirty years ago still haunting Clarissa’s thoughts, still on Richard’s mind: “We’re middle-aged and we’re young lovers standing beside a pond. We’re everything, all at once. Isn’t it remarkable?” (Cunningham 67). Jack Halberstam argues in “Queer Temporalities and Postmodern Geographies” that the significance of this kiss—of all three kisses—can be explained using a “queer rendering of time and space.” According to him, the Clarissa/Richard, Laura/Kitty, and Virginia/Vanessa kisses are all different representations of Cunningham’s rationalization of “Woolf’s authorial decision to have the young Clarissa Dal-

loway ‘love another girl’ in terms of queer temporality [...] ‘Virginia thinks; Clarissa will believe that a rich riotous future is opening before her, but eventually (how exactly will the change be accomplished?) she will come to her senses’ [...] the ‘riotous future’ [...] becomes, in Cunningham’s skillful rewrite, a queer time that is both realized and ultimately disappointing in its own narrative arc” (Halberstam, 5). Homosexuality—or, as in the case of Clarissa and Richard, love and passion associated with a sexuality other than what one identifies with (or has been told to identify with)—in *The Hours* is thus, according to Halberstam, representative of an alternative, “delicious and forbidden” future or of a, as Woolf succinctly puts it, life within a “world turned upside down” (Woolf, 52).

Perhaps Halberstam is right to characterize these versions of the Clarissa/Sally kiss (from the original *Dalloway*) as Cunningham’s rationalization of Woolf’s authorial choices—that is, is right to point to the truth that this interpretation is his, is unique to his reading of Woolf’s novel. Perhaps in his mind, these appropriated kisses and reworked sexual relationships do represent a realized “rich and riotous future” possible because space and daily life have been reconfigured within a queer temporality, but this future feels problematic for two reasons: first, because it does not seem as deeply rooted in Cunningham’s source text as it is implied in *The Hours*, and second, because this future is an intensely heteronormative (and thus neoliberal) one. This future promotes and represents, in short, an ideology that seems quite contradictory to what Clarissa Dalloway felt in Sally Seton and contradictory, in all likelihood, to the sort of future for women that Woolf may have envisioned.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa Vaughan—young, living with her family, unmarried, and entirely open to whatever life might give her—seems to fall in love with Sally because they both

love *life*, because Sally is the type of person to run naked down a hall after bathing because she forgot soap, is the type to scoff at Hugh Whitbread's kisses and declare that women should have the vote: the type, in short, who can and does grab Clarissa out of the blue and—innocently, passionately, youthfully, giddily—kiss her. Sally, it seems, represents adventure and energy and everything that is just slightly different from what has been found at Bourton before (though she still follows many of the same conventions and adheres to much of what defines Clarissa's place and experience in society). Clarissa remembers that

Sally it was who made her feel, for the first time, how sheltered life at Bourton was. She knew nothing about sex—nothing about social problems [...] There they sat, hour after hour, talking in her bedroom at the top of the house, talking about life, how they were to reform the world. They meant to found a society to abolish private property, and actually had a letter written, though not sent out. The ideas were Sally's, of course—but very soon she was just as excited... (49).

Sally was unique among Clarissa's peers during that summer at Bourton. Peter Walsh, for example, though in many ways as exciting and passionate as Sally, was also demanding and controlling. He loved and continues to love Clarissa with an intensity that, oddly, refuses to forgive her anything, that insists upon her being somehow *better* or more like the version of her that he has set up in his mind. When he visits her at her home in London decades later on the morning of her party, their conversation proves this tension between what they *are* and what they *want* from each other never truly went away after those summers in Bourton. After joking and remembering and tearing up and looking to one another for understanding or recognition, Clarissa feels Peter's irrational irritation with her and thinks, "what an extraordinary habit that was [...] always playing with a knife. Always making one feel, too, frivolous; empty-minded; a mere silly chatterbox, as he used" (65). Peter is passion embodied, and he evokes a number of emotions in both the

young Clarissa of Bourton and the older, married Clarissa of London, but not all of these emotions are positive or even healthy, and in many ways he seems to view her choices and decision-making in a way that feels condescending, chauvinistic, and, most importantly, unrealistic.

Sally, on the other hand, was a true peer to Clarissa, was an undemanding partner-in-crime. As Clarissa reflects years later, sitting in her room in London and thinking of what needs to be done for her evening party,

the strange thing, looking back, was the purity, the integrity of her feeling for Sally. It was not like one's feeling for a man. It was completely disinterested, and besides, it had a quality which could only exist between women, between women just grown up. It was protective, on her side; sprang from a sense of being in league together, a presentiment of something that was bound to part them (they spoke of marriage always as a catastrophe), which led to this [...] protective feeling which was much more on her side than Sally's (50).

Those other members of the Bourton set—Hugh Whitbread, for example—could not compete with this kind feeling, could not register against the purity of Clarissa and Sally or even the passion of Peter and Clarissa. Until Richard Dalloway—the character “meant to be liked,” using Woolf’s own words—who is resented by Peter (who blames Richard for everything he struggles to understand about Clarissa—“there’s nothing in the world so bad for some women as marriage, he thought; and politics; and having a Conservative husband, like the admirable Richard”) and who is considered absurd or boring by Sally. When she and Peter sit together at Clarissa’s party in London Sally thinks and perhaps tries even to explain to Peter that

she had owed Clarissa an enormous amount [...] but—did Peter understand?—she lacked something. She had charm, she had extraordinary charm. But to be frank, [...] to be quite frank then, how could Clarissa have done it?—married Richard Dalloway? a sportsman, a man who only cared for dogs. Literally, when he came into the room he smelt of the stables (288).

Richard is inexplicable to both Sally and Peter. He is unacceptable, the reason or cause for those parts of her they never quite like (her snobbishness, her frivolity must stem, in their minds, from his wealth and position as a conservative politician with influence, even though they knew about those aspects of her personality before she married). And yet, Clarissa chose him. No one forced her. In truth, Peter did what he could to prevent it, but Clarissa and Richard had an understanding; Peter felt it the first night he saw them together: “He was prey to revelations at that time. This one—that she would marry Richard Dalloway—was blinding—overwhelming at the moment. There was a sort of—how could he put it?—a sort of ease in her manner to him; something maternal; something gentle” (92). Clarissa had the rich, riotous future (certainly with Peter, and maybe even with Sally) in front of her, ready for the taking, but she *decided* on Richard Dalloway, a much more simple, steady, conservative companion. And all signs throughout the novel point to this being, on the whole, a good decision, particularly as compared to someone like Peter. Though the passion and the sexuality of her youth is on Clarissa’s mind decades later, so, too, is the knowledge that she has built a good life, one worth holding on to and valuing, even in the face of the possibilities in death and suicide which seem to enchant, tempt, even consume her after hearing that Septimus abruptly and violently ended his own life. Clarissa chooses Richard in her youth and life in her middle age, and does so confidently, joyfully—surely that is some testament to her own capacity for decision-making, for understanding herself and her needs.

The Clarissa of *The Hours* makes the very same decision—the Sally she marries is successful, reliable, and perhaps a little bland. Yet she and Clarissa have a strong relationship, built on mutual understanding much like the Dalloways. It is a man named Richard with whom Clarissa shares a meaningful, life-encompassing kiss, but this Richard is a more confusing option, is a

blend of Septimus and Peter Walsh and Sally Seton. He is all of those things: the poetry and madness, the passion and stubbornness, the unconventionality and youthfulness. And so readers and viewers of *The Hours* leave Clarissa Vaughan's story with the lingering feeling that she perhaps should have stayed with Richard, that Sally does not *quite* suit her, that she needs something more exciting or passionate. So, too, do we feel that Laura Brown is smothered by her marriage and must turn to a stolen kiss with a neighbor to glimpse that "riotous," queer, alternate future. So, too, do we question Virginia Woolf's (both the character and, perhaps the woman herself) choice: the Leonard of *The Hours* seems charming and loving, but he is the one who is trapping her in Richmond, who is denying her the opportunity to return to her true creative muse, London. By appropriating Clarissa Dalloway and transforming her into something slightly different than what she was in 1919 London, and by then molding Virginia Woolf herself to fit this new model, Cunningham distracts the reader from the reality of Woolf's original text. Clarissa Dalloway glimpses "a rich riotous future [...] opening before her," has the opportunity to revive her passion and youth with Peter (he, certainly, seems to have remained rooted in early adulthood—he has jumped from job to job, traveled the world, made several questionable relationship choices, and has ultimately settled on a much younger, beautiful woman), but instead chooses to preserve what is important to her, which seems to be her independence, her right to pursue her own interests (parties, social gatherings, June mornings in London), her security and comfort.

These things parallel interestingly with much of what Woolf, based on her letters and diaries, seemed to value, but that is not felt in *The Hours*. The joyful ending of *Mrs. Dalloway*, in which Clarissa enters into death imaginatively and emerges on the other side brimming with life and feeling with clarity the world that she's built, is missing from *The Hours*; in Cunningham's

novel most characters choose life, yes, but in a much darker, resigned, sorrowful way—in fact, the only character who experiences much of a positive ending is Woolf herself, a story line that is undercut by the knowledge (given to readers during the prologue) that she ultimately kills herself. By removing the ebullience of those final pages of *Mrs. Dalloway* (“what is this terror? what is this ecstasy? he thought to himself. What is it that fills me with extraordinary excitement? It is Clarissa, he said. For there she was”), Cunningham only deepens the significance of the stolen kiss that is already significant because of its frequent appearance. Consequently, the novel gives readers the impression that all three main characters *could* have had a “delicious and forbidden future,” that all three are trapped or suffering or somehow less happy because of what was denied them by life: all of this contradicts the confident, joyful, clear-headed Clarissa Dalloway, all of this feels manipulated and distant from the world Woolf created in her novel.

Though giving the slightly false impression that certain characters from *The Hours* are liberated or, perhaps more accurately, are more explicitly suffering or trapped versions of characters from *Mrs. Dalloway* is problematic in the sense that it creates a distorted lens through which contemporary readers might read Woolf’s novel and life, the more important issue is that the lives and relationships created by Cunningham do not truly promote a more accepting, liberal society when it comes to sexuality, but rather align with and further hetero/homonormative, neoliberal cultural ideology. The “delicious and forbidden” future that is realized by Sally and Clarissa in *The Hours* is perfectly characteristic of what Gavin Brown, in “Homonormativity: A Metropolitan Concept that Denigrates ‘Ordinary’ Gay Lives,” calls the “sexual politics of neoliberalism” (1066). As discussed in detail in the opening chapter of this project, neoliberalism can be understood “not just [as] an economic theory, but [as] a form of governmentality that

‘produces and validates subjects with marketized understandings of the relationship between public and private’ (Weiss, 2011, p. 18), promoting personal responsibility and individual autonomy through supposed free choice” (1066). Neoliberalism, in short, promotes a libertarian-like, capitalist, privatized culture, in which the government does not take responsibility for social welfare or support and in which the private is valorized—though in such a way as to mask the public’s power over the private.

All of this is potentially problematic for any group of people that does not immediately benefit from capitalism having free rein: anyone who, in other words, has historically been treated as voiceless, powerless, or secondary—women, people of color, homosexuals, and immigrants are a few examples. Recent years, however, have marked a shift in how culture in the United States views gays. Gay marriage, for instance, is now legalized in many states and is almost certainly going to be legal throughout the country within the next decade. This is an exciting time for a particular group that has long been oppressed and denied basic civil rights—and yet, as both Brown and Agathangelous, Bassichis, and Spira argue, not all members of the gay community have cause to celebrate, nor should certain implications of the gay rights movement as it is be ignored. In particular, the prevalence and influence of homonormativity, intricately tied to neoliberalism, is worth examining. This concept can be understood, I think, using the popular sitcom *Will and Grace* and the recent Oscar-nominated film *The Kids are Alright* as a foundation: it defines a particular lifestyle, a particular form of gay living (one that Brown complicates). In this version of gay living, two people—usually white, upper-middle or upper class, urban, and highly educated—live together in a committed relationship. In short, they mirror the popular version heteronormative couples (with, perhaps, the exception of their urban location). In other

words, this is a form of society-approved gay living, and clearly represents how deeply neoliberalism is embedded in our present societal and cultural views: this version of homosexuality is able to gain legal traction in the United States because the contemporary U.S. is a country in which the “private” has been given special importance, in which “personal responsibility and individual autonomy” are celebrated and yet also monitored or managed. Basically, those that fit within the homonormative label are deemed acceptable because they only slightly differ from widespread ideas about what a proper family or relationship is.

The relationship between homonormativity and Cunningham’s novel is fairly clear: Clarissa Vaughan lives with her partner Sally in upper class comfort. They live in a gorgeous, huge apartment in Manhattan, work in fairly artsy-yet-high-paying jobs, have a daughter (whose politicized tutor is, in this version of Dalloway’s story, a lesbian and an extreme feminist), and are, in short, very, very like Richard and Clarissa in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Cunningham’s decision to arrange his characters in such a way says quite a bit about his political/societal influences and, what is more important, could have potentially troubling affects on future readers of *Mrs. Dalloway*. Sexuality, in this film, though attempting nuance, is really very normative—something that can’t really be said of Clarissa’s (or Woolf’s, for that matter, from what I’ve read in her letters and diaries) own sexuality or feelings about love.

The Hours’ Richard, on the other hand, as a reconfigured blend of Septimus, Peter, and Sally, is a gay man dying of AIDs and as such differs significantly from Sally and Clarissa. He, as the poet, as the one who never really settled down to a committed, long-term relationship, is the outsider in this homonormative paradigm—and it is the outsiders and the way that they are characterized as such, according to both Brown and Agathangelou, Bassichis, and Spira, that

most clearly reveal the sinister effects of neoliberalism. As Agathangelous & co. argue when describing various gay rights movements in “Intimate Investments: Homonormativity, Global Lockdown, and the Seductions of Empire,”

The expansive effort to repeal sodomy laws coincided with, and was bolstered by, a national push on the part of a variety of LGBT organizations to legalize same-sex marriage. Both campaigns were launched under the banner of privacy rights—the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force’s (NGLTF) campaign to repeal sodomy laws was aptly dubbed the Privacy Project. Not coincidentally, such efforts were spearheaded by a class of queer subjects in the leading strata of the neoliberal world order, those who ‘benefited’ most from the increasing dominance of free market capitalism, structural adjustment policies, and the privatization of public space and welfare apparatuses. Both campaigns, fought in the name of equality, proved instrumental in consolidating precisely the political and material conditions they purportedly sought to contest [...] mainstream LGBT organizations herald[ed] the ‘decriminalization of gay sexuality,’ all the while leaving unnoted and undisturbed the ongoing criminalization and pathologization of ‘other sexualities’ (121-122).

Like Brown, Agathangelou, Spira, and Bassichis connect homonormativity with neoliberalism: the *Will & Grace* effect, in which gay citizens are free and comfortable living their lives in a liberal, accepting New York City is really only possible for those “queer subjects in the leading strata of the neoliberal world order”—those mostly white, rich, “monogamous, consumptive, privatized” citizens. Clarissa Vaughn and Sally have a wealthy, comfortable, normalized and socially approved-of life, but what about Richard, who is dying from AIDs? What about those people who don’t have the means to live in a liberal, tolerant, diverse borough or neighborhood of New York? Brown draws attention in his article to this idea that there are other lifestyles, other gay-lives that look quite different than those urbanized, wealthy lives that are captured in skewed media forms like Oscar-nominated films and Golden Globe-winning sitcoms (the Fox show *Brooklyn 99*, for example, features an extremely masculine and respected black police chief who frequently brings up his beloved husband—all of which is a nice step in the right direction,

though it is hard to ignore the reality that, besides being black, this character fits every other homonormative descriptor).

These other lifestyles cause Brown to argue that homonormativity's prevalence/influence—taken for granted by many scholars—should be questioned: “while neoliberalism may still be the hegemonic economic ideology of our time, it is not the only show in town. If sexualities research only reads for hegemony, and not for difference; if it only sees neoliberalism everywhere, then it is not surprising that homonormative practices appear to be so dominant and far-reaching” (1070). Brown is right to acknowledge that neoliberalism, though present in many, many aspects of contemporary culture, is not ubiquitous, nor is it impossible to overcome. His references to other styles of gay living throughout the United States serve as a good reminder that there are many non-normative or traditionally non-public groups of people (like women or blacks) who are (sometimes intentionally) not a part of the dominant, capitalist, normative social strata. And yet, Agathangelou, Bassichis, and Spira argue that this truth is more intricately tied to the dominant cultural strain than is perhaps immediately obvious, and that the treatment and recognition (or lack thereof) of these non-normative or (traditionally) private lives has serious implications for the future social makeup of this country. They argue that it is the act of Othering or excluding that makes the “forward progress” possible for the gay rights movement:

In the case of gay marriage, the push for state-sanctioned kinship reconsolidates the exclusionary practices of the institution of marriage. This move recodes ‘good’ forms of national kinship (monogamous, consumptive, privatized) while punishing those that fall outside of them, particularly those forms of radicalized and classed kinship that continue to be the target of state violence and pathology (121-122).

Without “punishing those that fall outside of [...] ‘good forms of national kinship,” in other words, gay marriage or the lifestyle of Sally and Clarissa are not an option. Whether intentionally

or not, Cunningham plays directly into this Citizen/Other dichotomy—Richard is deathly ill, insane, poverty-stricken, even unclean (“Richard’s chair, particularly, is insane; or, rather, it is the chair of someone who, if not actually insane, has let things slide so far, has gone such a long way toward the exhausted relinquishment of ordinary caretaking—simple hygiene, regular nourishment—that the difference between insanity and hopelessness is difficult to pinpoint”) (58). He does not benefit from the HIV drugs designed after his mind has begun to slip—but Evan, Walter Hardy’s (an updated version of Hugh Whitbread) partner and member of a normative, monogamous relationship, does. Louis, former lover of Richard and comfortably sane, employed, and respectable, is also spared. The lifestyle of Sally and Clarissa is possible in this 1999 New York world because it contrasts so sharply with this life of Richard’s, and because it “recodes ‘good’ forms of national kinship.” They reestablish and confirm certain citizenship/social roles—get married, stay monogamous, have children, raise them to follow certain value systems, and pay taxes—in order to perpetuate a particular form of capitalist/nationalist empire.

These lifestyle choices are not inherently wrong, but they do, without a doubt, embody a certain kind of American, British, and Western patriotism (“Miss Isabel Pole in a green dress walking in a square” and Shakespeare are synonymous with *England* for Septimus and are worth dying for) which, if left unexamined, can, in the name of privacy or security or freedom, perpetuate or mask “state violence” enacted against those who do not make these same choices or live these same types of lives. This state violence is not hyperbole, nor is it only tangible in the brutal illness and suicide of the fictional character Richard. As Agathangelou et al explain, recent decades have seen a dramatic shift in who goes to prison and for what reasons:

If it is no longer the bedroom of a 'gay and lesbian couple' arrested for having 'intimate relations with the person they love,' whose doors, then, will continue to get kicked down? [...] It is no coincidence [...] that the police are being called up to legislate good and bad love during this political moment. To be sure, the ruling coincides with two decades of the rapid proliferation of an increasingly privatized and corporatized prison apparatus, police state, and militarized regime of repression. During the past three decades of neoliberal (re) consolidation the number of mostly brown, black, and poor people locked away in the U.S. system along has increased nearly three hundred-fold (122).

As the government pushes privatization and sees the capitalist value in corporatizing former state-operated systems, so too does the cultural importance of private, non-state-regulated freedom increase—as long as those freedoms fit a certain neoliberal-approved framework. In short, it is because of our current culture that gay marriage is possible, which can be considered a very good thing, but it is that same culture that makes it possible to send thousands of Othered lives to privately-owned, money-making prisons and, moreover, that makes it possible to oppress any form of sexuality that deviates from a monogamous, reproductive, middle class partnership. Thus the severity of the situation: this cultural and political marriage to neoliberalism has more sinister implications than just reverting to a small-government, pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps mentality might seem to have. Locating these issues in the political moment helps to answer the question “why now?”—why are these pop culture representations of Woolf the way they are, and why is it worth critiquing them? *The Hours*, both novel and film, feature certain forms of freedom, privacy, independence, class, and societal roles. They feature spunky, modern 21st century versions of Clarissa Dalloway and homosexual-yet-heteronormative, upstanding-citizen, Western-empire relationships that oddly align features of an arguably repressive and exclusive past with this “tolerant future” which is anything but “delicious and forbidden”—something that clearly contradicts the interests of feminists and thus problematizes a novel that features three

strong female leads and that appropriates and speaks for one of the great female (and feminist) novelists.

The nature of Clarissa Vaughan's relationship with her partner Sally is therefore complicated by both *The Hours*' odd and somewhat discombobulated relationship with Woolf's original novel and by its relationship with the political atmosphere of Cunningham's time. This relationship's alignment with "the sexual politics of neoliberalism" goes beyond homonormativity, however: it also places Clarissa squarely in the role of housewife and caregiver. As Susan Braedly argues in "Someone to Watch Over You: Gender, Class, and Social Reproduction" and as was discussed in the opening chapter of this project, "Neo-liberal ideology assumes that care work is a family responsibility, and this notion is deeply and increasingly embedded in public policy discourse and practice" (216). Care work within this empire/libertarian framework is being treated as it was in the pre-labor movement/feminist/civil rights past; it is returning to where it originally operated—the home. Those programs that our government and other governments used to provide aid to families (whether in a large, economic sense, as in the New Deal, or in a more individualized sense, as in the case of a family with specific needs due to a family member with disabilities, chronic illness, or other debilitating issues) are rapidly losing funding, credibility, and political and public support. Care work, as it once was, is more fully a "family" responsibility and those who benefit from government aid are nearly always considered by our current culture as failures and sometimes as parasitic (mostly because of their socioeconomic position—staying home with children as opposed to working is considered lazy when that mother or caregiver is impoverished, but is considered selfless and good parenting when that mother is upper class).

Some of these ideas about family responsibility, especially in terms of dealing with dis-

ease or mental illness, can be found in Woolf's own work, and in the pastiches of her work. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, both Clarissa and Septimus resist the influence of an outsider when it comes to dealing with their psychological and physical health. "Getting better," for both characters (and in the mind of Woolf, as she fairly explicitly says in her letters and diaries) is something that is more likely to happen in the home amongst family than elsewhere with strangers: "she had once gone with some one to ask [Sir William's] advice. He had been perfectly right; extremely sensible. But heavens—what a relief to get out on the street again! [...] She did not know what it was—about Sir William; what exactly she disliked. Only Richard agreed with her, 'didn't like his taste, didn't like his smell'" (278-279). It may very well *be* best for both Clarissa and Septimus to recover in the comfort of their home and family, but it is a subplot of *Mrs. Dalloway* that plays interestingly into the hands of neoliberal ideas about where the responsibility for dealing with physical and mental illness lies. In Septimus's case, for example, the doctors *want* him to stay at home with his wife, but because he keeps threatening suicide and "talking nonsense to frighten [his] wife," he must be removed from her. There is the distinct impression that Rezia feels guilty for this, as if she has failed her husband by not being able to give him the in-home care that she, as his wife, should be able to. In this case, the external, medical world is the last resort, the unpleasant and even indecent final option; as in today's carework culture, turning to outside help feels like failure.

In *The Hours*, too, we see carework appear in Clarissa's relationship with Richard. He has nurses who come to see him and give him medicine, yes, but it is Clarissa who provides him the sort of care that he apparently needs, who sees whether he is eating or whether he has bathed. Again, it is Clarissa's homonormative relationship with Sally that makes this possible. Like the

original Mrs. Dalloway and Rezia, she is a mostly stay-at-home wife/mom, and unlike them she is neither sick nor dealing with a case so severe she must be removed from the situation (arguably because, by 1999, decades of neoliberal policies meant that outside care was minimal and the government/medical community did not feel compelled to intervene or offer help to the degree they did in 1919). Though she has a career, it is one that is completely flexible and that allows her to play this role of caregiver. Her lifestyle and the lives of those she cares about are dependent on her ability to shoulder this responsibility and the outside providers of care are perceived as negligent, distant, or, at their worst, incompetent.

Mrs. Dalloway then, corresponds with current ideas about family responsibility, which perhaps explains and justifies Cunningham's representation of carework in *The Hours*, which features familial responsibility of the kind described above in not only Clarissa's sections, but in Laura Brown and character-Woolf's sections too. Cunningham's version of Woolf, for instance, muses occasionally on the struggles of running a household, and about the difficulties of maintaining respect as the woman of the house while knowing that her servants see her as unstable. She wonders, "why is it so difficult dealing with servants [...] why is it so difficult to be firm and kind with Nelly; to command her respect and love? [...] She will give Clarissa Dalloway great skill with servants [...] her servants will love her. They will do more than she asks" (87). This version of Woolf seems to feel as though her lack of domestic ability, her discomfort with managing a home, is a reflection on her as a woman or person; her non-normative response to traditionally feminine tasks weighs on her and drives her to create a character that has no such issues.

Laura Brown, too, struggles with the role she is cast by society to play. She, like all the female characters in both Woolf's and Cunningham's novels, is responsible for the maintenance

of the health, spirits, and moral compass of her little family, but feels lost, unfit, clumsy, and confused in that role. She must force herself to get out of bed the morning of her husband's birthday, and in fact spends a few extra minutes reading the opening pages of *Mrs. Dalloway* and wishing she did not have to go down at all, despite hearing him put together breakfast for himself and her son ("she is again possessed (it seems to be getting worse) by a dream-like feeling, as if she is standing in the wings, about to go onstage and perform in a play for which she has not adequately rehearsed") (43). After her husband leaves (the sort of man who buys *her* flowers on his birthday—confusing and complicating her desire to flee her life even more) she decides she will make him a cake, and the very thought of it briefly stabilizes her:

“She is going to produce a birthday cake—only a cake—but in her mind at this moment the cake is glossy and resplendent as any photographs of cakes in magazines. She imagines making, out of the humblest materials, a cake with all the balance and authority of an urn or a house. The cake will speak of bounty and delight the way a good house speaks of comfort and safety [...] At this moment, holding a bowl full of sifted flour in an orderly house under the California sky, she hopes to be as satisfied and as filled with anticipation as a writer putting down the first sentence, a builder beginning to draw the plans” (76-77).

Laura Brown knows what she is supposed to be, knows what is expected of her, but cannot quite seem to make it happen for herself. The only times she is comfortable or happy is when she is alone, reading, or else during those brief moments when she feels as though she has fulfilled external expectations (“[my] cake will speak of bounty and delight the way a good house speaks of comfort...”). Much of her discomfort seems rooted not so much in her anxiety about being the perfect homemaker, but rather in her anxiety about her community recognizing that she is a failure. She is worried about society, about what others think of her—so much so that at points her feelings about her community border on fear or distrust: “someone taps on the back door [...]

Laura swallows a pang of excitement and something stronger than excitement, something that resembles panic. She is about to receive a visit from Kitty. Her hair is brushed; she is still wearing her bathrobe. She looks, too much, like the woman of sorrows” (101). Laura would rather be alone, rather be an individual than a member of the suburbs of L.A.: she would rather things stay private.

This kind of attitude in a character makes a lot of sense in a book written post-1960s and Cunningham’s motivation (conscious or not) may have been drawn from a post-Vietnam, anti-establishment kind of culture, a culture that very much lingers today. For many Americans post the sixties, the suburbs seem to represent a kind of lifelessness, a sort of oppressive, Big Brother, boring, *phony* version of adulthood (movies like *Pleasantville*, *The Truman Show*, and *American Beauty* capture the kind of horror many feel about the neighborhoods like Laura Brown’s). But this attitude, seemingly a direct result of the cultural revolution of Vietnam era, has since subtly shifted into something else. It looks the same—but underneath the surface, this anti-suburb feeling can be linked to neoliberal discourse, which encourages disassociation from community or societal goals. Unionizing, labor movements, and gender-or-racial-wide goals, have been buried under “culture” oriented movements and individualism. Nancy Fraser in particular blames the slow decline of the feminist movement on this shift away from community economic goals, as mentioned in the above chapter: “neoliberalism’ authorized a sustained assault on the very idea of egalitarian redistribution. The effect, amplified by accelerating globalization, was to cast doubt on the legitimacy and viability of the use of public power to tame market forces. With social democracy on the defensive, efforts to broaden and deepen its promise naturally fell by the wayside” (3-4). So that suspicion of the suburbs, which was initially a response to heteronorma-

tivity and all that it encompasses—materialism, capitalism, class hierarchy, gender norms, sexual norms, and/or racism and agism—remains, but now locates responsibility completely in the individual rather than in the community or in any kind of union, and regards the federal and local governments and even neighborhoods with suspicion, which, as has been implied throughout this project, does more to aid the imperialist/capitalist structure than to subvert it.

In other words, it is not as though the public sphere—meaning the government, or the larger social structure—is not still dominant over the private sphere or individual. The cultural suspicion and push against unionized thinking creates the illusion that individuals do, in fact, have complete autonomy and freedom, when in truth citizens are monitored and managed by outside, political forces. This is the crux of neoliberalism, at least as it relates to the public/private dichotomy and, in turn, feminism. Susan Braedly sums up the contemporary relationship between these spheres succinctly: “It is as if a private sphere of social reproduction were suspended as a discrete bubble within the public sphere, increasingly penetrated by rationalities and techniques of management that have developed in the surrounding public sphere of production. This management constitutes social reproduction in particular ways and keeps it always under the gaze of the public sphere” (216). This form of management, as discussed above, can most clearly be seen in Laura Brown’s character in *The Hours*: Brown, as a perfect neoliberal subject, is suspicious of community, but the community is also suspicious of her, because she is non-normative. She senses this—“she is three years older than [her husband] (there is something vaguely disreputable about this, something vaguely embarrassing; a broad-shouldered woman, angular, dark, foreign-looking, although her family has been failing to prosper in this country for over a hundred years”—and responds to it by desiring to retreat further inward, into herself,

away from everyone, including (perhaps especially) her husband, who seems to represent this kind of societal management or external expectation for her, even if his expectations come out of love. As the novel progresses, Brown begins to desire a retreat from life itself, and begins contemplating suicide.

Yet Brown does not commit suicide in *The Hours*, despite her desire and curiosity: as she pulls into the driveway of the babysitter's home after leaving the hotel in L.A. she visited for an afternoon she thinks, "it seems, briefly, that by going to the hotel she has slipped out of her life, and this driveway, this garage, are utterly strange to her. She has been away. She has been thinking kindly, even longingly, of death" (188). She does not kill herself then, but her feelings about her family and herself eventually lead her to leave her family. Virginia Woolf and Richard, on the other hand, do commit suicide in Cunningham's novel. Richard dies because, as the updated Septimus, as a sufferer of AIDs and poet (character-Woolf thinks of her yet-to-be-written novel, "someone else will die. It should be a greater mind than Clarissa's; it should be someone with sorrow and genius enough to turn away from the seductions of the world..."), he must. His suicide is one of the crucial links between *The Hours* and its source *Mrs. Dalloway* (both deaths are suicides, both committed by traumatized, mentally ill characters, and both involve falling out of a window after a brief, beautiful moment of perfect contentment with the world) (154).

Character-Woolf's death, on the other hand, arguably has little to do with *Mrs. Dalloway* itself and thus particularly connects to the above ideas about neoliberal confluences of the public and private and about contemporary appropriation of canonical texts. It seems significant that the very first scene in *The Hours* is a fictionalized version of Virginia Woolf's real-life suicide. Few people, I would think, who have heard of Virginia Woolf have not also heard that she killed her-

self—like Sylvia Plath, her manner of death is often more fascinating to people than anything she did in life. Laura Brown, who begins reading *Mrs. Dalloway* at the beginning of *The Hours*, reacts to the opening pages of the book by wondering “how [...could] someone who was able to write a sentence like that—who was able to feel everything contained in a sentence like that—come to kill herself?” (Cunningham 41). For her, the experience reading of *Mrs. Dalloway* is supplemented and, in a sense, framed within the understanding that Woolf committed suicide. Thus even Cunningham’s fictional characters are unable to separate the author-Woolf from the suicidal-Woolf. The opening scene of *The Hours* is merely a reiteration of what popular culture already knows about Virginia Woolf; it confirms the version of her that has been perpetuated by the media and entertainment and literature. The reasoning behind the scene is unclear. All of the other sections narrated by Virginia Woolf take place not in 1941, the year of her death, but in 1923, the year she began writing *Mrs. Dalloway*. There is no direct correlation between her death and the events of *Mrs. Dalloway* beyond the awareness that suicide was clearly a subject on her mind as early as 1923. Anyone familiar with the novel would know that any pastiche of it would include meditations on suicide, which *The Hours* accomplishes in the aforementioned characters Richard and Laura Brown. What role, then, does the opening scene—separated in time and plot from any other section and fairly irrelevant to the progression of the novel—play, beyond merely acknowledging and, in a sense, confirming the pop culture icon version of Virginia Woolf? Intentionally or not, in killing author-Woolf Cunningham creates character-Woolf. In opening with her suicide he confirms her fictionality, appropriates her for his own terms, and, more significantly, blurs the line between her private self and her public published work, which serves only to confirm antiquated notions about women’s relationship with the domestic sphere.

By treating Brown's suicidal thoughts and Richard and Woolf's suicides as he does, Cunningham participates in a dialogue about Virginia Woolf herself that has existed almost as long as she has been gone. There's a perpetuated narrative about Woolf—the crazy suicidal feminist genius—just as there's a narrative about contemporary politics and culture (never before have we been so accepting, so blind to race and gender; at least, that is what this my generation and every person younger than I have been taught), and Cunningham's decision to ignore themes like shell-shock, class struggle, or the dying aristocracy in order to highlight themes like (homonormative) homosexuality or suicide or creative genius aligns with these narratives perfectly. His version of Woolf's life and work is expected and affirmed by popular cultural understandings of these things, so that few, it seems, question the ways in which this deliberate appropriation of Woolf and her work creates a fictionalized, political version of Woolf herself or, ultimately, of the novel *Mrs. Dalloway*.

What Cunningham's novel does to transform both Woolf and her novel, the film version of *The Hours* does even more so. In the novel, suicide frames the narrative. The result is a much, much darker story, unlike *Mrs. Dalloway*, which begins, as mentioned above, with buying flowers and joyfully walking through London and June and ends with a revitalized, heightened, almost giddy reminder of life. Much of the joy of Woolf's original novel is lost in Cunningham's story, something that becomes quite clear in its film version. This is partly because of the director/screenwriters' interpretations of Cunningham's characters and novel, and partly because of how the film interprets and explains *Mrs. Dalloway* to its readers. The manipulation of Cunningham's characters is most obvious in Meryl Streep's version of Clarissa Vaughan. Streep's Clarissa is weepy, depressed, overwhelmed—a far cry from Woolf's original. The film's Clarissa is not

truly satisfied in her relationship with Sally (even more obviously than in Cunningham's novel—only further emphasizing the problematic interpretation of Clarissa and Richard Dalloway's marriage as explored above) and at one point slips to the kitchen floor in front of Louis (the character meant to be a version of Peter Walsh) and cries, "I'm unraveling! It's too much!" In both *Mrs. Dalloway* and Cunningham's novel, it is Peter Walsh/Louis who has the breakdown, who unravels and leaves Clarissa feeling a little sorry for him. The filmmakers' choice to give this show of emotion to Clarissa weakens her character considerably and plays directly into stereotypes about women and the emotions of housewives or stay-at-home mothers (Clarissa mentions that she has a job only once in the film and seems completely uninterested in it). It is as if the filmmakers noticed Cunningham's inclinations to speak for and even sneer at the horrors of suburban motherhood (as he does, albeit subtly and sympathetically, with Laura Brown and Virginia Woolf's characters) and chose to amplify this emotion by giving Meryl Streep the task to convey it, which, as usual, she does beautifully. Her strong performance masks the much stronger and happier version of her character found in Cunningham's novel, which in turn further buries the Clarissa Dalloway that can be found in Woolf's.

Laura Brown, in the film version, is also considerably weakened by the screenwriter or director's version of her character. The scene when Kitty comes to visit exemplifies this best: she essentially harasses Laura about the cake she baked for her husband, laughing cruelly and saying "it's so easy; why can't you do it?" In the novel, Kitty merely says "it's cute"—which punctures Laura, yes, but which only confirms her feeling that she is not meant for the life she is living. Laura continues smoking her cigarette and asks Kitty when her husband's birthday is. Not so in the film; Moore comes across as victimized and weak. She flutters around in her kitchen, voice

wobbling, looking desperately at Kitty for approval. The feeling she conveys is not one of not belonging or even angry embarrassment, but rather one of complete helplessness. Brown in Cunningham's novel may be many things, some of which reveal how deeply politicized the novel is, but she is not, as the film would have viewers believe, powerless; after all, she is able to almost effortlessly design a way for her to escape, leaving her child and responsibilities behind, and then return, without anyone the wiser.

These versions of Cunningham's characters are justified by the filmmakers' interpretations of Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, which is developed at various times by different characters in the film. The first instance occurs when Clarissa Vaughan visits Richard in his dark, grungy apartment. She tries to convince him to come to the party she will host that evening and he responds, bitterly, "Mrs. Dalloway, always giving parties...to cover the silence." This interpretation of Clarissa Dalloway's actions is clearly rooted in the idea that she must be depressed, lonely, unhappy with her life and marriage—an interpretation that is not quite the truth. Peter Walsh believes this (or, at least, wants to believe this) about Clarissa because he is in love with her and hates that she married Richard and became a socialite housewife, but any close reader of *Mrs. Dalloway* knows that Clarissa gives parties for reasons that are as far from shallow, really, as can be:

"They thought, or Peter at any rate thought, that she enjoyed imposing herself; liked to have famous people about her; great names; was simply a snob in short [...] It was childish, [Richard] thought. And both were quite wrong. What she liked was simply life. 'That's what I do it for,' she said, speaking aloud, to life [...] all she could say was (and nobody could be expected to understand): They're an offering, which sounded horribly vague" (184)

Clarissa Dalloway is not a hostess because she is trapped in a life she hates. *Mrs. Dalloway* is not centered on a character who, as film-Laura Brown describes, is “confident, [so] everyone thinks she’s fine, but she isn’t.” Woolf’s novel is not an earlier version of Laura Brown’s life, and explicitly telling audience members that it cheapens the intentions of Cunningham’s source text.

This relationship between the film *The Hours*, the novel of the same name, and *Mrs. Dalloway* is worth examining not because Stephen Daldry’s 2002 film is not a perfect interpretation of Cunningham’s book—there are thousands of films that miss the mark in this way, or that instead do wonders with a story that, in novel-form, was not particularly powerful (*Forrest Gump* comes to mind). Rather, the problematic film version of *The Hours* is important because of its popularity and critical acclaim, which may lend it even more power over popular understandings of Woolf’s life and work than the novel has. Erika Spohrer, in her article “Seeing Stars: Commodity Stardom in Michael Cunningham’s *The Hours* and Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*” points to the ways “celebrity” is created and understood in later 20th century and contemporary American society, claiming “celebrities attain importance as cultural currency; in [Cunningham’s novel] stars are commodities that determine cultural value for the people with and through whom they circulate, both by conferring distinction on events and by providing the static medium through which other may gauge their cultural sophistication” (Spohrer 114). This notion of commodified celebrity is evident in Cunningham’s characters (Oliver St. Ives, for example, and Clarissa Vaughan’s distraction because of a movie trailer parked on the street that may contain Meryl Streep, Susan Sarandon, or Vanessa Redgrave) but is even more obvious in Daldry’s film. As Spohrer argues, the Oscar-winning film relies heavily on commodified celebrity; “review after review admires in the film the acting by Meryl Streep and Julianne Moore, the score by Philip

Glass, the screenplay by David Hare [...] but the aspect of the film that receives the most attention [...] is Nicole Kidman and her prosthetic nose” (Spohrer 117). This focus on the

“astonishing performance of Virginia Woolf [is] somewhat disingenuous. [Reviewers] insist repeatedly on Kidman’s disappearance into the character of Woolf [but] the hype these articles generate about ‘the nose’ makes Kidman anything but unrecognizable [...] Kidman becomes the most visible aspect of the film [...] she] lends star power to the film—and subsequently to Cunningham’s book, to Woolf’s book, and even to Virginia Woolf herself [...] her] extratextual stardom [...] earns *The Hours* both big box office and significant critical attention” (Spohrer 117).

This “star power” lends the film and the novel’s political and social message credibility. It at once legitimizes and popularizes (by “conferring distinction on events” and providing a gauge with which to measure “cultural sophistication”) Cunningham’s pastiche. Thus the filmmakers make use of star power to make money and, more importantly, to call attention to contemporary issues—in a way that, intentionally or not, as explored above, reveals and perpetuates neoliberal ideology. It is not difficult to make the next step and recognize the ways in which Virginia Woolf herself is a commodified celebrity as well. She—as the woman genius, as the bisexual and suicidal writer—lends a sort of intellectual star power to both Cunningham’s novel and the film. Bringing Woolf into the gay rights or queer studies or care work conversation introduces a form of cultural elitism that plays directly into celebrity power and that, as a result, can influence film and literature consumers’ political perspectives.

The story of Laura Brown and Clarissa Vaughan is far from the only novel published in the last twenty years that makes use of Woolf’s life or novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, though for the sake of brevity I will only touch on two specific novels. *Mr. Dalloway*, by Robin Lippenscott, appropriates many characters from *Mrs. Dalloway* and tells a story about the marriage between

Richard and Clarissa from the perspective of Richard and, occasionally, other minor characters. The novel takes place several years after Woolf's and, like *Mrs. Dalloway*, makes use of a stream-of-consciousness narrative that flits in and out of the present time and place. In Lippenscott's novel, the central issue is that Richard is gay or, perhaps, bisexual: he spends much of the narrative dwelling on Robbie, his lover for over the past decade whom he has recently discussed with his wife, Clarissa. The foundation of the story is that Clarissa, after hearing about Richard's relationship with Robbie, completely understands—she, in a small sense, seems to even approve (at the very least, she does not try to stop Richard from seeing him, nor does she put an ultimatum of any kind on their marriage). Richard is both thankful to Clarissa for this reaction and haunted by it; he thinks:

“she has been entirely patient and good throughout all of this. It was a phrase which had first come to him months ago, one which now, upon occasion, repeated itself—a banner marched to and fro across the floor of his brain: *Clarissa has been entirely patient and good throughout all of this* [...] Perhaps it was because she surprised him so much, by her response: her tolerance, her goodness, her acceptance (and *because* of his lack of those qualities? he wondered now)” (4).

This surprise causes him to spend the year prior to the novel's start avoiding Robbie, in counseling, working on a history in quiet retirement, and trying to recapture the magic of his marriage. These tasks prove more difficult often than he can handle, and the novel concludes with a rather cheesy moment when Richard—at the anniversary party for himself and Clarissa that he hosts at the total eclipse of the sun in 1927—takes the hands of both Clarissa and Robbie while he looks up into the sky.

Richard may be surprised by Clarissa's reaction to his news, but we, as contemporary readers, are not: it is clear that, as in *The Hours*, Lippenscott's foundation for this plot derives

from Clarissa and Sally's subplot in Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. Readers of Lippenscott's novel have been prepped by novels like *The Hours*, and even if they have not read Cunningham's work, or even any other pastiche of Woolf's work, Richard Dalloway's position in the "upper strata of the neoliberal world order" allows us to immediately find his situation sympathetic and not entirely unpredictable. Like Cunningham, Lippenscott seemed to read Clarissa Dalloway's marriage as an unsatisfying alternative to the "delicious and forbidden future" that Clarissa could have had with Sally and, with both authors, it seems likely that contemporary readers find this kind of story or experience familiar. As briefly mentioned above, we like to think of our current culture as being post-racial, post-gender, and so when we read novels about marriages from decades ago we are on the lookout for issues for which we have contemporary solutions. It is easy to believe that it is Clarissa's remembered love for Sally, as Lippenscott seems to argue, that allows her to understand Richard's transgression against their marriage in *Mr. Dalloway*. There is the feeling that *both* Clarissa and Richard are homosexual and that their marriage is a marriage between like minds and like experiences—a marriage based in love, yes, but perhaps not of the romantic variety. As in *The Hours*, this claim confirms a modern, probably skewed lens with which contemporary readers may approach Woolf's original novel, with which readers may reconstruct Clarissa and Richard and perhaps Woolf herself. Arguably, Lippenscott's novel feels much more like fan fiction and less like a thoughtful, contemporary reworking of Woolf's original narrative. In a sense, this makes *Mr. Dalloway* less problematic; yes, Lippenscott's characters fall squarely in the homonormative paradigm, yes, his plot shamelessly appropriates *Mrs. Dalloway*'s for the purpose of telling a story that feels quite distant from Woolf's, but unlike Cunningham, Lippenscott has neither the lofty goal of exploring the world of *Mrs. Dalloway* in an entirely unique,

updated way, nor does he have the writing chops to do so. As a result, *Mr. Dalloway* merely confirms the larger neoliberal cultural dialogue that continually reshapes famous works like *Mrs. Dalloway*, without in any sense deepening it.

Vanessa and Her Sister, the recently published novel by Priya Parmar, on the other hand, has a notably different relationship with Virginia Woolf and neoliberalism than do either *The Hours* or *Mr. Dalloway*, and thus adds an interesting flavor to the collection of contemporary fictions concerning Woolf. Parmar's novel does not track Woolf's writing of any of her novels, nor does it imitate or borrow aspects of *Mrs. Dalloway*. Rather, it is the story of Vanessa Bell, née Stephens, in the years following her father's death. The novel tracks her young adult life with her three blood-siblings (Thoby, Adrian, and Virginia), her courtship with Clive Bell, most of her marriage to him (they never divorced, but lived apart for most of their lives), and part of her relationship with Roger Fry—in short, the years between 1905 and 1912, which pre-date Woolf's first novel, *The Voyage Out*.

Structurally, Parmar's narrative is fairly unique. The novel alternates between diary entries written by Vanessa, letters written to and from a wide variety of members of the Bloomsbury group (Lytton Stratchey, Leonard Woolf, Clive Bell, Roger Fry, and Violet Dickinson, for example), and less-common forms of print media like ticket stubs, programs, postcards, and telegraphs. *Vanessa and Her Sister* feels like a blend of diary and scrapbook, and the result is an extraordinarily well fleshed-out Bloomsbury world. As readers, we get to know Vanessa and Clive and all of their friends—and in particular, we get to know Virginia, who is the source of much of the tension and drama in the story. Yet, the people we are getting to know, though real, are fictionalized in Parmar's work. Vanessa never kept a diary, for example, so her internal dia-

logue is mostly imagined. Parmar notes the difficulty of her task; unlike Cunningham, who had the luxury of creating only one day of Woolf's life—a day which, arguably, could have occurred the way he imagined it, for the very reason that not every minute of every day of her life is documented—she attempts to imaginatively capture *years* of Vanessa Bell's life. Parma explains the main issue she encountered while writing the novel:

“It is not easy to fictionalize the Bloomsbury Group, as their lives are so well documented. They were prolific correspondents and diarists, and there is a wealth of existing primary material. For me the difficulty came in finding enough room for invention in the negative spaces they left behind. The characters in the novel are very much fictional creations. The broad external chronologies and events are as accurate as possible, with the exception of a few small adjustments and alterations [...] Many of the unlikelier details in the novel are rooted in fact” (346-347).

Here we see Parmar doing two important things: first, she acknowledges that of famous groups to fictionalize, the Bloomsbury set poses a particular problem because of how frequently they spoke *for themselves*. Unlike other intriguing historical figures, who perhaps because of their relative silence inspire writers to create interesting daily lives for them (Shakespeare, for example, has inspired stories like the Oscar-winning film *Shakespeare in Love*), the Woolfs, Stephens, and Bells left enough proof of their daily lives that transforming them in characters can only be at best difficult and at worst problematic. Secondly, Parmar explicitly notes that the people in her book are “fictional creations”—she does not claim biography, something that the filmmakers of *The Hours*, if not Cunningham himself, seem to imply, even if accidentally. As a result, Parmar's novel—though contradictory in many ways to the legend- or mythologized-Woolf that appears in popular culture and in *The Hours* and *Mr. Dalloway* specifically—feels more genuine. Readers may not recognize Virginia, and in some senses that is a very good thing.

Far from being the creative, independent genius that appears in *The Hours* (and, briefly, at the end of *Mr. Dalloway*), the version of Woolf in *Vanessa and Her Sister* is, frankly, unlikeable. She is extremely volatile, domineering, needy, and difficult, and spends the majority of the novel controlling her siblings' space and time, jealously manipulating Vanessa, alternating between an awkward, rude, and distant hostess and a brilliant, intelligent, attractive one (usually so as to distract male or academic attention away from Vanessa), and, most importantly, conducting an emotional affair with Clive, Vanessa's husband, mostly because of her own feelings of abandonment and powerlessness after her sister's marriage. As a writer, Virginia is only alluded to in Parmar's novel, and even then not in the most flattering terms:

“Virginia is always in motion. Her tempo is staccato and quick. Even when her body rests, her mind tumbles over and over like a lock. Her way is acquisitive. She is always interested in more—more affection, more attention, more contact, more safety, more warmth, more secrets. Her writing never catches its breath either. As soon as she has settled on a style, she grows bored with it. The freshness lost, she discards it and seeks something new. I worry she can never be still and happy at the same time” (61).

As difficult as she is about writing and as a housemate, Virginia is even worse when it comes to possessiveness over her sister. This manifests itself most clearly in anything to do with Clive.

After Thoby's illness and return from Greece to England, Clive takes up residence in the Stephens' house and is inexhaustible in his attempts to help them. This is partly because of his love for Vanessa who, during this period, reaches the conclusion she will marry him. This reality leads to the following exchange between Virginia and Vanessa:

“‘Kind? You call sniffing round you like some great sniffing dog *kind*?’ Her voice arced shrilly. ‘[Clive] means *harm*, Nessa. He means to wriggle and fit and ingratiate until he has made himself one of us [...] He has no *character*. He lacks *bottom*. And one day I shall sit him down and tell him so. I shall say, ‘Absurd Mr. Bell, you lack bottom and are not good enough for us. Please go.’ [...] What do you say to that, Nessa? What will you do when I tell your thing to go away, we do not want him?’

‘He does not want *us*, Virginia.’ I looked at her levelly, raising my head from the pillows. ‘He wants *me*.’”(122-123).

Virginia cannot stand the idea that anyone would attempt to take Vanessa away from her, and it seems clear that this is the reason she later shamelessly conducts an affair with Clive with Vanessa’s full knowledge: she is punishing her and attempting to show her that Clive, indeed, is not good enough. What Virginia does not realize is that she, in the process, proves that *she* is not good enough for Vanessa. At the end of the novel, after Virginia has successfully destroyed Clive and Vanessa’s marriage and even attempted to intervene in Vanessa’s affair with Roger Fry, she wants everything to go back to the way it was before, wants herself and Vanessa to have a pure, uninterrupted relationship. But Vanessa firmly rejects Virginia’s attempt to forget the past: “But you are on the far bank, Virginia. I am replanted in different earth. Still, you are my sister, and in that we are twinned always. Look for me. I will be watching you from here. But to begin again? No, Virginia. There can be no beginning again. Love and forgiveness are not the same thing” (341).

In short, Parmar’s Virginia Woolf is anything but a hero, and in many ways directly contradicts the autonomous, feminist image that most have of her. Rather than be fiercely independent or, at the very least, equal to the intellectual men that surround her, this Virginia—though surely as intelligent as and definitely more creative than any of the male characters—flirts and manipulates and panders to them. Rather than walking around immersed in her genius, in her writing, as the character-Woolf does in *The Hours*, this Virginia spends her time scheming to keep those she loves far away from anyone else and seems obsessive, not about her novel, but about Vanessa (which is reasonable, given the period of Woolf’s life that Parmar is attempting to

capture). Whether Parmar does so intentionally or not, her version of Woolf flies in the face of convention and consequently distances Woolf beautifully from her characters—there is no trace of Clarissa Dalloway in this version of Virginia, no clumsy attempt to connect the life of a wealthy politician's wife to that of her author's. In many ways, this treatment of Woolf affirms her genius and treats her fairly as an *author*, and not just as a *female* author. This Virginia is not rooted only in the domestic or private, but rather is able to enter the public sphere using her writing—writing that, despite what it may seem in *The Hours* or other contemporary pastiches, is fictional, is imaginative.

Yet despite the many ways the *Vanessa and Her Sister* differs from other re-workings of Woolf's life and fiction, it still shares characteristics typical of today: Parmar's novel still carries traces of neoliberalism, and does so in such a way, as is the case with *The Hours*, that perhaps explains some of its appeal to modern-day readers. In particular, the novel's treatment of care work and mental illness aligns with contemporary notions of privatization and familial responsibility. As in both *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Hours*, mental illness plays a significant role in *Vanessa and Her Sister*. Yet it seems clear that this decision rests in the historic truth that Woolf did, in fact, suffer from various hallucinations, pains, and depression—usually referred to by Woolf as “headaches”—and not because of the prominence of illness in *Mrs. Dalloway* (though, notably, Parmar tosses the topic of suicide in early in the novel—“[Virginia] was *determined* to talk about the morality of suicide—one of her favorite topics”—for seemingly no other reason than, as explored, suicide is always expected when Virginia Woolf is mentioned) (30). In the case of Parmar's novel, though, all of this illness is viewed from the outside; whereas in *Mrs. Dalloway* and even in parts of *The Hours* readers are in the minds of those characters that are suffering from

visions and depression, in *Vanessa and Her Sister* Virginia's illness is communicated to readers by Vanessa. The result is a much less sympathetic picture. Though Vanessa loves her sister and wants her to be healthy and happy, she is also frustrated with Virginia's actions and with her own inability to truly make a difference. Virginia's mental illness, as Vanessa describes it, comes on suddenly and is shrill, ranting, rambling, tinny, and nearly impossible to manage. In an early scene, Virginia works herself into a frenzy talking, and eventually requires a mild sedative and 18 hours of sleep to recover:

“At home, she kept on talking; talking without stopping, talking for hours. She did not respond when spoken to and would not turn to look when we called her name. She just continued to talk. When she gets like this, her words rush and tumble like unskilled acrobats, landing up in a heap of broken nonsense [...] after three hours [...] we sent for Nurse Fardell to come and administer a mild sedative—a draconian measure as far as Virginia was concerned” (30-31).

In this instance of “madness,” Vanessa feels helpless and frustrated (bordering on angry). She can anticipate Virginia's spells but cannot prevent them, she can calm her but at the cost of making her sister furious. At best, Virginia's episodes draw embarrassing attention to the family and at worst, they terrify her siblings into worrying that she might do serious damage to herself. And so Vanessa often finds herself in the position that many family members have been when dealing with a loved one's illness: she does not know whether it is better to care for Virginia herself, despite her own lack of expertise, or to find professional outside help at the risk of causing her sister emotional pain. Virginia, as she is depicted in this novel, is very much of the neoliberal mindset when it comes to care work. For her, as for Septimus and Clarissa Dalloway in *Mrs. Dalloway*, the idea of trusting doctors—men like Dr. Holmes and Dr. Bradshaw—with something as personal, as delicate as their recovery from depression or other mental or physical illness seems

absurd and cruel if and when there are perfectly good care givers available in the form of their (usually female) family members. Virginia in *Vanessa and Her Sister* loathes the idea that anyone besides Vanessa would care for her, a viewpoint that aligns very closely with today's attitude about the government or public sphere's level of responsibility (or lack thereof) for health care. Virginia's attitude (and perhaps the attitude of early 20th century English culture) is not a mystery to Vanessa—she is very aware of what her sister would prefer and, consequently, feels supremely guilty for turning to doctors, nurses, or family friends for help during her sister's episodes:

“Virginia's vitriol towards me during her terrible breakdown last year was more than I could manage, but I still regret packing her off to Violet. I know Violet's big-bodied reassurance sets Virginia on her feet while my frantic flapping knock her flat, but to think of that time makes me twist in discomfort. Remembering how I palmed her off like a library book, or a fish, unhooked and thrown back into the lake. I was relieved to be unburdened of Virginia and able to get on with the business of moving into the new house—horrible of me” (49).

This is a guilt that our culture continues to perpetuate: it is your personal, private responsibility to deal with your family's non-normative illnesses, and any failure on your part to do so is demanding an act of charity from the government or community—support of that kind is certainly not a “right.”

In connection with Virginia's illness, then, *Vanessa and Her Sister* contains some degree of contemporary, neoliberal appropriation. Woolf's life, as in *The Hours*, is fictionalized and shaped, slightly, to more closely fit today's attitudes. Yet, for the most part, Parmar's novel reflects the respect she clearly feels for the Bloomsbury group, for Vanessa Bell's art, sexuality, and take on marriage as an institution, and, in some sense, for the truth that Virginia Woolf was a real person who lived and breathed; a person who, though clearly a genius, was far from myth.

Parmar does not conflate Woolf with Clarissa Dalloway as Cunningham does, nor does she inflate minor themes or plot points from Woolf's fiction to suit modern-day social issues or attitudes like both Cunningham and Lippenscott. The result is a novel far more in line with feminist concerns. Unlike *The Hours* or *Mr. Dalloway*, hers is story that deviates, mostly, from the dominant, capitalist, libertarian, hetero/homonormative narrative found in United States culture and politics today.

Chapter Two

Becoming Janeites:

Contemporary Approaches to Austen's Themes and Characters

Jane Austen is certainly a more visible pop culture icon than Virginia Woolf; she is everywhere, and has been everywhere since the 1990s, when “Austenmania,” as many scholars and journalists have called it, truly began. Suzanne R. Pucci and James Thompson capture the breadth of Austen's recent popularity in the opening paragraph to their book *Jane Austen and Co.: Remaking the Past in Contemporary Culture*:

Jane Austen's books have never been out of print, so it seems strange to speak of an Austen revival. Nevertheless, [...] ‘Austenmania’ has produced a virtual industry flourishing widely in the United States and England, [spawning film and television] adaptations of this author's work, and over one hundred continuations, rewritings, and sequels of Austen's now almost two-hundred-year-old novels. This is phenomenon [...] spreads from Hollywood to movie theaters, television, bookstores, boutiques, and onto the internet—from *Clueless* [...] to the cross-marketing of such tie-ins as *Clueless* and *Pride and Prejudice* dolls, music to read Austen by, and organized tours of Jane Austen's England (1).

When Thompson and Pucci wrote their book, the 1990s were drawing to a close and the continued popularity of all things Austen in the opening years of the new millennium was by no means certain. Yet since their book's publication in 2003, at least a dozen more film or television adaptations have been made specifically of Austen's writing, let alone those books or movies that merely reference or pay homage to her characters or life. Though the mania has perhaps maintained less media attention than it did in the mid-1990s, Austen as pop cultural icon and inspiration is alive and well in 2015 United States and England. Vlog editions of *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma*, and *Mansfield Park* have appeared on YouTube from 2012 to the present day, entitled

The Lizzie Bennet Diaries, *Emma Approved*, and *From Mansfield with Love*, respectively, and the detective novel spin-off of *Pride and Prejudice* titled *Death Comes to Pemberley*—by P.D. James—has been adapted as a BBC miniseries with great critical success.

Twin pillars support the foundation and continued strength of this mania: Colin Firth and the internet. Deborah Yaffe, in the introduction to her entertaining *Among the Janeites*, traces the beginnings of her love of Austen and identifies the moment when many others' love for her and her novels began: "In July 1976, [Austen] had been dead for exactly 159 years [...] but she was not yet the global brand she would become. Nearly twenty years would have to go by before Austenmania's Big Bang—the shot of a wet white shirt clinging to the chest of the British actor Colin Firth, in the BBC's 1995 production of *Pride and Prejudice*" (xiii). This miniseries, adapted by Andrew Davies, was massively successful; "between 9 and 10 million British viewers watched the last episode [...] (out of 47 million, which is an implausible 21 percent) and 'the three part series earned A&E its highest rating ever when it aired [in the U.S.] in January'" (Thompson 14). Critics, too, raved about the show, and it won both BAFTA and Emmy awards, something not necessarily expected of a relatively buttoned-up (wet white shirt notwithstanding) adaptation of a 19th century novel. As Virginia L. Blum explains in "The Return to Repression: Filming the Nineteenth Century,"

the fact that the two principals?—Jennifer Ehle and Colin Firth—of the BBC production [...] had an affair during the filming is an essential part of the story of our reception of this particular Austen adaptation that led to a phenomenon known as 'Darcymania' among British and North American women. Women loved him [...] Unlike a lot of male heroes, he was a mystery. He was in no way a feminized wimp. Late in the day, burning with passion and unfulfilled sexual desire, he jumped off his horse into a pond and emerged, his shirt dripping [...] this was a superb antidote to the dull, whining, noncommittal 'New Man of the 1990s'—and he did not drink lager and go on about football all the time" (165).

So it was not merely that Elizabeth Bennet's story fascinated viewers, or that Andrew Davies' adaptation brought new energy to her famous novel that sent Austen skyrocketing into the American and British pop culture stratosphere—it was also sex and fame. As in the film adaptation of *The Hours*, the star power of Firth and Ehle's private lives underscored the star power of Lizzie and Darcy and, as was also the case in *The Hours* as compared to *Mrs. Dalloway*, the more overt sexuality (or, at least, the more visually apparent sexuality) drew contemporary viewers in to watch brooding Firth week after week. Regardless of the hype, Davies' adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* is fairly faithful to the novel, at least as compared to other adaptations, and so it would be unfair to characterize the miniseries as being slave only to money or to ratings or to modern ideas about sex. The fact that it *is* a miniseries is part of what made its loyalty to Austen's work possible. Without the time allowed in six one-hour installments it is difficult for filmmakers to do justice to almost any novel, let alone one with Austen's level of detail. Nevertheless, Davies' work—and Firth's work within it—served, as Yaffe so pithily put it, as “Austenmania's Big Bang,” and as a result not only did numerous other Austen adaptations hit theaters and bookstores, but so too did a multitude of specifically Darcy and Lizzie Bennet related stories. *Pride and Prejudice*, the story, has experienced the same, if not a greater, level of popularity as the rest of Austen's work combined. Indeed, one particular positive result of the BBC miniseries' massive success is that, according to Thompson, “during the broadcast of [the] adaptation, sales of *Pride and Prejudice* [the novel] hit 35,000 copies a week according to the *New York Times*” (14).

Austenmania is, at the very least, bringing more and more readers to Austen's wonderful novels, though it is important to consider how these multitudes of adaptations and spin-offs might be shaping readers' understanding and interpretation of these source texts. *Pride and Prejudice*, in particular, seems to be at risk for more and more contemporized reinterpretation the more the story itself is retold in the entertainment industry. The love of Darcy does not stop with Firth. Less than ten years after the BBC miniseries, a full-length, A-list Hollywood film adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* hit theaters in the United States and Great Britain, this time starring names like Kiera Knightley, Judi Dench, and Matthew Macfadyen. This was the first full-length film of Darcy and Elizabeth's story since the 1940 version starring Laurence Olivier. Anticipation was high amongst Janeites leading up to the making of the film, and unfortunately its release brought mixed reviews from fans, in part because it deviated more from the novel than the BBC version did. Still, the 2005 *Pride and Prejudice* did fairly well critically and was a massive commercial success (it grossed over \$121 million). Because of this and my generation's relationship with the film and its impact on more recent Austen adaptations (the BBC miniseries is now twenty years old), it will serve as the foundation for this chapter's discussion about contemporary ideas about *Pride and Prejudice*, Lizzie Bennet, and Jane Austen herself.

Joe Wright's adaptation of the Bennets' story is rooted in one thing: beauty, both in nature and in people. The characters are all essentially good (with the exception of people like Lady Catherine de Bourgh and Wickham) and care for one another deep down—something that could arguably not be said for all the characters in Austen's novel. The visuals in the film, too, are beauty-centered, particularly because Wright includes so many shots of some of the most beautiful landscapes in England. The film starts with nature: it's early morning, there is a foggy field

and chirping birds, and then, gradually, a peaceful piano melody swells until we see Lizzie Bennet, engrossed in a book, walking through the dewy grass. This Lizzie is clearly an outdoorsy one—as is the case in Austen’s novel, yes, but here she is even more so. Her home, for instance, is a far cry from the one in the BBC adaptation. In that series, Longbourn was tidy, crisply painted, and surrounded by a spare lawn and small garden. In Wright’s film, Longbourn is muddy; there are pigs snorting all around the perimeter and servants beating laundry hanging from lines. Through all this Lizzie walks, oblivious, as unsurprised by pig droppings as a farm girl. Later, Lizzie dashes through the pouring rain to part of Rosings Park (when Darcy first proposes) and at the end of the film, when she and Mr. Darcy reconcile after the rude visit from Lady Catherine, they meet in a field at dawn, both shivering, both soaked by fog and dew. London never appears despite both Jane and Lizzie’s temporary stay there. The effect of this all is comforting in a natural sort of way. The entire film feels almost like a dreamscape, like a sort of Middle Earth of lovely hills and cliffs and fields, a place much like the Shire where everyone is cozy and welcome and in tune with their environmental surroundings.

The naturalness of the settings goes hand in hand with a sort of naturalness in the characters; sexuality, physicality, and emotions are all bobbing on the surface of the entire film, despite its somewhat more restrained (and thus more lighthearted—meaning humorous and witty, not, by any means, fluffy) source text. Lizzie’s parents, for instance, poke and pull at each other in a way that feels more flirty than irritable, which is quite a departure from Austen’s characterization. In the novel, Mr. and Mrs. Bennet do not get along very well at all, and most of Mr. Bennet’s resistance to Mrs. Bennet’s nagging seems rooted more in detached rather than fond amusement—even in slight cruelty—than in flirtatiousness or teasing. Austen presents this comedically, of

course, but it does not seem a like pleasant marriage nevertheless, and her first representation of them as individuals and as a couple is not flattering:

Mr. Bennet was so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humor, reserve, and caprice 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. The business of her life was to get her daughters married; its solace was visiting and news (3).

In the novel, Mrs. Bennet is not a nagging but essentially warmhearted mother and wife, but rather is a woman with little taste or propriety who is spoiled and irrational. This is certainly not how Brenda Blethyn plays the role in Wright's film, nor does Donald Sutherland, as Mr. Bennet, seem anything but slightly exasperated with his wife. He teases her about Mr. Bingley, for instance, but in a kind way. Later in the film, after Mr. Bingley has proposed to Jane, Wright includes a scene where Mr. and Mrs. Bennet are lying in bed, talking quietly about how happy Jane will be; it ends with Mr. Bennet laughing softly at his wife's excitement and looking at her lovingly. It is difficult—almost impossible—to imagine the Mr. Bennet of Austen's novel genuinely laughing at anything his wife would say, let alone him snuggling and having an intimate conversation with her (though it is difficult to imagine the marital bedroom making any sort of appearance at all in Austen's world).

Sexuality in Joe Wright's *Pride and Prejudice* is certainly not limited to Mr. and Mrs. Bennet. The relationships between Darcy and Elizabeth, Jane and Bingley, Wickham and Elizabeth, and even between Lydia and Wickham, have moments of clear physical/sexual attraction. When Wickham first meets the Bennet girls he accompanies them ribbon shopping and, while flirting with Lizzie, turns to Lydia and pulls a coin from behind her ear. He does it slowly, gal-

lantly, and she both beams at him and silently turns away to make her purchase. It is a useful moment; it establishes Wickham's view of Lydia as someone silly and in need of shushing, Lydia's own willingness to *be* the silly sister (so long as she gets attention from officers), and, more significantly, Wickham's readiness and propensity towards ignoring potential flaws or problems with a woman for personal gain. Lydia irritates him, but he still flirts with her because the action could eventually benefit him—or perhaps simply because he is a flirt. What's particularly unsettling about this moment is the knowledge that they eventually run off together. What could be interpreted as a sweet, adult-to-child interaction (finding coins behind children's ears is the sort of thing fun uncles and generous grandparents do) becomes oddly sexual and sinister in the context of these characters' story arcs.

Darcy and Elizabeth, too, have small erotic moments like these in the 2005 film, though none so potentially disturbing. Their moments—given that they are the main protagonists—are highlighted to the point of almost excess. In one dance scene (when Lizzie tries to confront Darcy about his treatment of Wickham) they have a clearly hormone-charged argument that ends with some fancy video editing where the rest of the company completely disappears, giving the impression that the couple literally only has eyes for each other. At an earlier point in the film, Darcy guides Elizabeth into a carriage and she is visibly struck by the unusual nature of this gesture (coming from him). He, too, is struck by the sensation of her bare hand in his—as he walks away the camera shows his hand slightly twitch (something that actually occurs during a few different scenes, always following a flirtatious interaction with Lizzie). Both the first proposal scene and final reconciliation are also dripping with sexual tension. In the first, Lizzie and Darcy yell at each other in the rain and just barely turn away from an almost-kiss, and in the second,

described above, both seek each other in fields at dawn. Physicality plays a huge role in this particular scene. Whereas in the BBC version Darcy and Lizzie have a simple conversation while walking down a country road (in broad daylight, and with others nearby), in Wright's film the couple are alone, wet, and suffering from insomnia—Lizzie grabs Darcy's hands and says, instead of anything else, "your hands are cold," and Darcy, in response, leans forward so that their foreheads touch, the rising sun glinting between them.

The naturalness of Wright's film is apparent not only in the landscape and characters' (admittedly muted) acknowledgement of their sexuality, but also in the bluntness of many of the characters' relationships. Again, Mr. and Mrs. Bennet's interactions seem based more in flirtatiousness than in actual irritation, and so too does Lizzie and Jane's frustration with and responses to their mother and younger sisters seem rooted not so much in actual disgust or resentment of their mother's vulgarity, but rather in a sort of amused embarrassment. Throughout the film, Lizzie makes small jokes at the expense of her mother—always with a smile or a knowing look directed to her father. With the exception of the conversation she has with her father about the folly of allowing Lydia to accompany Colonel and Mrs. Forster to Brighton, these moments of teasing never seem anything but friendly. She and Jane do occasionally attempt to interrupt some of Mrs. Bennet's more embarrassing social moments, but even then it seems to be arising more out of modesty (this occurs while their mother is complimenting their beauty) than out of mortification. This actually differs notably from the relationships—at least between Lizzie specifically and her mother and sisters—as they are presented in Austen's novel. After receiving the letter from Mr. Darcy which explains his treatment of Wickham and his motivation behind separating Mr. Bingley and Jane, Lizzie (of the novel) reflects:

In her own past behavior, there was a constant source of vexation and regret; and in the unhappy defects of her family a subject of yet heavier chagrin. They were hopeless of remedy. Her father, contented with laughing at them, would never exert himself to restrain the wild giddiness of his youngest daughters; and her mother, with manner so far from right herself, was entirely insensible of the evil. Elizabeth had frequently united with Jane in an endeavor to check the imprudence of Catherine and Lydia; but while they were supported by their mother's indulgence, what chance could their be of improvement? (140).

These are not the words of a slightly miffed-yet-indulgent sibling and daughter. Clearly Elizabeth has been struggling against the behavior of her mother and sisters for the majority of her life with little help from her father, or anyone besides Jane. Their silliness, their impropriety, their shameless fascination with officers and money—all of these things weigh on Lizzie, make her feel (frustratingly) helpless in the face of scrutiny from people like Mr. Darcy. She recognizes her own merit, and certainly that of her sister Jane, but understands that familial connections often speak louder than individual attributes in her world of advantageous marriages.

By choosing not to highlight novel-Lizzie's true feelings towards much of her family and instead constructing those relationships as being rooted in mutual respect or love, Joe Wright adds yet another brushstroke to the alluring landscape of the Bennet's world that he is attempting to create. The universe of the 2005 *Pride and Prejudice* is beautiful in both land and people. It is a place with rain-soaked gazebos and passionate fights, and with families who good-naturedly tease one another but remain loyal to the last in the event of turmoil (in the novel this is also the case, but not so much because of affection, as seems to be the case in the film, but rather because of a shared fear of ruin). Many of my acquaintance of who criticize the film call it a "Brontë-fied" version of Austen, and there can be no doubt that the foggy, gloomy fields and the brooding Matthew MacFayden-as-Darcy feels more fitted to *Jane Eyre* than to *Pride and Prejudice*, but it

also is apparent that the makers of the 2005 film attempted to retain some degree of the humor, pleasantness, and bright charm of Austen's novel—though often at the expense of loyalty to the original story and characters.

The consequences of the changes made to Elizabeth Bennet's story and character in the Kiera Knightley version of *Pride and Prejudice* are most obvious when comparing it to the 2007 “autobiographical” film *Becoming Jane*. Julian Jerrold's film focuses on Jane Austen's life during the period between 1795 and 1796 and attempts to capture the flirtation between her and Irishman Tom Lefroy, implying that it was this failed romance that inspired “First Impressions,” later edited and titled *Pride and Prejudice*. The impact and seriousness of this real life flirtation is uncertain, and the entire film is built on the conjecture that Austen and Lefroy are in love—so much so they attempt to run away together—rather than merely having a good time and livening up country dances by paying particular attention to each other. It would be impossible to say for sure which was the case, but Austen's letters to her sister Cassandra do little to support the claim that she was passionately in love with Lefroy:

You scold me so much in the nice long letter which I have this moment received from you, that I am almost afraid to tell you how my Irish friend and I behaved. Imagine to yourself everything most profligate and shocking in the way of dancing and sitting down together. I can expose myself however, only once more, because he leaves the country soon after next Friday, on which day we are to have a dance at Ashe after all. He is a very gentlemanlike, good-looking, pleasant young man, I assure you. But as to our having ever met, except at the three last balls, I cannot say much; for he is so excessively laughed at about me at Ashe, that he is ashamed of coming to Steventon, and ran away when we called on Mrs. Lefroy a few days ago (Jan. 9. 1786).

Here Austen seems giddy and proud in the way that any would be after being the belle of the ball in the eyes of an attractive, “pleasant” young man. She seems intent on bragging slightly to her sister, and humorously exaggerating what she and Lefroy must have looked like to everyone

else (“imagine to yourself everything most profligate and shocking...”), but not necessarily love-struck. She seems gratified, yes, by his attention and by their shared love of fun and absurdity, but there is no evidence in this passage that she was pining for him or, more significantly, that he made anything near to the same impression on her that Mr. Darcy does on Elizabeth Bennet. This interpretation becomes even more plausible when considering the thoughts Austen shares with Cassandra as Lefroy is about to leave Stevenson:

Tell Mary that I make over Mr. Heartley and all his estate to her for her sole use and benefit in future, and not only him, but all my other admirers into the bargain wherever she can find them, even the kiss which C. Powlett wanted to give me, as I mean to confine myself in future to Mr. Tom Lefroy, for whom I don't care sixpence [...] *Friday*. — At length the day is come on which I am to flirt my last with Tom Lefroy, and when you receive this it will be over. My tears flow as I write at the melancholy idea (January 6, 1796).

Given the context of these statements—they appear in a letter that discusses letter-writing, calling on friends, the weather, or cousins and their children—neither seem to have particular importance. Mr. Lefroy’s attentions seem more like a game or joke to Austen than a serious attempt to gain her affection or hand; “my tears flow” feels particularly sarcastic given its placement one line before the semi-snarky “Wm. Chute called here yesterday. I wonder what he means by being so civil” (January 16, 1786). In short, choosing to construct a “biographical” film that builds the inspiration for one of the most famous novels in English literature on this foundation—that is, on the notion that a man mentioned only six times in all of Austen’s surviving (and admittedly censored) letters must have been her personal Mr. Darcy—is questionable at best.

Yet what makes *Becoming Jane* particularly problematic is the ways it conflates Austen’s life, friends, and family with the characters from her novel. Jarrold’s film begins almost exactly as *Pride and Prejudice* (both novel and film) does. Thomas Lefroy, a young man related to a res-

ident of Stevenson arrives for a prolonged stay in the country and interacts with the local families, including Austen's. In *Pride and Prejudice* it is Mr. Bingley and then eventually Darcy as well who interacts with the Bennets (particularly with Lizzie and Jane Bennet). Both Lefroy and Darcy are arrogant and consider themselves much superior to their country surroundings (both refuse to ask women to dance during balls despite there being a lack of men available) and both make scathing remarks about the heroines of their story within the first ten minutes of meeting them. Darcy, in response to Bingley's suggestion that he dance with Lizzie, replies, "she is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt me; and I am in no humour at present to give consequence to young ladies who are slighted by other men," and Lefroy, nearly falling asleep during a reading Austen gives to family and friends, comments to himself, "Good God. There's writing on both sides of those pages" and later to his friend that her writing is "accomplished enough, but juvenile" (Austen 9, *Becoming Jane*). Neither couple, then, gets off to a good start and, as is typical *Pride and Prejudice's* genre, they only acknowledge their mutual feelings after a series of arguments, pointed actions and looks, misunderstandings, and jealous conversations. In the interim period, both heroines (Bennet and Austen) are proposed to by very socially awkward, boring men, who differ only in that in *Pride and Prejudice* this man is a humble pastor whereas in *Becoming Jane* he is the nephew of the extremely wealthy Lady Gresham. This aunt mirrors in both her personality and her eventual aversion to Austen the character Lady Catherine de Bourgh, who finds endless fault with Lizzie Bennet. Eventually Darcy and Bennet and Lefroy and Austen fall in love, despite Darcy and Lefroy's benefactors' objection—Lefroy's uncle objects to Austen's financial status in a manner that directly corresponds to Lady Catherine de Bourgh's (Darcy's aunt) reaction to rumors that Darcy might be engaged to Lizzie in *Pride and Prejudice*.

But where Darcy and Lizzie Bennet eventually overcome these obstacles and marry, Austen and Lefroy must live apart. Though they attempt to run away despite Lefroy's uncle's opposition and despite Austen's acceptance of Lady Gresham's nephew, Austen ultimately decides it would be wrong to cut Lefroy off from his benefactor and thus deprive his immediate family of his support (of which they are desperately in need). It is clear that Jarrold and the makers of *Becoming Jane* intended to give audiences the impression that *Pride and Prejudice* was the direct result of this experience: because her real-life romance was doomed, Austen spent her career writing stories in which her often relatively penniless (as *Becoming Jane* frequently reminds viewers Austen herself is) heroines found great happiness with loving, *wealthy* men. This connection between her life and *Pride and Prejudice* is made explicit in Jarrold's film. She begins writing the draft to "First Impressions" in a fit of inspiration while staying with Lefroy's uncle. The writing itself is conveyed as an attempt to remedy Austen's strong feelings of repressed sexual desire; before entering her room for the night, Lefroy and Austen exchange a passionate, whispered goodnight that both very clearly would have liked to continue in privacy, and it is much later, after Austen lies awake, entangled in her nightdress, staring at the ceiling that she jumps from her bed and agitatedly begins the story of Mr. Darcy and Lizzie Bennet. Moreover, at the end of the film, which takes place twenty years after the main narrative, Austen reads from the published *Pride and Prejudice* after seeing Lefroy for the first time since they tried to run away and learning that he has named his daughter "Jane." Just like Cunningham's version of Virginia Woolf, the lines of Jarrold's Austen are blurred: Austen's life seems framed by her fictional characters and world—she herself seems lost in the even-more-famous and more romantically interesting Lizzie Bennet.

Part of what makes this feeling possible in *Becoming Jane* is its relationship with Joe Wright's *Pride and Prejudice*, released only two years before Jarrold's film. Many of the specific *Pride and Prejudice* moments that are alluded to or even mimicked in *Becoming Jane* are more closely related to the film starring Kiera Knightley than to the novel (with the exception of the broad plot arc). Many scenes could be copied and pasted from Wright's film. The opening sequence, like *Pride and Prejudice*, focuses on the beauty of the English landscape before cutting to Austen sitting at her writing table writing as day breaks (mirroring Lizzie Bennet's walking and reading at dawn), all with lilting music playing in the background. Inside the house, the family is awakened by Austen's loud piano practice, just as in Wright's film the Bennet house is filled with Mary's loud and imperfect playing. When at a country dance, Austen complains that Lefroy is not dancing, despite the lack of gentlemen in the room—a line almost copied word-for-word. When they do dance, Austen instructs Lefroy on the conventions of country dances, much as Lizzie ironically or metadidactically instructs Darcy about the sort of conversation appropriate for dance partners. And, as in Wright's film, Austen and Lefroy share a meaningful slow dance, in which they clearly feel as though they are the only ones in the room.

Beyond these plot moments, much of the characterization in *Becoming Jane* imitates that of the 2005 *Pride and Prejudice*. The relationship between Reverend and Mrs. Austen, for example, mirrors that of Elizabeth's parents in the Wright film. Like Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, they are painted as often at odds but essentially in love—indeed, following the opening nature-writing-piano sequence, the first scene is a conversation between Reverend and Mrs. Austen in bed. As in the Jane-discussion between Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, this immediately establishes not only their love for each other, but their physicality and sexuality (the scene actually ends with a clear refer-

ence sexual foreplay). In this, as in a later scene when Tom Lefroy and Henry Austen sprint into the woods and strip naked for a swim (with Jane and Eliza, comtesse de Feullide, Henry's future wife, accidentally watching), we see Jarrold tipping his hat directly to Wright's film; nowhere in Austen's novels would such dialogue or events occur. The Austen's relationship to their daughter Jane, too, mimics almost exactly that between the Bennets and Elizabeth in the Knightley-*version* of the story. Reverend Austen operates as the sentimental, sweet believer in Jane's strength of character and ability to make money because of her writing and Mrs. Austen as the nagging, exhausting supporter of sensible, financially-stable marriages—both characterizations that, as explored above, stray slightly (and, in some ways, greatly) from the novel. Other characters, too, seem borrowed from Wright's film rather than Austen's novel. Lefroy's young cousin, for example, is a blend of Lydia and Kitty. She spends most of her time giggling and resorting to childish methods to get Tom's attention. Even physical appearances of certain figures seem intentionally similar: Jane's sister Cassandra is blond and sweet in the exact same sense that Jane Bennet-as-played-by-Rosamund Pike is, and Anne Hathaway is dark haired and pale skinned like Kiera Knightly. In a sense, it seems as though Jarrold is relying on the audience's connection to and understanding of Wright's characters to help shortcut character development in his own film. We do not need to know anything about Lefroy's cousin, really, beside the fact that she acts like a Lydia-Kitty mashup, just as we do not need Jane and Cassandra's relationship developed because we already know how Kiera-Knightley-Lizzie and Rosamund-Pike-Jane interact and feel. Reverend Austen is already our favorite of the parents because of his blatant similarities to Donald-Sutherland-Mr. Bennet.

The most significant overlap between *Becoming Jane* and Joe Wright's *Pride and Prejudice* is in the character of Jane Austen herself, which mimics Knightley's Lizzie Bennet in more ways than merely her relationship with her sister. As mentioned in the opening chapter of this project, the 2005 version of Lizzie Bennet is more earthy, independent, sassy, and even masculine than any before her, and *Becoming Jane*'s Jane Austen is almost identical. Where Knightley-Lizzie walks in mud and dew and sits sprawled in the roots of an ancient tree eating an apple, Hathaway-Jane plays cricket with the boys, walks constantly (and solitarily) outdoors, and runs with abandon in the woods. It is not only the influence of Knightley on Hathaway that explains this characterization of Jane as tomboyish or outdoorsy, but also, as explained in the introductory chapter of this project, their respective "star-power," as Sporer calls it in her article about the novel and film *The Hours*. As is the case with Meryl Streep, Julianne Moore, and Nicole Kidman's versions of Clarissa Vaughan, Laura Brown, and Virginia Woolf, respectively, both Knightley and Hathaway bring more to the roles of Lizzie Bennet and Jane Austen than merely their interpretation of the characters as seen on screen. Both actresses, during the era when the aforementioned films were released, were household names because of projects from the early 2000s. Knightley played the love interest of Orlando Bloom and unlikely accomplice to Johnny Depp in the massively successful *Pirates of Caribbean* trilogy, which appealed to children and adults alike, and Hathaway played the quirky, awkward (yet still gorgeous with a little makeup) granddaughter to Julie Andrews and princess in *The Princess Diaries* movies, which appealed mostly to girls and teens but was still a massive hit. Both film series were produced by Disney, both became cultural icons to the tween and teen crowds, both featured A-list names (Depp, Andrews), and both essentially skyrocketed their leading ladies to stardom.

Thus both *Pride and Prejudice* (2005) and *Becoming Jane* had built-in audiences, mostly of the teen girl variety, which perhaps is not always the case when adapting 19th century novels to the screen. More importantly, these women bring with them characteristics that shape their respective roles and, by extension, audiences' understanding of Austen's fictional character and her own life. A gender-role-challenging-yet-conventionally-beautiful, swashbuckling pirate cast as Lizzie Bennet—of course the hem of her dress will get a bit muddy. And so, too, will clumsy princess-to-be Jane Austen be a little gawky, a little boyish. Hathaway's Austen is therefore both *Princess Diaries* and 2005 Lizzie Bennet; like Knightley or Meg Cabot's character, her hair is always a little disheveled, her character is more interested in books or art than in dreamboat red-coats, her body is physically fit and more inclined to participate in male-dominated activities. In *Princess Diaries* it's rock climbing, in *Pirates of the Caribbean*—pirating; in *Pride and Prejudice* it's endless walking, until *Becoming Jane* ultimately becomes the most athletic of all, filled with walking, running, and cricket.

With all of these similarities, and with the knowledge that *Becoming Jane* was released in theaters only two years after the relatively successful (in terms of box office and critical reviews) *Pride and Prejudice*, it is impossible to avoid feeling as though Jarrold's film was capitalizing on what worked—or, at least, was generally well-received by audiences—in Wright's. The writers and actors in the film seemed to have the 2005 version of *Pride and Prejudice* in mind. The costumes, the music, the sets, the dialogue, the characters, even the hair—all seem to have stepped out of Joe Wright's vision of post French-revolution England. And so Jarrold's "biography" unfortunately has potential consequences that go beyond it blatantly imitating a better film and not being a very good movie in general. It targeted a specific audience when it was released in the-

aters—a blended group of *Princess Diaries* tweens and general newcomers to Austen, fresh from their first look into a Knightley-framed Lizzie Bennet—that, in all likelihood, then approached Austen’s books with a particular distinct impression in mind: that is, that Austen, who is really just Elizabeth Bennet, had a failed love affair and thus her books are her way of writing her own happy ending, her own way of dealing with being unmarried.

Becoming Jane is not the only film or text that makes, consciously or not, this argument, nor is it the only one that uses *Pride and Prejudice* as its foundational text for this claim. Helen Fielding’s *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, for instance, also conflates Austen with Lizzie Bennet, though in a far more subtle and less intellectualized way. In Fielding’s novel—which, incidentally, was adapted to film in 2001 and featured Colin Firth once again as the Darcy character—Bridget Jones is the central character, and is likely meant to be a modern-day, satirical response to the more stuffy, dignified Elizabeth Bennet. Bridget meets a wealthy and single Mr. Mark Darcy early in the story and has a less-than-satisfactory initial interaction with him, and has a relationship with Daniel Cleaver—her hot, charming, and manipulative boss—who turns out to be a Wickham-like character from Darcy’s past life. Later in the novel, Bridget learns that Cleaver slept with Mark’s ex-wife (before she was an “ex”), and thus Cleaver is dishonored in the same way that Wickham, who attempted to elope with Fitzwilliam Darcy’s sister Georgiana, is in Austen’s novel. Not only the men in Bridget’s life mimic that of Lizzie Bennet’s. Bridget’s mother, for example, is embarrassingly attempting to relive her youth and, even more Mrs. Bennet-like, is gossiping about Bridget’s love life (or lack thereof) all over town.

The Bridget version of Lizzie Bennet, though, is certainly distinct from the Austen original; though her life in the novel has many parallels with *Pride and Prejudice*, her character

shares little with Elizabeth, beyond the fact that both are single young women with some degree of humor and family-awareness at the beginning of the novel. This Lizzie—brought into 1990s England, with all of the pop cultural connotations of that decade (*Sex and the City*, sassy Spice Girls, open relationships and complicated friendships: the decade of *Friends* and coffee shops and a hyper-awareness of modernity)—is awkward, lonely, and even a little pathetic, though usually in a comical way. Bridget’s novel begins with failed New Year’s resolutions, when she “gabbles” nervously about them during her first interaction with Mark Darcy:

But then I do think New Year’s resolutions can’t technically be expected to begin on New Year’s Day, don’t you? Since, because it’s an extension of New Year’s Eve, smokers are already on a smoking roll and cannot be expected to stop abruptly on the stroke of midnight with so much nicotine in the system. Also dieting on New Year’s Day isn’t a good idea as you can’t eat rationally but really need to be free to consume whatever is necessary, moment by moment, in order to ease your hangover (13-14).

This is a Lizzie, in other words, who can perhaps honestly be blamed for her lack of success with Mr. Darcy, because she is a bit socially nervous, neurotic, and uncouth—all in the name of relatable comedy. But it is difficult, when faced with this character who has little confidence, is man crazy, and weight-obsessed, not to feel as though Fielding’s interpretation of Elizabeth Bennet’s story has more to do with the simplified romance plot-version of *Pride and Prejudice*—a version that has since influenced a large number of chick flicks—than with personality characteristics of Austen’s heroine. This version of the novel strips most of the flavor from the plot and reduces it to a bare-bones series of events that looks something like: boy meets girl, boy and girl dislike each other, girl or boy starts falling for other character who is secretly a jerk, girl and boy meanwhile grow to begrudgingly respect each other and eventually acknowledge their mutual attraction to each other, boy and girl experience significant misunderstanding and resolve to part for-

ever, boy and girl cannot live apart and learn they were wrong to jump to conclusions about the other, and, finally, boy and girl dramatically declare their love for one another and live happily ever after.

Bridget Jones's Diary, then, despite some overlap in plot and characterization with *Pride and Prejudice*, seems to follow more in the tradition of nearly every romantic comedy from the last thirty years than that of Austen's novels, which explains Bridget Jones' characterization as a somewhat ditzy, clumsy, childish, lovable, thirty-something-single woman (her character is hardly distinguishable from Meg Cabot's Mia Thermopolis in *The Princess Diaries*, for example, which harkens back to Anne Hathaway's star power in *Becoming Jane*). This is not to say that Fielding's novel and the film adaptation thereof do not explicitly acknowledge ways they mirror the Bennets' plot. Moreover, some of these references/acknowledgements to their source text are potentially problematic. In other words, *Bridget Jones's Diary* is not only connected to *Pride and Prejudice* because of the similarities discussed in the above paragraph; Fielding also very clearly references Austen's work and the Colin Firth BBC adaptation throughout her novel. Much of Bridget Jones's story takes place during the months when BBC's *Pride and Prejudice* was airing in Britain, and so at various points Bridget references the real-life romance between Firth and Jennifer Ehle (Lizzie Bennet), the sensuality of Firth-as-Darcy, and the nation's general obsession with the mini-series. Towards the end of the novel, Fielding (using Bridget's voice) analyzes England's interest in the show so as to somewhat obviously draw a parallel between Bridget Jones's life and Lizzie Bennet's and, more importantly from a marketing standpoint, to establish the relationship between Lizzie Bennet's/Bridget Jones's life and that of the readers/viewers:

Hard to believe there are so many cars out on the roads. Shouldn't they be at home getting ready [for BBC *Pride and Prejudice*]? Love the nation being so addicted [...] Tom says football guru Nick Hornby says in his book that men's obsession with football is not vicarious. The testosterone-crazed fans do not wish themselves on the pitch [...] instead seeing their team as their chosen representatives [...] That is precisely my feeling about Darcy and Elizabeth. They are my chosen representatives in the field of shagging, or, rather, courtship. I do not, however, wish to see any actual goals. I would hate to see Darcy and Elizabeth in bed, smoking a cigarette afterwards (215).

Pride and Prejudice, in other words, provides the foundation for and confirmation of Bridget Jones's own life/romantic experiences, which in turn serve as a kind of guide or goal for audiences of this story. Because BBC's version of Austen's story has credibility for lovers of Austen or romance or heritage films or chick flicks, Fielding's use of the miniseries as both backdrop and inspiration for Bridget's story helps legitimize her novel, and also provides it with a built-in audience. The fact of this built-in audience and its relationship to Lizzie/Bridget's story is itself a potential issue from a feminist standpoint: that is, it confirms/forwards an understanding of Lizzie Bennet that is rooted in her courtship experience rather than in her (or any of the other characters from *Pride and Prejudice*) wit or personality. Moreover, it uses her influence and hero-status (both in the form of Elizabeth Ehle and in Bridget Jones/Renee Zellweger) to promote lifestyles and life choices that do not necessarily promote the welfare or equality of women within society.

This is often the problem with chick flicks, fun as they certainly are to watch and read, and so it would perhaps be unfair to Fielding's novel and its film version to hold it to the same standards as BBC's adaptation of Austen's novel, Joe Wright's film, and *Becoming Jane*. Yet though *Bridget Jones's Diary* does not do so nearly as explicitly as *Becoming Jane*, it is clear that the character of Lizzie Bennet and that of Jane Austen have been somewhat conflated in Field-

ing's novel. Jane Austen, writer, created the world of the Bennets and Wickham and Darcy, and in Fielding's work we see a Lizzie Bennet spin-off operate as both protagonist, as in *Pride and Prejudice*, and as writer, as in *Becoming Jane*. Bridget's life—which mirrors Lizzie's—is also the material she writes about. *Bridget Jones* implicitly argues, then, that the story of Elizabeth is as true to real life as Bridget's is to her own experiences. Just as Jarrold's film explicitly makes the claim that "First Impressions" arose directly from Austen's experience, in short, so too does Fielding make that claim about Bridget Jones—which in turn, whether consciously or not, makes a particular claim about Austen herself. Once again, then, contemporary pastiches of Austen's work, as was the case in Michael Cunningham's reworking of *Mrs. Dalloway*, confuse author with character. Moreover, in this particular case and in the film *Becoming Jane*, Austen's genius seems to be understood as a product of her personal experience with courtship. As mentioned above, the general consensus amongst many of these writers and film directors seems to be that Austen, as an unmarried woman, must have been so upset about it that she needed to work through those feelings in her fictional writings.

Yet what we know about Austen's life shows this to be an unlikely claim. In the first place, Austen was given at least two concrete opportunities to marry: the first about a year after Lefroy left Stevenson, when Mrs. Lefroy (Thomas' aunt) attempted to tempt Austen with a Reverend Samuel Blackhall, and the second from Harris Bigg-Wither, the rich younger brother of some of her neighborhood friends. In the first situation, Austen was not interested, and in the second, interestingly, she accepted Bigg-Wither's proposal only to retract it the next day. In addition to these proposals, Austen was known to have had a brief flirtation with Lefroy and, more mysteriously, with a man she met at the seaside in late 1800, "who seemed to Cassandra to have

quite fallen in love with Jane; Cassandra later spoke highly of him, and thought he would have been a successful suitor. According to Caroline ‘They parted—but he made it plain he should seek them out again’; however, shortly afterwards they instead heard of his death” (Roberts). In short, if Austen had been seeking marriage—if it was something she felt would have made her life more complete or meaningful—she clearly had suitors more than willing to gratify her. The logical conclusion is that she did not feel as though marriage was right for her—or, at least, that marriage to any of these men was not right for her (or otherwise were impossible). Moreover, she often speaks in her letters to Cassandra of her social experiences involving men with significant humor and contentment. In one instance, for example, she recalls a ball where “there was one gentleman, an officer of the Cheshire, a very good-looking young man, who, I was told, wanted very much to be introduced to me, but as he did not want it quite enough to take much trouble in effecting it, we never could bring it about” (Jan 8 1799). These do not sound like the words of a woman desperate for male attention, but rather like someone who finds those small social absurdities prevalent at events like dances amusing and somewhat revealing in terms of human character: this man would not—could not—be the one for her. In another letter, dated nearly ten years later, Austen reflects on another event:

Our ball was rather more amusing than I expected. ... The melancholy part was, to see so many dozen young women standing by without partners, and each of them with two ugly naked shoulders! It was the same room in which we danced fifteen years ago! I thought it all over, and in spite of the shame of being so much older, felt with thankfulness that I was quite as happy now as then (Dec 9 1808).

Again, this is an Austen who seems satisfied with her life, even in a social situation that could be (depending on the atmosphere) not the most welcoming or enjoyable to a woman who would then, at age thirty three, seem quite out of place. Austen does not give the impression of being

long-suffering, or heartbroken, or bitter in these moments—neither because of a lost true love or missed opportunities at matrimony in general.

Indeed, many of Austen's letters include, rather than ignore or avoid, the topic of love and marriage, particularly in the form of love advice to her nieces, specifically to her brother Edward's daughter, Fanny. In one specific letter, dated November 18th, 1814, Austen reveals some of her beliefs about these issues:

Oh, my dear Fanny! the more I write about him, the warmer my feelings become -- the more strongly I feel the sterling worth of such a young man and the desirableness of your growing in love with him again. I recommend this most thoroughly. There *are* such beings in the world, perhaps one in a thousand, as the creature you and I should think perfection, where grace and spirit are united to worth, where the manners are equal to the heart and understanding, but such a person may not come in your way, or, if he does, he may not be the eldest son of a man of fortune, the near relation of your particular friend and belonging to your own county (Nov 1814).

Austen is encouraging reason in her niece; she sees the value in her's nieces suitor Mr. A and knows that, though he may not inspire an all-consuming passion based on his money, appearance, or manner, he is a good person worthy of "growing in love with [...] again." This kind of level-headed appreciation for the true merit of a man is often celebrated in her novels, as is making the kinds of decisions that Austen is encouraging Fanny to do here (*choose* to see his value: decide to marry a man who wears flannel waistcoats like Colonel Brandon because he is good, kind, and generous, rather than a man wearing a red coat merely because of his charm). But this truth is often buried under the fan culture's focus on the more romantic features of her male heroes, as can be seen with Darcy who is an "eldest son of a man of fortune" and who is often portrayed as possessing brooding, sex appeal. The "pop" Darcy is characterized by some features at the expense of others, such as his clear tendencies for respect and loyalty and eventually empa-

thy, all of which are major contributors to his worthiness as a potential husband for Elizabeth Bennet.

Once again, then, Austen reveals in this passage her clear-headed perspective on marriage and on the realities of men, and she does so here, as she does in her novels, without having been married—Austen did not need marriage to spur her genius, nor did she feel compelled to provide her characters with a fictional happy ending because she (or her niece) could not have one themselves. It is important to note, though, another passage from this letter to Fanny, in which Austen (who is clearly using this letter as an opportunity to muse about her opinions regarding her niece's dilemma, rather actually provide concrete advice) adds a critical footnote to her above statements regarding Mr. A's worth:

And now, my dear Fanny, having written so much on one side of the question, I shall turn round and entreat you not to commit yourself farther, and not to think of accepting him unless you really do like him. Anything is to be preferred or endured rather than marrying without affection; and if his deficiencies of manner, &c. &c., strike you more than all his good qualities, if you continue to think strongly of them, give him up at once (November 18, 1814).

Austen makes herself clear: affection is necessary, critical, foundational to marriage—money or security is not enough to justify it (Lizzie Bennet's reaction to Charlotte Lucas makes this clear). But, it seems safe to say, not the sort of (charmed, even lustful) affection that Marianne feels for the unworthy Willoughby, or that Lizzie briefly entertains for the deceitful Wickham. Those are clear-cut mistakes, but so, too, are marriages that would hurt those close to the couple, or cause their family scandal, or that would otherwise be inappropriate. Elinor, for example, cannot and would not marry Edward so long as he continued to be engaged to Lucy Steele, even if secretly (nor would he marry Elinor, despite his love for her instead of Lucy). Affection is necessary, it seems Austen would say, but not sufficient for a strong marriage. All this Jarrold seems to be trying to convey in the "biography" of Austen's life in *Becoming Jane*: she fell in love with some-

one whose “grace and spirit [was] united to worth, [and] manners are equal to the heart and understanding,” but outside factors—family, money—prevented it, and thus the seed of her writing career was planted. Yet this interpretation of her life and its relationship to her writing is undermined by the same things that support it: as seen above, Austen’s perspective on marriage and on the process of falling in love, though perhaps part of what fueled her interest in writing about related topics, is clearly an insightful and nuanced one that *could not* have been cleaned from direct personal experience. Even if the man she met by the sea had survived, even if Lefroy had loved her and whisked her off to elope, it is evident from Austen’s advice to Fanny and from her other observations in letters to her sister Cassandra that Austen was *not* her characters, that she was *not* trying to give herself an elusive happy ending, but rather that she enjoyed writing and thinking about people and their relationships and, more importantly, was extremely good at it.

As is the case with *The Hours*, though, the issues with a film like *Becoming Jane* go beyond its representation of Austen, even if that representation supports stereotypical and patriarchal divides between men and women. As with Cunningham’s novel, these versions of *Pride and Prejudice* and of Austen’s life confirm and promote oppressive neoliberal cultural ideology. From a gender standpoint, the most obvious way this happens in these films and books is in the characterization of Lizzie Bennet/Jane herself. As explored above, the Lizzie Bennet of *Pride and Prejudice* and the Austen of *Becoming Jane* are earthy, sassy, confident women who are willing to be different from the norm yet also conveniently align with most norms regarding beauty or talent. In *Bridget Jones*, the Lizzie equivalent is certainly sassy and modern, though perhaps not quite as confident, but she without a doubt is hilarious, and could easily be perceived as a sort of relatable role model for the modern British single woman, just as the relatable, 21st century-like Knightley-Lizzie or Hathaway-Austen might be a role model for British or American teen girls

or women in their twenties. These spunky Lizzie Bennets convey girl-power and female independence and may seem 2015 feminist-friendly, but that is not quite true, especially given the political/cultural climate of today which is pushing a particular form of conservatism that is dangerous for the interests of women. There are many things about Elizabeth Bennet that make her an admirable character and a plausible hero for young women. For example, she knows her own mind and is unwilling to allow societal expectations for women or class to intimidate or shape her (as when she discusses governesses and coming out with Lady Catherine), and she is unwilling to either compromise her integrity and accept the proposal of a man she does not respect or allow him to continue to hold out hope that she will marry him: ““Upon my word, sir,’ cried Elizabeth, ‘your hope is a rather extraordinary one after my declaration. I do assure you that I am not one of those young ladies (if such young ladies there are) who are so daring as to risk their happiness on the chance of being asked a second time. I am perfectly serious in my refusal”” (Austen 73). Indeed, the marriage proposal from Mr. Collins and their subsequent conversation has been applauded by contemporary feminists not only because Elizabeth handled the situation exceptionally well, but also because Austen reveals in the scene a very real (and sadly both historical and contemporary) reality about many men’s understanding of when a woman is legitimately saying “no.” A blurb from *The Atlantic* made a small social media splash in the fall of 2014, because staff writer Conor Friedersdorf noticed a connection between this scene and recent events that have received a lot of attention in the news:

Two centuries ago, Jane Austen published a passage in her masterpiece *Pride and Prejudice* that fits almost seamlessly into the ongoing debate about sexual culture, consent, women saying no, and men who proceed as if they don't mean it, even though the context is ‘courting culture’ as opposed to ‘hookup culture.’ The scene begins when a gentleman caller, Mr. Collins, asks permission to speak alone with Elizabeth Bennet, a

request that the young woman's mother quickly grants [...] Thus begins the exchange that confounds her, for she finds that this man's expectation that women sometimes say no when they mean yes—whether arrived at due to myth, ego preservation, the behavior of some subset of women unfamiliar to Elizabeth, or the socialization of men—saps *her* of agency. She is rendered unable to reject his advances in a way that will be taken seriously (*Atlantic*, Oct 2014).

Austen, using the voice of Lizzie Bennet, gives a searing commentary on the hierarchical dynamic of men and women when it comes to issues of marriage and sex. Mr. Collins assumes that because of Lizzie's relative exceedingly modest dowry, she will have few if any offers of marriage. Moreover, he assumes marriage itself (and not love) is her end goal, and, because of his power over her (financially, socially, culturally), he *cannot* understand her “no.” Given this power dynamic, he cannot accept that she, the individual with little to no “agency,” might attempt to exert authority over her own mind and life. Sadly, as Friedersdorf claims, this issue is at the heart of the “ongoing debate about sexual culture [and] consent,” a debate that exists partly because of the great number of campus sexual assaults that have received national attention. Thus Elizabeth Bennet's understanding of her self and her body/agency and her willingness to speak up in defense of these things should establish her place as a strong role model for women, even women separated from her and her culture by two hundred years.

Yet despite these useful and laudable qualities, it is hard to ignore those aspects of her character and plot that, even if masked in the star power of modern-day women like Knightley and Hathaway, promote lifestyles/choices that should be questioned, if not fundamentally altered, in a society like ours that *claims* to be progressive, equal, or free. The historical context of *Pride and Prejudice* cannot be ignored, which is something that both Joe Wright and Julien Jarrold try very hard to do for the sake of creating a relatable, marketable, “romantic” Regency-era film. It

hardly needs to be said that in Jane Austen's time and in particular amongst the classes that she portrays in her novels, a woman's power, independence, status, freedom, came almost always with marriage or with inherited money. There were a few other options, and most of them not nearly as attractive as having one's own home and family (being a governess, for example, was a possibility for women of certain classes, but few of those stories ended quite as happily as Jane Eyre's). Arguably writing for a living, which some women like Mary Wollstonecraft managed to do, was the closest thing to a career-driven life available, but the odds of successfully doing so were even slimmer then than they are today.

In other words, Mr. Darcy or indeed Mr Collins represents more to Elizabeth Bennet than merely a romantic partner. Marrying one of them meant the closest thing to independence a woman could have. This aspect of marriage is explicitly referenced in the shape of Charlotte Lucas' marriage to Mr. Collins. As Joshua Rothmans argues in a February 2013 article in *The New Yorker*,

Charlotte's been thinking about marriage for years, and she's developed for herself a code of conduct for marriage, a set of rules that recognize the reality of her situation and direct her toward a solution. Long ago, she recognized that she was trapped in a social web; rather than ignoring her predicament, she set about understanding it [...Charlotte] is too wealthy, educated, and upper-class to marry a working man [...] but too poor and average-looking to attract a truly wealthy one. She can't marry up or down—she can only marry sideways. She knows and understands all of this [...] Almost certainly, Charlotte has a finely textured idea of the future she is choosing—she's spent a long time thinking not just about her present situation but also about what the future might hold (*The New Yorker*, Feb 2013)

Austen's depiction of Mr. Collins is far from desirable; he is pompous, overbearing, and socially awkward—all high on the list of personality traits that seemed to have annoyed Austen the most. Nevertheless, his marriage to Charlotte, of which Elizabeth at first heartily disapproves (“to the

pang of a friend disgracing herself and sunk in her esteem, was added the distressing conviction that it was impossible for that friend to be tolerably happy in the lot she had chosen”), turns out to be a relative success. Charlotte enjoys being mistress of her own home, and she and Mr. Collins seem to have reached an understanding regarding each other’s space and privacy (86). It is clear, in fact, as Ruth Perry argues in “Sleeping with Mr. Collins,” that contemporary audience’s feelings about Mr. Collins are rooted more in modern ideas about sex than they are in the character as Austen presents him:

There is not the slightest whiff of sexual disgust about the matter: not from Charlotte, nor from Elizabeth, nor the narrator. However one feels about the marriage [...] the physical repugnance that we in the present century feel at the idea of sleeping with Mr. Collins is entirely absent in Jane Austen’s treatment of the matter [...] In this, as in so much else, Austen reveals her eighteenth-century sensibility because Charlotte Lucas Collins is a vestigial character, left over from an era of pragmatic rather than romantic matches (215).

Perry and Rothmans’ point is that Austen, as can be seen in both her personal writings and her novels, though clearly in favor of a marriage based in mutual affection and respect, is not unaware of or combative towards the reality that marriage was a social and economic decision, something that had as much to do with family, financial background, and career prospects, as things like romance and friendship. Sex, it seems, had little to do with it. Again, Colonel Brandon’s flannel waistcoats in *Sense and Sensibility* were ultimately less important than his loyalty and reliability. In short, Elizabeth Bennet chooses Fitzwilliam Darcy, who, though a good match for many good, applaudable, and modern reasons (he loves her and respects her, as she does him), is also a match for many political and financial reasons.

Pride and Prejudice, then, is perhaps not the ultimate guidebook for girls of 2015; it would be nice to think that marrying a wealthy gentleman who happens to have a friend move

into your parent's neighborhood is not the only option for young women today. Austen's novels follow a marriage plot—which makes sense given her time period, and which she writes better than almost anyone—yet this is something that sometimes gets buried beneath discussions of Elizabeth Bennet's independence or wittiness, particularly given the recent Lizzies discussed above. In noticing the mud caked on her skirts and her eloquent and humorous rejection of Mr. Collins, many seem to forget that, ultimately, Elizabeth will either be dependent on her sister's husband or her own; her happiness and *freedom* is dependent on men. Framing this story as “modern” (by introducing sexuality in the form of wet shirts and screaming fights in the pouring rain) and developing a sassy, contemporary Lizzies furtively aligns features of an arguably repressive and exclusive past with today's “tolerant future.” Recent adaptations and pastiches of Austen's novel, by situating Elizabeth Bennet and Jane Austen as pop cultural heroes and ignoring many realities of their historical context, re-legitimize and -normalize a hierarchical understanding of the power relationship between men and women, and confirm notions of the public and private spheres.

Featuring celebrities like Kiera Knightley, Colin Firth, or Anne Hathaway in a familiar-yet-modernized plot is not the only reason that films like *Pride and Prejudice* (2005), *Becoming Jane*, or the multitude of other Austen adaptations like *Emma* (1996) and *Sense and Sensibility* (1995) that led to the creation of spin-offs like *Bridget Jones's Diary*, have experienced such popularity and commercial success. Our culture's fascination with Austen and the world of *Pride and Prejudice* is likely rooted in something besides fame and familiarity. We, as a culture saturated with individualist ideology, desire to return to Austen's time (and, more specifically, to the somewhat romanticized version of it that she—and even more so, the film adaptations of her

work—describes). Moreover, we recognize the similarities of Austen’s culture as compared to ours; we feel its familiarity and are drawn to it as a result. Austen’s world, as it is conveyed in the aforementioned films and even in her writings, shares at least some characteristics with our neoliberal one. The wish to revisit the past, to recreate it and even attempt to *live* it is not a new concept. Films that attempt to do this are actually considered by many its own genre, usually referred to as “heritage” films. Pucci and Thompson, in their introduction to *Jane Austen and Co.*, offer a useful definition for these works and establish the foundation for their argument that there is more to this phenomenon than a mere desire to return to the past (this is a question they explore and nuance throughout their entire book—something I will not attempt to recreate here):

In the nature of a ‘heritage’ productions is an attempt to promote a sense of unbroken tradition that confirms national identity and ostensibly works to repeat, to remake the past in film or through other activities that represent a particular moment in the costume, speech, behavior, setting, or plot—in other words, a moment that has already gone by, already disappeared [...yet] all these films [like *Mansfield Park*] remake the past in the sense of making over, of shaping the past in the new fashions, styles, and desires of the present. The ‘Austen Phenomenon,’ in short, is about makeovers (2)

Adaptations of Austen’s work, then, offer a sort of cinematic playground where people can reimagine their lives and society involving muslin, wealthy landowners, and country dances. It gives audiences a window into what England once was, what it “meant” (even if the England as it appears Austen’s fictional world was not financially or socially accessible to the majority of Regency Era British citizens), and, perhaps oddly, this appeals to Americans as much and perhaps even more so than to contemporary Brits. The success of these films has led to a kind of “heritage” lifestyle, which Pucci and Thompson allude to. Yaffe explains the relationship in her chapter “Dressing the Part”:

Back in 1983, when I attending my first JASNA [Jane Austen Society of North America] conference, the Saturday night program featured a sober lecture on *Emma* delivered by a distinguished [...] scholar. No one cleared away tables after the banquet so we could promenade through English country dances in high-waisted gowns, feathered turbans, and opera-length gloves. Not until the early twenty-first century did a Regency ball, period costumes optional, become a regular feature of JASNA's AGM [Annual General Meeting] (4)

Die-hard Janeites and even casual fans of the films mentioned above, then, are drawn to this fictional world because it is *fun*, because it gives people an excuse to buy and make frivolous costumes, to learn to dance, and to daydream about a Darcy-like romance. But Thompson and Pucci are right to acknowledge that this desire is not just about revisiting, but about *remaking*, just as Yaffe is right to situate this phenomenon in the last twenty years. It is no coincidence that Kiera Knightley's Lizzie Bennet and Anne Hathaway's Jane Austen are the tomboyish, "independent" versions that they are, and likewise it is no coincidence that the plot of *Pride and Prejudice*, which, as explored above, is essentially about marriage as a romantic but primarily sociopolitical choice, is as popular as it is. It is no mistake that Austen is being conflated with her characters and subsequently reduced to the private sphere. These things, these characters, mirror aspects of today's culture in somewhat ominous ways. As discussed in the introductory chapter of this project, the world of Regency England, like neoliberal contemporary United States and other western nations, valued privacy, independence, small government, and static gender roles. The contemporary emphasis on marriage as monogamous, hetero/homonormative, and child-producing, for example, fits neatly into the marriage plot that Austen utilizes throughout her fictional writing, yet films like *Becoming Jane* and *Pride and Prejudice (2005)* do more to support a particular political agenda and consequently counteract wider women's interests than merely enact this storytelling tradition. Familial/private responsibility, for instance—as opposed to the

government or state responsibility for things like healthcare, forms of rehabilitation, and financial welfare for the poor—is experiencing as much of a renaissance today as it did during Austen’s time. Carework, as discussed in the above Woolf chapter, is today considered firmly in the realm of the private, as Braedly succinctly explains:

The management, intensification, and surveillance of unwaged care work results, I suggest, from neo-liberalism’s reconstitution of the relationship between the state and its subjects. Neo-liberal ideology assumes that care work is a family responsibility, and this notion is deeply and increasingly embedded in public policy discourse and practice. The role of the state within this paradigm is to get involved only when families ‘fail’” (216).

This conception of the family versus the state not only absolves the state of responsibility for things like mental illness and poverty, but it also fuels a culture where the private is understood as being *superior* to the public, a culture where family name and the British notion of “I paid my way” (to use Joyce’s words) takes precedence over a sense of community or a reliance on federal or national support.

This seemingly modern-day, libertarian phenomenon plays a significant role in the plot of *Pride and Prejudice*: Lydia’s elopement, and the reaction thereto of her family and friends, embodies the neoliberal perception of the private sphere. When Lydia disappears with Wickham, Lizzie and her family’s concern is not so much for their sister and daughter’s safety as it is for their family name and for the marriage prospects of the other Bennet sisters post-elopement. Her disappearance and the strong likelihood that Wickham will never marry her due to her lack of fortune would mean that the Bennets would be “ruined” socially, that their name would publicly disgraced. Indeed, the very mention of their name publicly (as it certainly would be in the papers if word got out) is in itself a disgrace. Unless a member of the family is getting married or a male member is achieving something in parliament, there should be no reason for private, individual

families to enter the public sphere, even in print. Lydia's situation is such that, though Lizzie is obviously concerned for the well-being of her sister, she cannot help but reflect on and sympathize with what she believes will be Darcy's inevitable reaction to the situation:

Elizabeth soon observed [Darcy's attitude], and instantly understood it. Her power was sinking; every thing *must* sink under such a proof of family weakness, such an assurance of the deepest disgrace. She could neither wonder nor condemn, but the belief of his self-conquest brought nothing consolatory to her bosom, affording no palliation of her distress [...] but self, though it would intrude, could not engross her. Lydia—the humiliation, the misery, she was bringing on them all, soon swallowed up every private care (180).

Elizabeth believes, inaccurately, that Darcy must and *should* abandon his association with her, despite his desire to marry her. The power of name, the desirability of family privacy and respectability, the importance of self-sustaining wealth and dignity: all of this is the driving force behind the tension in *Pride and Prejudice*, and the episode with Lydia is such that Lizzie cannot imagine a situation where Darcy could continue to consider her a potential wife. He does not feel the same way about the situation, but that is only because he is able to remedy Lydia and Wickham's mistake. Had he not been able to, there is no way of knowing how he would have reacted to Lizzie's ruin-by-association; but it seems likely that he, however unwilling, would have been even less inclined to marry her than he had been upon his initial acquaintance with her family.

Darcy, like all of Lizzie's family, understands that the only possible solution to the elopement is through private, financial means, something over which he has plenty of power. There is no question, no thought of turning to a local constable for help, or of appealing to any authority in the military beyond Colonel Forster. Rather, the responsibility for finding and convincing the couple to marry is purely the Bennets'—specifically, Mr. Bennet's and Lizzie's uncle Gardiner's. It is they who need to track the eloped couple down using clues provided by Colonel

Forster and his wife, they who need to, once Wickham is found, convince him (using both moral and fiscal arguments) to marry Lydia and save both her and themselves. If they do not find the couple, they will have, in the words of Braedly, “failed,” and perhaps only then would they, like many good neoliberal subjects, turn to the public or outsider help. Perhaps it should be noted that this association between public intervention and shame or failure is connected to class just as much as it is to social/cultural convention. The disgrace the Bennets fear and feel stems from several ideas about privacy, many of which persist today, particularly in today’s political climate: the public sphere, at least in the form of the judicial system or the media or social support (rather than in the patriarchy-friendly form of politics, literature, or science, usually what is meant by “public” in relationship to the private), is tacky in many ways merely because of its level of exposure—or so a neoliberal, intentionally socially irresponsible government and culture would like citizens to believe. The interference of a judge or public defender is embarrassing, something that members of the higher class would never allow because of its sheer commonness (unlike the drawing room, the “democratic” courtroom cannot and will not exclude people who certain classes of people might deem unequal to them).

This kind of shame associated with allowing the public to interfere in private affairs has certainly crossed the Atlantic and appears in literature and social thought throughout the history of the United States. In Mark Twain’s *Puddn’head Wilson*, for example, Tom Driscoll’s uncle is outraged that Tom, a Virginia-descended “gentleman,” brings the Italian Capellos to court for kicking him rather than dueling them and preserving his honor. Nancy Fraser, in her sobering and much more recent examination of American cultural attitudes about welfare in *Fortunes of Feminism: From State Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis*, notes the persistence of such ideas

evident in the usage and prevalence of the word “dependent” to describe recipients of support from the state:

Contemporary policy discourse about welfare dependency [divides into] two major streams. The first continues the rhetoric of pauperism and the culture of poverty [...] The contention is that poor, dependent people have something more than lack of money wrong with them. The flaws can be located in biology, psychology, upbringing, neighborhood influence [...] the second stream of thought [...] assumes a ‘rational man’ facing choice in which welfare and work are both options [...] Neither group questions the assumption that independence is an unmitigated good [or whether] *dependency* is a value-neutral term (105-106).

“Private” concerns like poverty, or illness, or, in the case of *Pride and Prejudice*, family drama, thus only enter the realm of the public (in the form of a lawsuit, for example, or the receipt of financial welfare), according to our culture and Austen’s, because the person or family receiving this state-or-community sponsored help is “flawed” in some way—either because of psychological or emotional deviation from the norm, or moral degeneracy, or lower class upbringing. Thus the severity of Lydia’s situation. Mr. Bennet or Mr. Gardiner, if their family is ever to be free of the social stigma that her elopement could bring upon them, *must* convince Wickham to marry her, must “pay their own way,” must, at all costs, avoid public intervention and attention, for fear of becoming the dependent—and therefore degenerate—Other.

Luckily, the Bennets have a friend in the shape of Darcy, though not all of them know it. His intervention, though, is notably unconventional. When Lizzie finds out through Lydia’s slip-up that Darcy was present at her wedding, she immediately contacts her aunt for details:

‘You may readily comprehend [...] what my curiosity must be to know how a person unconnected with any of us, and (comparatively speaking) a stranger to the family, should have been amongst you at such a time. Pray write instantly, and let me understand it—unless it is, for very cogent reasons, to remain in the secrecy which Lydia seems to think necessary; and then I must endeavor to be satisfied with ignorance’ (208).

Lizzie is conscious of the impropriety of having an “outsider” involved in these intimate affairs of her family. Darcy, though closely acquainted to her, is for all intents and purposes a distant member of the public; he is “(comparatively speaking) a stranger to the family.” His interference in the Lydia scandal, depending on its nature, could potentially be disastrous (if, for instance, others learned of it and then realized that the Bennets were not capable of effectively responding to their private matters) and, at the very least, would be embarrassing for those members of the family who are in the know. The embarrassing nature of Darcy’s heroism is notably emphasized in the 2005 *Pride and Prejudice*. In the film, Donald Sutherland-as-Bennet reacts in shock to Lizzie’s explanation of her future husband’s involvement in Lydia’s marriage, gasping “I *must* pay him!” This is quite a departure from Austen’s version of Mr. Bennet’s reaction to the same knowledge—her character expresses some delight at the realization that he will not have to pay his brother-in-law back: “had it been your uncle’s doing, I must and I *would* have paid him; but these young lovers carry every thing their own way. I shall offer to pay him to-morrow; he will rant and storm about his love for you, and there will be an end of the matter” (247). It is not very surprising, in short, that the early-millennium adaption of Austen’s novel would have such a thoroughly libertarian attitude about Darcy’s help with the Wickhams’ union even if Austen’s original character did not share these feelings. Joe Wright’s film is situated in an era of pulling-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps, and Darcy sweeping in to save the day would only be acceptable to a patriarch like Mr. Bennet if Darcy fulfilled the role of son (which he does) rather than stranger. Despite Austen’s Mr. Bennet’s reaction to the news, however, it is clear that other members of Lizzie’s family, including herself, feel the impact of Darcy’s act, and recognize the implication of it. It is this action that ultimately unifies Lizzie and Darcy—in part because it reveals

their mutual respect and investment in each other (they've been prejudiced, they've been proud), but also in part because it situates Darcy within Lizzie's familial, private sphere. If his action had been that of an outsider, it would be a source of shame for the family, whereas as Lizzie's future husband, he was only fulfilling his natural familial responsibility.

This concern with keeping problems within the family and with preserving respectability via avoiding public interference appears not only in *Pride and Prejudice*, but also in much of Austen's other work and in many of the recent pastiches or adaptations of her life and work. It is a theme that is unsurprisingly appealing to citizens of today's culture and is thus a thread in *many* contemporary novels and films set in the Regency or Victorian eras. In *Becoming Jane*, for example, Lady Gresham, the aunt of the Mr. Wisley who proposes to Jane, declares that her nephew must withdraw his offer of marriage because Jane's attempt to elope with Tom Lefroy has become public knowledge. For that matter, Jane and Lefroy do not follow through with their elopement because of ideas about self-sufficiency and family name; they don't marry because Austen refuses to allow Lefroy to spend his money and time on her instead of his large, needy, *dependent* family. In the murder mystery *Death Comes to Pemberley*, adapted by BBC into a miniseries in 2013, family/the "private" is elevated above the public. The Darcys' determination to free Wickham—Darcy and Elizabeth's brother-in-law—stems not from a desire to help him so much as to prevent the Darcy name from forever being associated with a murderer and from Pemberley itself becoming known as a dangerous place. In one notable scene, Lady Catherine de Burgh tells Elizabeth that Darcy must not be a witness in the trial because such things as courtrooms and murder trials are beneath the name of Darcy, to which Elizabeth is forced to reply that her husband is serving as witness because "it is the law." The driving plot in *Pride and Preju-*

dice, then, along with notable characteristics in many of its spin-offs and related works, aligns with contemporary ideas about dependency, familial responsibility, care work, and the relationship between the public and private, which may help explain the appeal of Austen's world to Americans and Brits during the last (conservative) twenty years.

But it is not only the prevalence of these particular ideas about privacy and care work that connect Austen's time and world to today's neoliberal politics and culture. The implications of these kinds of attitudes about responsibility for care work, for instance, go beyond merely shaping the government's relationship to welfare: they also speak to a general understanding of what it means to be a citizen. Braedly, after explaining the relationship between care work and neoliberal ideology, goes on to explain the economic realities of the current system:

Rather than social reproduction simply being reprivatized to households, care work is being commodified through these processes of surveillance and described as a public 'investment.' By measurement and assessment, women's unpaid care work is transformed into an equivalent of market-based products and services that have a definable monetary value. Bakker argues that neo-liberal policy changes have reconfigured government in ways that 'shift toward a citizenship based on individuals as consumers and taxpayers rather than one characterized by citizens who are politically engaged and active' (1996, 70) (222)

Neoliberalism, then, reconfigures citizens as consumers; it situates them in more in the private, personal sphere than in the public, political one. Traditionally consumerism is associated with the "private" sphere. Reproduction of culture and empire, often in the hands of careworkers in the shape of mothers and wives, has historically had much to do with buying and maintaining healthy homes and products as it has had to do with explicit value or ideology-building, just as economic and empire growth has, in the capitalist model, had much more to do with private businesses and corporations than with the state. It is not difficult to see the legitimacy Braedly's

claim in terms of today's notions of citizenship; the "American Dream" itself is a materialistic, consumer fantasy, not a vision of Athenian-like democracy.

In some senses, this notion of citizen-as-consumer/taxpayer is not so distant from Austen's world. This past summer, for example, I attended the Jane Austen Summer Program at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and Robert Clark, who was one of the keynote speakers, gave a presentation on Bath as it was during the Regency era. He shared with us pictures of where Austen lived or stayed, of the best shopping areas, and of the baths themselves. What was particularly striking about his lecture, however, was how expensive it was to enter parts of town during Austen's time. Certain areas had entrance fees, which ranged from what would today be between \$30 and \$100—just to get *into* a certain area where people would then spend extraordinary amounts of money shopping. This is notable first because it shows how well-off the Austens actually were; Jane was not by any stretch of the imagination impoverished. She may not have had as much as many of her characters, but she certainly was not as distant from the world many of her characters inhabit as some people make her out to be. Next, this highlights how intensely materialistic the age of Austen seems to have been. This description of Regency-era Bath sounds similar to modern-day major metropolitan areas like New York, Washington D.C., London, Barcelona, or Tokyo that have extraordinarily high costs of living and that often require a kind of "in" in order to access certain parts of town or certain venues. Within this context it is understandable that, if read in a certain light, many of Austen's characters' interests and day-to-day experiences have to do with consumerism; their primary role within larger English society is as consumer. At least, that is how we as readers often see them in the books. Though many of her characters implicitly take on serious community-related responsibility after

their marriage (as the wife of a clergyman, in the case of Fanny Price, Catherine Morland, or Elinor Dashwood, or as the wife of the local large landowner, as is the case with Elizabeth Bennet, Marianne Dashwood, or Emma Woodhouse), *before* their marriage, they rarely seem concerned with notions of “citizenship” as we would define it if we were discussing it in the context of a political science class. Throughout Austen’s fictional world, we see women and sometimes men—Mr. Ferrars in *Sense & Sensibility* and Mr. Rushworth in *Mansfield Park*—concerned mostly with going to the pump room, or getting a new toothpick box, or with buying ribbons or muslin, in the case of the women. or aesthetically improving the landscape and interior of their estate, in the case of the men. Perhaps here, then, lies part of the appeal of Austen’s world to modern readers and filmgoers; her characters, like us today, experience “a citizenship based on individuals as consumers and taxpayers rather than one characterized by citizens who are politically engaged and active.”

Though questions of citizenship undoubtedly appear in Austen’s work, whether in relationship to consumership as noted above or in more obvious senses (as when the Caribbean—and its clear connection to sugar plantations and, by extension, slavery—is alluded to in *Mansfield Park*), the perceived distance between her writing and politics partly fueled her popularity historically, and perhaps is to a certain extent responsible for her popularity today. Austen’s novels are often understood to operate fully in the private, as opposed to the political-public sphere. These are stories that, in addition to focusing on family responsibility and respectability, are physically set in the domestic sphere: they are novels of drawing rooms, country dances and gardens. Her novels therefore fit nicely into what was long considered the proper territory for women and specifically for women novelists. Throughout the 18th and 19th century what women could and

should write about was often considered very different from what men could and should write. Claudia L. Johnson, in her introduction to *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, argues “while the novel had proved especially attractive to eighteenth-century women writers precisely because it was not already the territory of men, starting from as early as around 1815, reviewers insist on a fairly rigid distinction between the ‘male’ and the ‘female’ novel” (xiv). This distinction, Johnson notes, “implied a hierarchy which reviewers sometimes made painfully explicit” (qtd. xiv). She quotes a particular review from 1852 which is far from ambiguous: “perhaps, indeed—and some critics would substitute ‘unquestionably’ for ‘perhaps’—none but a man, of first-rate power withal, can produce a first-rate novel; and if so, it may be alleged that a woman of corresponding genius (*qua* woman) can only produce one of a second-rate order” (qtd. xiv). This common attitude of literary critics, Johnson explains, is partly a reaction to the extremely political novels written by women of the eighteenth century. These women, “offering little or nothing in the way of apology [...] took on urgent social, political, and theological questions, since assigned to the ‘masculine’ sphere,”—i.e., public sphere—“and they have dropped out of later versions of literary history altogether as a result” (Johnson xv).

Thus when Austen entered the literary scene, she was at risk not only for general sexist criticism characterizing her work, as the work of a woman, as second tier, but also for impassioned, reactionary criticism about women writing at all. Austen, because of her era, needed to stay as far from the “public,” political realm as possible if she wanted to be taken seriously. And she did, too, or at least, she made a convincing show of it; she was praised throughout the nineteenth century for “declining the didactic posture—which assumes the ambition as well as the authority to teach the public—and for opting instead to hint at matter of serious concern unobtru-

sively and unpretentiously” (Johnson xv). She, in other words, fulfilled expectations about what a woman should be: she stuck to the home, to the realm of the “goddess” or “symbol” (notably, she is able to be this ideal because she was white and upper-middle class; without these circumstances neither she or Virginia Woolf would be in the position to be celebrated by their contemporaneous cultures which valued women in the home more than women who must earn money and enter the public sphere). Obviously this form of “praise” was (and is) as problematic as it was useful in establishing Austen as a notable writer. As Johnson rightly notes, “the same modest acquiescence to work with the feminine, commonplace limitations that wins Austen the indulgence of so many nineteenth-century reviewers and, in Lewes’ [the Victorian critic] words, a place ‘among great artists,’ also consigns her to a rank ‘not high among them’” (xvi). She is the ideal woman, in these reviewers’ minds, because she is “private,” but by being so she is inherently not public and her work, consequently, not “culture” in the same sense as men’s. Even today, as already explored, this feeling persists, as is evidenced in various reworkings of Austen into her own character: she, as a member of the domestic, non-culture sphere, does not and cannot “create” in the sense of men or members of the literary, cultural, political public.

Yet this perception of the public and private, especially as they relate to Austen’s world both fictional and real, is overly simplified and actually does more to support neoliberal ideology than subvert it. This is because, as explicitly discussed in the introductory chapter and alluded to above, public (meaning public, imperial, capitalist, state) interests are actually embedded in and operate through the private, particularly in a neoliberal/libertarian construct where the private and the individual are lauded as superior to the public or state. The spheres are not truly distinct and the hierarchical relationship between them has not disappeared, nor has it been truly re-

versed, despite the purported efforts of small-government, fiscal conservatives—the state still controls and manages the individual, which clearly benefits those in power, both conservative and liberal. Thus something like an emphasis on familial responsibility or privatized care work can actually serve the interests of capitalist empire, despite seemingly benefitting the individual. In the opening chapter of this project, I draw a connection between this neoliberal/conservative reality in which the public permeates and directs the private and the historical realities of Austen's time. Gary Kelly, in his chapter "Jane Austen, Romantic Feminism, and Civil Society," shows that Austen's novels can be read as responses to "increased policing of social boundaries, with greater separation of the classes and sexes, including renewed emphasis on the restriction of women to the domestic and local spheres" (22). Even so, as is the case today, the domestic and local spheres were responsible for instilling patriotic, imperial, national ideology in citizens. As Kelly explains, "women were called to heroic defense of the 'national' culture, identity, and destiny within and from the ideological and cultural bastion of the home" (22). In short, because the private, domestic sphere was considered the sole domain of women, and because the national consciousness (and productive/reproductive capabilities) was developed in the home, women, affirmed by general understandings of their patriotic duty, had the ability to enter the public sphere/conversation in those terms. They had a moral authority based on domestic virtue and could thus publish and discuss public matters if disguised in these terms, as a concern of the private. This corresponds almost exactly with Ryan's explanation of feminized civic duty in her analysis of 19th century United States. According to her, "American women, especially of the urban middle classes, worked just as frantically to infuse the home with social functions, giving

new definition to the border between public and private life. In the antebellum years, republican motherhood became inflated into what one writer called the ‘empire of the mother’” (272).

In short, using motherhood and the home to participate, however disguised, in public life, was not specific to Austen’s time and place or to 19th century America and we can see similar attitudes in contemporary United States. Inderpal Grewal’s article “‘Security Moms’ in the Early Twenty-First Century United States: The Gender of Security in Neoliberalism,” explores the role certain mothers feel they play in ensuring the safety of the American people and way of life and the degree to which national and patriotic interests (which are coded with imperialistic and capitalistic interests) have permeated the “private.” The blended public and private that appears in Austen’s work, then, may explain some of the Austenmania. The Bennets and Mr. Darcy work to save the private-family name because that is what upper-class, good, British *citizens* do. Likewise, in *Mansfield Park*, Fanny Prince marries her cousin Edmund because, as Glenda A. Hudson argues in her chapter “Consolidated Communities,” their characters’ union “serves to verify and reinforce Austen’s view of the sacredness of the home [...] this type of egalitarian relationship between quasi-siblings suggests that only the family, not the state or public sphere, can solve the problems experienced by men and women” (111). According to Hudson, “Austen argues that private virtues such as sympathy, tolerance, and magnanimity should lead all public action [...she forges] a new utopian community based on fraternal qualities [that] seems even more revolutionary from the point of view of late twentieth-century feminism” (111). Revolutionary, perhaps, in a 19th century context, but it is clear that this understanding of the private—as being a vehicle for public interests—has ominous implications for non-normative sexualities, bodies, or lifestyles for the very reason that it subverts the state’s ability to act openly and, more

importantly, absolves the public sphere of responsibility for its citizens. Fanny and Edmund, the Wickhams' patched-together marriage, Austen's very situation as a female (woman/cultural mother) writer during a time when women were expressly banned from the "political"—all, as with many other characteristics of Austen's novels and life, incidentally legitimize and align with contemporary neoliberal practices. Whether audiences or readers are conscious of it or not, these similarities between Austen's fictional and lived worlds and society in the present United States may be fueling the vitalized interest in her work.

The fact that Austen was a woman writer—and thus shares a relationship with modern women today, in the sense that she, limited as she was to the private sphere, also lived in a culture where that sphere inadvertently or sometimes explicitly promotes the interests of empire—and that her novels included this individualistic blended version of the public and private, are not the only ways her time and writings share characteristics with the neoliberal now. Many of these contemporary pastiches of her life and work seem to be part-acknowledgement and celebration of her status as a "career woman." In a culture where feminism and women's rights is often considered (and taught as) something already accomplished, there is the common belief that a woman can and *should* "do it all." As Luxton shows in "Feminist Political Economy in Canada and the Politics of Social Reproduction," though, this kind of thinking is seriously flawed given today's economic and political realities:

Tracing the effects of neoliberalism on laboring populations internationally since the 1970s, feminist political economy has documented their disproportional impact on women, maintaining or even increasing women's subordination [...] The more responsibility for social reproduction is imposed on private households, where it is accomplished through unpaid household labor or purchased, the more uneven are its standards and material practices, resulting in growing inequalities of gender, race, and class (39).

Of note here is not only that the economic and political climate is such that women are experiencing more pressure to be stay-at-home-moms while simultaneously contributing as non-dependent, productive, good neoliberal citizens in the work force, but that this can only really be accomplished through either “unpaid household labor or purchased.” Austen and Woolf, as “career” writers, were as subject to this reality as many women are today. Their careers were only really possible because of their family’s money and what that money could buy—namely, hired help, or purchased care workers. This aspect of both women’s lives aligns with both neoliberal ideas about career women *and* with our cultural fascination with the class/aristocratic system. Austen’s being enabled by servants in a sense only furthers her appeal because the political mood, in England and (somewhat oddly) in America, finds a structured, classed, gendered economy and politics very appealing. Much of the emotion behind heritage films and novels may be the desire to return to a time when this kind of structure existed, when England was the great political and cultural empire in the world, when people (according to our cultural (mis)representations) knew their place and were satisfied with their lot because it was in the name of King and country.

Thus the current love, on both sides of the Atlantic, for the television show *Downton Abbey*: the Grantham’s is a world in which women can succeed, yes, but in order to have the equivalent of both CEO and motherhood they need help—sometimes a whole host of help. The current market is enamored with up-close and personal accounts of the lower, domestic working class, because readers or viewers either identify with or, as is perhaps more likely, are curious about the life of that class (what *would* it be like to be a maid for a great, beautiful, Lady? What

does my cleaning lady really think of me? My children's nanny?). Books that feature upper class women conducting their lives with little real thought about how their meals get prepared or their homes clean are equally appealing for the same reasons. Many readers or viewers understand and connect with or else dream of that kind of fictional and historical lifestyle because, in the last twenty or thirty years, this is what some wealthier career-driven, glass ceiling-shattering woman must also do in order to be both one of the "suits" and a mother/wife. The massive popularity of *Downton Abbey*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mrs. Dalloway* and related texts and films can perhaps be connected to this: all are aware of or else depend upon the need for household labor and all are, whether explicitly or (perhaps because of historical context) implicitly defiant in the face of any government equivalent which might brush uncomfortably close to ideas like "dependence," "welfare," or "charity."

This kind of attitude or selective historical memory is problematic in that it supports current shifts towards inequality; it ignores the implicit racism and classism in such a structure, and it turns a blind eye towards the blatant sexism present in such a rigid labor system. As Arat-Koc argues in "Whose Social Production? Transnational Motherhood and Challenges to Feminist Political Economy,"

Feminist research in Canada has documented the various social consequences of economic restructuring and the neo-liberal restructuring of the welfare state: increased economic insecurity for the vast majority of the people; loss of or diminished access to social assistance on the part of the working class and the poor [...which] is also useful as it exposes the myths of independence and "self-sufficiency" on which neo-liberalism heavily relies [...] Canada, as an imperialist and settler society and one that, like the United States and Australia [and arguably the former British Empire], continues to rely on immigration, has never been "self-sufficient" in social reproduction (91).

Many of the above texts and films' deliberate or inadvertent ignorance of the fact that both the U.S. and Britain have never truly "been 'self-sufficient' in social reproduction" ignores the critical reality that neoliberal economic and political policy has created stronger class and gender lines while claiming to open the door to greater freedoms, opportunities, and equalities. If history can be absolved, in other words, then so too can these kinds of oppressive policies be subtly buried in contemporary notions of freedom and independence. This fascination with the "heritage" version of England that appears in everything from adaptations and pastiches of Austen's novels to *Downton Abbey*, then, may be tinged with a sort of "us versus them" sentiment that stems directly from this ignorance or revisionism. In short, some of the popular cultural interest in these films and novels may stem from the historically faulty desire to live in a time when Britain was just that, the land of Brits and Brits only, when Englishman did all their own work and the nation produced their own goods and sustained themselves without the outside influence of foreigners or anyone non-normative (this is a narrative perpetuated in America by many: "back when we didn't buy everything from China" or "back when you could call a company for help and get somebody on the line who speaks English"). There may very well be a subtle kind of racist-fueled nostalgia operating within Austenmania, even if only for some people, which is itself another staple of hetero/homonormative, individualistic, patriotic neoliberal ideology. The appeal of Austen's work and the pastiches thereof, in these contexts of current constructs regarding care work, history, and individual responsibility, may be their use as lenses with which to examine both a distant historical time and ourselves, our present day. This can be done using a feminist, inclusive, progressive framework, or, problematically, it can be done in such a way as to further promote the repressive and oppressive power structure as it exists today.

The romanticized view of Austen's world as a time when people knew their place and were content with it; when England was patriotic, blessed, productive, healthy, and morally sound; when people were taken care of by benign, good-hearted if old-fashioned Lords—the world, in short, of Julian Fellowes' *Downton Abbey* or *Death Comes to Pemberley* or *Becoming Jane*—seems to be what Jo Baker, in her 2013 novel *Longbourn*, is critiquing. *Longbourn*, like *Becoming Jane* or *Bridget Jones' Diary*, is an interesting modern take on *Pride and Prejudice*, and is the most recent of any of the Austen pastiches mentioned hitherto. Unlike either Jarrolds' or Fielding's stories, though, *Longbourn* unravels the lives of a very different cast of characters—the servants of the Bennets' home, Longbourn. Their home is much smaller than Lord Grantham's of *Downton Abbey*—they have only two maids, a cook, a manservant, and the main character Sarah's love-interest, James, who is a kind of a miscellaneous worker (he is at times an outdoor laborer, at times a formal butler; the size of the house is such that a young, fit man is needed for quite a few tasks). Jo Baker's novel asks what the lives of real people were like, what the day-to-day experiences of both the upper-middle and lower classes looked like. Despite occasional windows into the daily lives of the Bennets and into the parallel plot of *Pride and Prejudice*, though, the novel is firmly centered on the experience of Sarah, the older of the two housemaids, and on James, the mysterious worker who was once a soldier in the British army.

In fact, the few glimpses of the Bennet family from the perspective Sarah, James, and Mrs. Hill (the house manager) do little to endear them to the reader. Baker reveals fairly early in

the novel that spunky Lizzie Bennet was really just another member of her class: independent and smart, yes, but just as likely to brush off a servant's personal problems and concerns than not, solely because of their lower social position. What charms us about Lizzie in *Pride and Prejudice*—her tomboyishness, her occasional criticism of senseless social convention, her impetuosity and frequent misjudgments or mistakes—is exposed through the eyes of Sarah as a form of selfishness, carelessness, and even oppression. Kiera Knightley's version of Lizzie Bennet becomes particularly problematic from this perspective; her love of nature would result in hours of extra painful work for the servants of her home, as is already the case for the Elizabeth of Austen and Baker's novels:

Sarah leaned over the washboard, rubbing at a stained hem. The petticoat had been three inches deep in mud when she'd retrieved it from the girls' bedroom floor and had had a night's soaking in lye already; the soap was not shifting the mark, but it was biting into her hands, already cracked and chapped and chilblained, making them sting. If Elizabeth had the washing of her own petticoats, Sarah often thought, she'd most likely be a sight more careful with them (5).

The Bennet sisters, including our beloved heroine, do not have feel much concern about the amount of work they create for Mrs. Hill and the two housemaids. They do not, in fact, seem to think of any of their demands as being any trouble at all—or if they do, it is only because they have been taught to acknowledge their servant's work, not out of actual feeling but out of politeness. Before Mr. Bingley's ball at Netherfield, Sarah listens to the sisters' conversation about shoe-roses, bracing in anticipation of being asked to walk into town in the pouring, cold rain to get more:

‘I shall need pink ones to match my dress,’ Lydia said.
Sarah closed her eyes. She let a breath go softly. She looked up.

‘Big as cabbages! Big as you can get, anyway. You know the shade of pink, like my good muslin. You can take the sash with you if you like, to get as close a match as you can. Thank you, Sarah. You *are* as good as gold, you know.’ [...]

‘Yes,’ Elizabeth said, with a sorrowful glance at the misted window, and the rain beyond that spattered it. The panes shook in the wind. ‘I’m afraid the shoe-roses will have to be got by proxy’ (116).

Lizzie and her sisters’ complete obliviousness to the effect of their actions and desires on a young woman of their same age culminates in Lizzie’s later insistence that Sarah leave Longbourn and those people that she loves in order to join her as her lady’s maid at Pemberley. Eventually, Sarah learns that James is still alive and she determines to leave the Darcys in order to find him, something that they seem incapable of understanding: Mr. Darcy “studied her in a puzzled, faintly irritated manner, as if she were an unconsidered household item that had abruptly ceased to function, and on which he now found himself obliged to have an opinion. ‘My wife had expected to keep you with her at this time’” (322).

Yet despite all of these instances of their complete ignorance regarding the trouble and weight of the demands they—Bennets and Darcys—place on characters like Sarah, the most disturbing interaction between the housemaid and Elizabeth has less to do with unreasonable task-setting than with actual neglect. Midway through the novel, James disappears from Longbourn and leaves Sarah distraught as she tries to discover if he’s been hurt or killed. After Mrs. Hill attempts and fails to persuade Mr. Bennet to contact Colonel Forster for information, Sarah turns to Elizabeth for help. What results is a scene that reveals Elizabeth’s cold-blooded lack of concern for anyone below or outside her social circle:

‘When you write next to Miss Lydia, miss,’ she asked Elizabeth, ‘would you mind asking her, if it not too much trouble, if there is any news of Mr. Smith at Brighton?’ [...]
Elizabeth frowned, half shook her head. ‘I’m sorry. Of whom?’
‘Mr. Smith. You must remember him?’

Elizabeth's eyebrows crept up; Sarah had moved closer, her hand was reaching out: she had forgot herself.

'I'm sorry, miss. I really am, but he was here just a little while ago and so much in our lives. A fine young man, your father said so. Everybody said so' [...]

Elizabeth's expression cleared. 'Oh! *Smith!* You mean the *footman!*'

'Yes.'

'You called him *Mr.* Smith, that's why I miss understood you; I thought you meant someone of my acquaintance. I thought you meant a gentleman [...] I shall mention what you ask, when next I write to Lydia [...] but I fear her thoughts are so occupied with officers that it will be unlikely she would spare much notice for a footman' (265).

Sarah, in this scene, is desperate. She is so consumed by her worry—which is bordering on panic—that she “forgets herself,” and approaches Elizabeth as she would a peer (a friend), and not as an employer or social superior. But Elizabeth does not notice this, or else does not consider that Sarah's lack of propriety might be stemming from fear for someone she loves. Instead, she is shocked that Sarah would forget, even for a moment, that “Smith” is far beneath the notice of someone like her, shocked that her maid would ever forget to distinguish between the former footman and a potential “gentleman” of Lizzie's acquaintance. Despite the years that Sarah has spent living in Longbourn, despite the number of hours she has spent caring for Lizzie and her sisters, Elizabeth sees her only as a maid, as a necessary part of her existence, and even when her confusion clears she does not deem the situation as needing much attention (“it will be unlikely she would spare much notice for a footman”).

Baker's implicit critique of the class system and historical attitudes about care work does not only focus on the difficulty of the work assigned to servants or on the often heartless disregard the Bennets have for Sarah and the others. She also reveals the emotional or physical manipulation and violence care workers/members of the domestic sphere can be subject to because of their presence as Others or outsiders in the homes of their social superiors. One of the most

obvious examples of manipulation due to class divides is Mr. Bennet's treatment of Mrs. Hill. Over the course of the novel, Baker reveals that the two had an affair prior to Mr. Bennet's marriage. This affair resulted in the birth of James (the very same who appears decades later at Longbourn and falls in love with Sarah). The situation, at least for Mrs. Hill, was riddled with pain, both physical and emotional. She walked twelve miles while pregnant to go to the family Mr. Bennet had persuaded to take their child. The idea, or so Mr. Bennet explained to Mrs. Hill, was that he could have a better life with this farming family than with her:

She knew as she passed him from her arms that she would not hold him again, but also that [...] he would [...] have as decent a life as she could hope for, and that was so much more than she could do for him by herself alone. It still seemed a fair kind of deal: she would pay for the baby's safety with her broken heart, and Mr. Bennet would pay for it with his money, so that he need not pay for it with his name (218).

As with Lydia's elopement with Wickham, Mr. Bennet's concern here is not for Mrs. Hill and not really for his son; his personal problems must be solved privately, secretly, so as to avoid the scandal of having the incident become public knowledge. As James grew up, Baker tells readers that Mr. Bennet visited the family periodically and checked on his son's development and happiness, but it is clear that these visits were as much a confirmation that his secret was safe and in good hands as it was for the sake of the boy. Mrs. Hill, at least, knew this to be true and knew that she had no other choice but to accept these terms: "whatever she might have done or said or threatened to do, Mr. Bennet was never going to have offered her better than this. He had never once, during her time of difficulty, so much as mentioned the possibility of their marrying" (222).

Mrs. Hill, as the lower class, domestic, outsider to Mr. Bennet's upper class, public/political, insider, is not as important or worth consideration when compared to the need to maintain

propriety or name. Her body, her self are not worth marrying in the context of Mr. Bennet's social reality, and it is not difficult to draw the conclusion that, even during the time of the affair, Mrs. Hill did not seem to Mr. Bennet as being fully human in the sense that he and his future wife are. Just as Elizabeth sees James as a *footman*, and not as a man, Mr. Bennet sees Mrs. Hill as a servant or object, and not as a woman. Unfortunately, this attitude stretches at least partly to his son, something Mrs. Hill suspected when Mr. Bennet would conduct his visits and then return with reports for her, but later was forced to recognize as the truth when James, as an older teenager, runs off to join the army. Mr. Bennet's reaction to this is almost identical to his reaction years later when the adult James abruptly leaves Longbourn; he does not even attempt to learn of his son's whereabouts:

The boy had run off, he announced. It was to be presumed that he had joined the Army. 'And he is being looked for—what is being done to recover him?' Mr. Bennet played with his paper-knife, then set it down and picked up some documents; he pretended to look at them [...]

'But why—why would he choose that? It makes no sense; he must be found, you must buy him out.'

Eyes closed, a shake of the head. 'It is not to be contemplated, Mrs. Hill.' People would talk. The scandal. Of course. He could not bear the scandal. It had been a dreadful miscalculation, she saw that now: that all of them should be unhappy, so that he should not be disgraced (222-223).

One man's name, one man's "honor," takes precedence over every one else's happiness or well-being; the status of the care worker/domestic is such that, though they are necessary for social reproduction, necessary to those they work for in the sense that the public could not and would not function without this private productive space, they are not equals, not peers. They are more cogs (emotionless, voiceless) in a larger machine than fellow citizens or community members.

Because of their voicelessness, these lower class servants are as at risk for violent treatment as they are unfair emotional manipulation. When Mr. Wickham begins to visit Longbourn, first as a potential suitor for Elizabeth and later as Lydia's husband, his true nature is much clearer to the servants than it is to the Bennets. This is because he does not feel compelled to hide his desires or tendencies from people who are beneath him socially. His publicly acceptable mask can be removed when in the kitchens or when interacting with Sarah and, more disturbingly, the pre-teen housemaid Polly. Baker takes Wickham's already manipulative and self-serving character and expands on it in *Longbourn*. Whereas Fielding takes the same character and turns him into a sexy bad boy later played by Hugh Grant, and P.D. James expands on the canonical character and turns him into a selfish adulterer who still has a kind of love for his silly wife in *Death Comes to Pemberley*, in Baker's novel Wickham's character takes a serious turn towards the sinister. He is, it is slowly revealed in the novel, likely a pedophile. Starting with his first visits at Longbourn, he takes a fancy to twelve-year-old Polly and charms her with candies and pennies. The rest of the servants notice this and caution Polly not to become attached to Wickham, but she does not understand their concern. Finally, the night before the officers' move from Meryton to Brighton, Wickham gets drunk at a Bennet family dinner. He corners Polly as she clears the mess in the drawing room and tells her that he will bring her sweets from Brighton—pineapple in particular, which she has always dreamed of trying—if she's "sweet to [him] now" (208). Abandoning pretense, he removes the tray she is carrying from her hands and traps her against the table behind her:

'You will be, won't you? Sweet.'

'Sir?'

'The way you look at me, like butter wouldn't melt—'

The table edge pressed into the small of her back; he leaned closer; his breath thick with wine and tobacco. She turned her face away, nose wrinkling. Then his hand came up and touched her cheek, and then ran down her throat. It stopped at the collar of her dress. Her heart was beating like a bird, and she felt gooseflesh rise on her arms, and she did not know what she was supposed to do (208).

Thankfully, James arrives and stops Wickham from sexually assaulting Polly, which infuriates the drunk Wickham, who then tells James he will ruin him by telling Mr. Bennet that James has been sleeping with Sarah. This in turn causes James to punch Wickham who, in typical upper-class master-to-servant fashion, responds: “‘You can’t touch me.’ Wickham sounded more puzzled than angry. He struggled upright, touched his fingertips to his temple, then looked at them [...] ‘There are rules, dammit. Don’t you know the blasted rules?’” (210).

It is this interaction that forces James to run away: Wickham tells him he will reveal the affair with Sarah, the fact that James hit him, and, most importantly, that James is likely an Army deserter—all because James interfered with Wickham getting what he wanted with Polly. Just as Mrs. Hill served a particular purpose in Mr. Bennet’s life before his marriage and continues to fulfill a cog-like role in it even years later as his maid, so too does Wickham expect Polly (and James) to act as an object of pleasure for him. Those are the “rules”—he is her superior and she, as a member of domestic, care-working class, is not fully human, not fully a citizen, and therefore her emotions, wishes, or body do not matter as compared to his desires or needs. In this context or social structure, even the violence he intended to commit against Polly does not truly count as violence. In this framework, only the violence James enacts against Wickham registers as a violation of a moral code: the relationship is necessarily only a one-way street. If Mr. Bennet’s name takes precedence over Mrs. Hill’s pregnant body or broken heart, so too does Wickham’s take precedence over Polly’s body and James’ happiness—he is always already absolved

of his “crimes” because his is the class that determines what is and is not a crime and who and who cannot commit one.

Baker shows, through the eyes of Sarah and later James, that this violent and oppressive dynamic between the classes is not limited to the master/servant relationship and, moreover, that it is perceived by most of society as a necessary reality of empire: the private ultimately must be subjugated to the public (whether explicitly or implicitly) to serve the interests of an imperialist England. The novels includes a number of passages that critique the practices of the British military, but perhaps the most disturbing instance occurs when Sarah is in town doing a few errands for the family and passes by the buildings where the militia is barracked:

She saw what it was that kept the men pinned back there, their faces turned aside. It was at the hitching post, just inside the gateway. It stood between them and her. Her senses, briefly, could not accommodate the image. Then it was a pig. A carcass. A great slab of meat waiting to be skinned. Then her perceptions shifted again, true patterns formed: she saw the shape of human muscle, shoulder blade, a dark slick of hair, the cable-twist of neck. In the instant that she saw, she looked away, but by then it was too late. The image pressed itself upon her sight like a die into sealing wax (77).

As she watches, she learns that the soldier is being punished for the same thing that makes Wickham threaten James—he has forgotten the “rules,” has failed to acknowledge his superiors and his own subjugated place within a system where his life and body are valued far less than an officer’s:

‘They need it, you know, Chamberlayne," said the older man—the colonel. ‘They’re nothing without discipline. They’re incapable of self-control, and so it falls to us to control them. We would be remiss in our duty if we neglected this. Failure to salute an officer; that’s rank insubordination, that is’(78).

This violence—which, given the man’s rank, can be renamed “discipline”—is part of an officer’s duty; England, the state, the public is dependent on it. In Austen’s time the subordinate, disci-

plined subject that preserved England's power would be in the shape of a poor, unranked soldier, in the shape of young serving girls like Polly, in the shape of the slave on the plantations scattered throughout the British empire. Today, as Agathangelous, Bassichis, and Spira argue in "Intimate Investments: Homonormativity, Global Lockdown, and the Seductions of Empire," this necessary-to-empire subject still exists, but often in the form of queer, non-normative, dark-skinned, or foreign bodies:

[There have been] two decades of the rapid proliferation of an increasingly privatized and corporatized prison apparatus, police state, and militarized regime of repression. During the past three decades of neoliberal (re) consolidation the number of mostly brown, black, and poor people locked away in the U.S. system along has increased nearly three hundred-fold. [There has been] an entire retooling of the possibilities for life that is attempted through a neoliberal narrative of private rights, peace, and security. This move works hand in hand with a deeply racist and imperialist symbolic, affective, and material order that increasingly requires the soldiering, gatekeeping, and prison-guard labor of so-called formerly and currently marginalized subjects to this order. (122)

If the imperial state is going to succeed, Agathangelous et al argue, there must always be a laboring, repressed Other, always a physical body that must bear violence so that normative, tax-paying, monied citizens do not. The neoliberal present is as guilty of this reality as Austen's world where the sun never set on the British empire.

Longbourn, then, with its not particularly subtle critiques of care and domestic work, the class system, and empire, flies in the face of the romanticized version of England and of landed gentry that appears in the aforementioned pastiches of Austen and in shows like *Downton Abbey*. In an informal interview I conducted with Jo Baker via Facebook Messenger, Baker shares her thoughts on Julian Fellowes' massively successful BBC drama, which reveals her refreshingly feminist and implicitly anti-neoliberal stance:

I watched a bit of one episode of *Downton* but then switched it off, it made me so cross. I don't know that the class-stuff translates across the Atlantic, but as far as I could see, the politics were high-tory, and reactionary (everybody should stay in their 'place', in class terms) and it put me completely off the whole thing. If everybody stayed in their place, then I would never have got to do what I do (Baker, Jo. Personal Communication, Aug. 28, 2014).

Baker does not expressly state that *Longbourn* is a direct response to the massive popularity of a show that promotes this kind of class-thinking (the idea for her novel no doubt came to her long before BBC launched *Downton Abbey*), but it seems clear—from both her comment and from the tone and content of her novel—that there is at least some connection between the subject and focus of the book and the increasingly conservative, “reactionary,” neoliberal now. Baker reveals what most “heritage” films ignore: that Austen’s time and fictional worlds, beautiful and entertaining as they can be, were also shadowed by oppressive political and cultural power structures. It is important to note, though, that Baker, as a fan of Austen, enjoys and sees value in many of the recent adaptations of Austen’s work (as do I). In my initial message to her, I asked about the BBC version of *Pride and Prejudice* and Joe Wright’s 2005 film, and she responded, “I love the adaptations you mention and have watched both the BBC & the film umpteen times”—an interesting comment because it may indicate that these modern takes on Austen’s text may have influenced the characterization and world in *Longbourn* (Baker). As with *Becoming Jane*, perhaps some of *Longbourn* owes more to Wright’s film or Firth’s *Darcy* than to Austen’s novel. For instance, in my own foray into Austen pastiches and adaptations for the purposes of this project, I noticed that servants actually play a much more noticeable role on-screen than they do in the pages of *Pride and Prejudice*. This is undoubtedly partly because the servants are actually visible—they may not be saying anything, but they are there, doing hair, fetching tea, or opening

doors. In the BBC version in particular, there is a scene in which Lizzy's Aunt and Uncle interact with and then discuss the merits of a servant-girl—a scene that isn't in the novel. In the Kiera Knightley film version, as well, servants occasionally take center stage, as when one servant (presumably Sarah) sings as she moves throughout the house. Curious about this and the influence that watching these adaptations “umpteenth times” might have had on *Longbourn*, I asked Baker if she had similarly noticed this about the film adaptations and whether they might have shaped her ideas for her novel or her interest in what was happening “behind the scenes.” Understandably, she responded “I don't know what influenced what, to be honest, as writing's never that direct and simple and influences come from all directions (eg, the fact that my grandmother was in service),” but she acknowledged that she's “loved so many of [the adaptations]; they've given me a great deal of pleasure” and the presence of servants in the films is notable:

“I think you're right about the physical fact of servants - they are there implicitly in p&p [sic], but we actually are reminded of them by physical presences on screen. The Kate Beckinsale *Emma* is absolutely heaving with young men in white gloves—more, I think, than the novel or her standard of living would warrant—it's making a visual point too about the way of life (it's like something out of Versailles, pampered and privileged - particularly that strawberry picking scene.) [...] and I love the scene where the servant girl [in the 2005 *Pride and Prejudice*] (I BET it's Sarah, in Joe Wright's mind) climbs the stairs, singing. It's beautiful” (Baker, Jo. Aug 24, 2014).

In short, whether or not *Longbourn* is directly critiquing these films, it seems clear that these adaptations had at least some role in the development of the novel and, moreover, that the novel itself is critiquing our related cultural tendency to ignore the problematic characteristics of Austen's world, both fictional and real. In a sense, Baker's novel seems to argue that wishing for the past is foolish in many ways, but it would be equally foolish to ignore how similar the world of Austen is to the contemporary United States or Great Britain. Certainly the employer/servant

relationship as Baker presents it is eerily similar to that same relationship today. Much of what Sarah and her coworkers endure are the result of living, essentially trapped by necessity, in the same home as her social/political superiors, which is a situation that Arat-Koc, in “Whose Social Reproduction? Transnational Motherhood and Challenges to Feminist Political Economy,” argues endures today:

employment of domestic workers, often as caregivers, brings together women who, despite the significant class differences, share a common condition: they both experience their paid work as incompatible with their reproductive roles and responsibilities. For both, social reproduction has to be hidden (either at home or in the country of origin) as a condition to secure and keep present employment (87).

Just as Mrs. Hill was required by her role as a domestic servant to hide—even sacrifice—her child, just as Sarah is required to hide her relationship with James because he lives in fear of strength of the military and his employer, so too do today’s workers have to separate their motherhood, their *humanity* or citizenship (or lack thereof), from their day-to-day lives. Disturbingly historical racial, gender, class lines are experiencing a sort of renaissance in today’s capitalist, individualized society despite, and partly because of, the particular steps women, non-whites, and homosexuals have made towards obtaining more rights, a better life, or equal citizenship—something which the world and characters, oddly enough because of its historicity, of *Longbourn* throw into sharp relief.

Despite all of this, it is hard to ignore how trendy *Longbourn* is and how similar its commercial and cultural success is to Joe Wright or Julian Jarrold’s films or to *Downton Abbey*. The novel feels like a financial and career opportunity as much as it does a critique of the past and current political climate: surely Baker knew a *Downton*-like story set in the hugely popular world of the Bennet sisters would sell. Moreover, its ending in some senses confirms the system the

novel seems to be critiquing. As surely all readers desired while reading *Longbourn*, James and Sarah get married and spend the remainder of the war years (due to James' status as a deserter) "moving on when work was done, and finding friends and leaving them behind, and borrowing books and passing them on, and keeping quiet, and keeping their heads down, and doing their best to go unnoticed, and waiting for the peace that was to come" (331). And yet, after all this travel, all this independence, they ultimately return to Longbourn to serve the Bennet family. Undoubtedly Mrs. Hill and Polly would seem to both of them family (in James' case, literally), but it still seems odd that, at the end of the novel that spent pages describing chilblains and sore feet and the aloofness—and occasionally cruelty—of the ruling classes, these two protagonists would return to the place that had often caused them so much harm.

Even more strange, the Mrs. Hill and Mr. Bennet affair takes what feels like a sudden turn towards the romantic. What seemed, throughout most of the novel, to be an extremely uneven, manipulative, and oppressive relationship is, in the last few pages, portrayed as a tragically thwarted true-love pairing that finally gets its hour:

And so it transpired that, after all those long years of wanting, Mrs. Hill was now possessed of her desired object: she had Mr. Bennet almost entirely to herself [...] Once, he asked her, out of nowhere, 'Do you sometimes wish, my dear, that things had been different?' She considered this. If things had been different. If they had married. She might have had a glass of wine herself [...] she might not have had calluses on her hands, or the swellings that pained her legs, or the bitter pool of grief that still settled in her, at the loss of James [...] Still, still, but still: would they not just have ended up here, like this? [...] No matter how they got there, after all, she thought. The end was all the same (328).

Here Mrs. Hill, contrary to her own thoughts and feelings conveyed earlier in the novel, speaks of the "loss of James" as if it were not Mr. Bennet's doing, and of their marriage as if it were something that was denied them and not as something that *Mr. Bennet* denied *her*. Perhaps she is

simply love-sick, but, as in the case of James and Sarah, it seems her attitude towards her employer and employment situation does more to implicitly support the unequal and oppressive class system of the day rather than critique or subvert it. Only Polly leaves service and works as an independent, educated citizen (she becomes a teacher). Thus in some ways *Longbourn* seems to undercut its own agenda and romanticize, in much the same way as *Becoming Jane* or the 2005 *Pride and Prejudice*, the lives and culture of Regency England and, in particular, Austen's fictionalized version of it. Still, *Longbourn* is unique amongst the many recent and popular pastiches and adaptations of Austen's work in that it draws attention to the political situation of Austen's time and, more importantly, to the implicit support many of these pastiches lend to contemporary neoliberal policies and cultural practices.

Coda: Reflections on the Inception, Development, and Future of this Project

This project began as a result of a conversation I had with a professor during the fall of my first year in the Master's program. We were sitting in his office chatting about an undergraduate class he was teaching at the time, which featured a reading list that included the prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*, *Hamlet*, *The Waste Land*, and, most interestingly, Bob Dylan's *Chronicles*. Bob Dylan is—perhaps surprisingly, depending on your relationship with his work—a fascinating artist to consider within a larger conversation about the English literary canon and particularly in relationship to a writer like T.S. Eliot. As he outlined his plans for connecting *Chronicles* to the class's earlier conversations about Hamlet's youth, Chaucer's humor, and Eliot's odd and dynamic approach to canonical texts and stories, I started to think about how certain literary texts have informed, permeated, or else been appropriated by popular culture throughout history. Because this professor is an extraordinarily knowledgeable music fan, this observation naturally led to a discussion of the connection between Beats like Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg and the Grateful Dead and, with time, we reached the conclusion that this dynamic between literature and “pop” or non-academic culture is one of the most exciting elements of English studies. By nature, the English discipline is self-sustaining partly because of this inevitable exchange between the “canon” and Hollywood or independent film, Top Twenty Radio or emerging artists, *Buzzfeed* lists or counter-cultural movements. As I left his office, I remember mentioning that I had read *The Hours* for the first time that summer and speculating that its relationship with *Mrs. Dalloway* could perhaps be complicated by these ideas about literary texts and popular culture.

I mention all of this to show that, at least initially, my interest in the relationship between Cunningham's text and Woolf's was rooted not so much in feminist studies or cultural understandings of female authorship as it was in questions about the English canon and its relationship to particular movements such as the 1960s countercultural revolution. It was not until I started immersing myself in feminist theory that the issue of conflating writer with character struck me as an issue more common to female authors than male and that therefore might reveal something about contemporary gender relations. That conceptions of particular authors or canonical texts might be informed by politics is something that absolutely lends itself to feminist critique, and is therefore an issue that I hope other scholars address in their work and continually revisit as our culture and political climate shifts. In general, though, this kind of questioning is something that I continue to be invested in, and my hope is to show in this conclusion how the work I have done for this project connects to issues related to the English discipline/canon. Additionally, I would like to then outline potential directions where this project could feasibly expand (perhaps later in my graduate studies) in order to more explicitly address these issues.

Before addressing those places where my argument could be expanded, I should first give a brief summary of what I have done in this version of this project and of what conclusions I have drawn. I chose to look at two of the most famous texts in British literature, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mrs. Dalloway*, written by arguably the two most famous female writers of all time, Jane Austen and Virginia Woolf, and to consider them as they relate to the reworkings of these texts that have been published or produced in the last twenty years. The selection of the texts and authors were deliberate; I did not merely choose Woolf and Austen because I like them or because they are particularly trendy in English studies right now—rather I chose them because of

the very fact of their popularity, both within the discipline and within popular culture. Woolf, certainly for most readers who are drawn to the “classics” or “must read” section of bookstores, has a kind of hero status, and *Mrs. Dalloway* is particularly widely read, perhaps in part because of the success of Michael Cunningham’s *The Hours*, a text which I discuss at length in the Woolf section of this project. The recent publication of *Vanessa and Her Sister*, a novel that takes the fictional form of Vanessa Bell’s journal covering the years when she lived her sister Virginia, her brothers Thoby and Adrien, and eventually her husband, Clive Bell, also made Virginia Woolf’s status in contemporary pop culture an even more appealing concept to explore; the book has already received good reviews and is experiencing the kind of widespread success that can be expected from the kind of book that appears on “Recommended Reads” tables in Barnes and Nobles nationwide.

Austen, on the other hand, was an even more obvious choice given my interest in the representation of canonical texts in pop culture. Austenmania—a phenomenon I discuss in the chapter dedicated to pastiches of Lizzie Bennet’s story—has been a major player in the massive continuing popularity of *Pride and Prejudice*, a novel that was already deeply imbedded in the English canon even before it was adapted in 1996 by BBC to universal acclaim. The fan culture around Austen has spawned everything from figurine dolls to costume balls to throw pillows. There have been so many spin-offs or pastiches of *Pride and Prejudice* written in the last twenty years that I could not come close to discussing all of them in detail, so I instead narrowed my focus to the 2005 film version of the novel, the inaccurate biopic *Becoming Jane*, *Bridget Jones’ Diary* (very briefly), and the 2013 novel *Longbourn*. This last novel was an especially useful, both because as a recently published book, it has received a good amount of critical and fan base

attention, and because of its content; it, as an upstairs/downstairs take on the Bennet's house in *Pride and Prejudice*, connects very well to issues specific to the contemporary political and cultural climate.

Specifically, the political climate that framed my readings of these texts is one that emerged after the 1970s. Neoliberal economic policy has shaped many things about the contemporary United States, including cultural attitudes about gay rights, gender, dependency, and care work. Much of this neoliberal change has been achieved in the name of increased individual responsibility. One of the hallmarks of neoliberal ideology is that it claims to strip the public (government) sphere of power in favor of the private (corporate/individual) one—because, according to the widespread narrative today, it is better for profit-based companies, who theoretically are not guided by corrupt, re-election obsessed politicians, to have authority over things like healthcare or education. Yet as many scholars have argued, this supposed divide between the public and private—and particularly, this claim that the private is elevated over the public—does not reflect reality. As Susan Braedly explains in “Someone to Watch over You: Gender, Class, and Social Reproduction”

The relationship between social reproduction and the state reveals the imagined boundary between public and private spheres as a shape-shifting, socially constructed terrain, where markets and state apparatuses interact with the private sphere of household and families to reconfigure and reconstitute the boundaries between production and social reproduction. The lie of a private space containing uncommodified relations of social reproduction, juxtaposed with a discrete and separate public space of production, is exposed. Instead, the state is actively engaged in constructing a private sphere by ‘indirect techniques for leading and controlling individuals without at the same time being responsible for them’ (Lemke 2001, 201) (223).

Thus neoliberal ideology is in some ways more insidious than other, even more explicitly imperial ones because it affirms previous power structures while claiming to open doors to historically marginalized groups or to relocate power to places more deserving of it.

When I first began reading about neoliberalism, I had no expectation of linking it to the work I was doing in my literature classes. In the first version of the paper that eventually led to the Virginia Woolf section of this project, I focused only on how Cunningham's *The Hours* creates a version of Woolf herself that is clearly a reworked version of Clarissa Dalloway. I was interested in showing that pastiches like *The Hours*, by fictionalizing authors like Woolf and using *her* fictional characters to make assumptions about her life, strip those authors of their authority and essentially reduce them to the private, domestic sphere. Given that the authors I noticed this happening to were by and large women, it struck me that this trend reflected historical (and, unfortunately, not-so-historical) understandings of gender dynamics: that is, the traditional notion that women are associated with the domestic sphere and men with the public, political/cultural one. The novel *The Hours*, then, seemed to me to be an example of how this public/private dichotomy is not necessarily a thing of the past, but rather is something that is subtly reinforced in a number of ways, including in texts that seem innocuous at first look.

After familiarizing myself with the rhetoric surrounding neoliberal policy and ideology, though, I began to see that this author/character relationship as it is presented in stories like *The Hours* or *Becoming Jane* can be attributed to more than just broad ideas about the public or private. Rather, recent takes on Austen and Woolf's lives and texts reveal cultural trends regarding, as mentioned above, gay rights, care work, dependency, and gender as a whole. These are the four main areas that I focus on throughout my analysis of these texts. In the Woolf chapter, for

instance, I draw attention to the prevalence of homonormativity amongst the couples and main characters in *The Hours* and to libertarian-like attitudes towards care work within *Vanessa and Her Sister*. In the Austen section, I also delineate neoliberal attitudes about care work in *Longbourn* and draw attention to embedded ideas about dependency and familial responsibility in *Becoming Jane*. In both sections, I ultimately make the claim that the contemporary reworkings of Austen and Woolf's novels—even those that clearly attempt to deviate from the popular conceptions of these authors or their work, i.e., *Longbourn* and *Vanessa and Her Sister*—reflect and even forward neoliberal ideology. This tendency, I would argue, speaks less to problems within contemporary literature than to the degree to which current culture is saturated with individualist, libertarian, capitalist narratives.

It is this point—that literary or cinematic texts can theoretically be permeated by politics and, alternately, themselves permeate politics—that, despite the somewhat roundabout way my project approached it, continues to be an issue of particular interest to me. Just as I am in a general way fascinated by Kerouac's influence on the imagination of someone like Phil Lesh (the bassist for the Grateful Dead), as my professor and I discussed over a year ago, so too am I invested in the idea that someone like Austen or Woolf might be shaping a new generation of writers, songwriters, or even politicians. But while the notion that Jane Austen might be influencing artists today seems, for the most part, to be a positive thing, that inevitable reciprocal relationship is potentially troubling, which is much of what my thesis project addresses. That is: how might 21st century American or English pastiches of canonical texts be shaping the way someone like Austen is read, understood, or taught, and how might these shapings result in interpretations of Austen that falsely or mistakenly support an imperial or capitalist agenda?

This specific question is one that I could see expanding upon in future work on this project in a couple of different ways. On the one hand, I could see pursuing—as a musicology and childhood studies professor recommended during a recent visit to the University of Pittsburgh—a line of inquiry that has to do with the way that Austen and Woolf novels are actually marketed: for example, what do the book covers look like, what are the sales numbers, what are the supplementary materials sold at places like Barnes and Noble, and how many downloads do they have on free and for-purchase ebooks websites and apps? Connected to this type of investigation would be questions regarding the intended audience of Austen or Woolf novels: are booksellers and publishers targeting tween or teen girls, college-aged men, stay-at-home moms, high school teachers, and/or retired women? How are they doing so? More importantly in terms of the central questions of my project as it is now, how does this marketing reflect the current political climate or else specific conceptions of gender or female authorship?

Whether I choose to pursue the above questions or not, if I do in fact expand this current project I am fairly certain I would attempt to conduct a digital ethnography (perhaps even an autoethnography) to try to observe/analyze online reader reviews of the novels and films that appear in this project in order to determine how these recent pastiches might affect the reviewers/readers' understanding or interpretation of the source canonical texts. My first exposure to ethnography of any kind came during this semester's Women's and Gender Studies "Feminist Methodologies" seminar. After reading a number of articles by feminist researchers who are interested in counteracting, addressing, or else revising traditional masculinist/positivist approaches to research (and specifically to anthropological or sociological approaches to ethnographic practices), I came to realize the potential value in adopting some of these methodological ap-

proaches and applying them to the plethora of information available online. The broad plan would be sift through the reviews, first at sites like goodreads.com and amazon.com and perhaps later at sites like republicofpemberley.com, audible.com, or imdb.com, and observe what I see in the same way that I might observe a more tangible research site, like a coffee shop. I would take notes on general trends like, for example, the kind of language these reviewers use (quotes from the novel? or perhaps from the BBC miniseries or the film *The Hours*? general internet speak? specific to Janeite or to Amazon or to Goodreads speak?), or the tone/attitude of the reviews, or (hopefully) the gendered nature of them. My hope would be to find material that supports my claim that contemporary pastiches, which sometimes and in some ways align with and forward a neoliberal cultural agenda, shape readers'/viewers' understanding of novels like *Pride and Prejudice* or *Mrs. Dalloway*, which then—theoretically—problematizes perceptions Austen or Woolf's relationship with feminism and the English discipline.

Earlier this semester, I completed a sort of mini-ethnography examining goodreads.com and amazon.com reviews of Jo Baker's *Longbourn* in order to get a sense of whether or not this approach would be actually be useful in terms of answering the above questions. I reached the conclusion that it is clear that neoliberal ideas are at work amongst some of these reviewers, but that it is not completely clear that something like *Longbourn* is working to shape readers' understanding of *Pride and Prejudice*. I determined, though, that arguably the extreme views of die-hard Janeites might be confirmed or shaped by something that is so clearly *not* representative of their preconceptions, meaning that perhaps reading something like Baker's novel might result in readers solidifying or recognizing their own interpretations of Austen. I also noted that many people discussed ideas about pastiches and representation and those concepts' relationship to the

culture of Austenmania, which may shed light on audience's receptiveness to modern retellings or reworkings of classic texts in general. In short, it seems like a digital ethnography conducted in this vein would be a worthwhile pursuit, if only because it would expand my line of questioning and, at the very least, nuance by claims about the relationship between contemporary texts and their canonical sources.

There is certainly room to grow with some of the questions I attempt to address within this project, but as it currently stands, this project seems to me a necessary examination of how an analysis of contemporary treatments of two of the most famous female writers from the English canon reveals quite a bit about current attitudes within the United States about gender (in)equality, care work/dependency, and sexuality. This strikes me as a particularly important issue for pop cultural/literary studies because such an analysis, beyond bringing the current political climate into focus, may also help English studies scholars understand how Austen and Woolf's relationship to the discipline, to feminism, or to the canon might be shaped by or shifting because of these political or cultural trends or forces. Ultimately, this kind of questioning might lead to a more in-depth examination of marketing trends within literature, of parallels between Austen or Woolf's (or other canonical writers') political/cultural climate and our own, or else of the unique and ever-changing internet review culture and its relationship to popular understandings of famous texts.

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