

‘Waltzing with Wellington, Biting with Byron: Heroes in Austen Tribute Texts’

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Waltzing with Wellington, Biting with Byron:

Heroes in Austen Tribute Texts

At the close of Georgette Heyer's most famous novel, *Regency Buck*, the heroine, Judith Taverner, tells the hero, the Earl of Worth, that she had no idea he could knock a man down. The earl, who has just done precisely that, is highly amused: of course he can knock a man down, because he boxes regularly at Jackson's and has sparred with the great Jem Belcher. *Regency Buck* is a thoroughly Austenian book; at one point Judith actually shows a passage from *Sense and Sensibility* to her cousin,¹ the joke being that she is at that very moment putting her trust in the wrong man just as an Austen heroine might do, but is unable to apply Austen's text to her own situation. Where *Regency Buck* departs from its Austenian model, however, is in the range of activities in which its hero is involved - fighting, yachting, gambling, horse racing, hobnobbing with Beau Brummell and thwarting the Prince Regent, and even a little light (and well-intentioned) kidnapping. (In the sequel, *An Infamous Army*, we discover that Lord Worth is also an ex-hussar.) In this *Regency Buck* is typical both of Heyer's romances in general and also of other, more recent books influenced by Austen, including Stephanie Barron's Jane Austen Mysteries in which Austen herself acts as a detective, aided in the early books by the dashing spy Lord Harold Trowbridge and in the later by the painter (and also spy) Raphael West; Maya Slater's *Mr Darcy's Diary*; Carrie Bebris' Mr and Mrs Darcy mysteries; Susanna Clarke's *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell*; Patrick O'Brian's series of books about Captain Jack Aubrey; Emma Tennant's *Pemberley* and *An Unequal Marriage*; and Reginald Hill's detective novels *Pictures of Perfection* and *A Cure for All Diseases*, which revisit *Emma* and *Sanditon* respectively (in the case of the latter bringing the novel to the conclusion Austen was prevented from reaching, in which Sir Edward Denham and Sidney Parker are revealed as a gay couple). All these books pay open

homage to Austen, but all also do what she did not: they not only show men conversing alone with no women present, but they imagine men as leading full and rounded lives of which women are only part.

In this essay, I examine the ways in which Austen's men, and characters who are modelled on them, find new life outside her books. In particular, I discuss the impulse shown by many Austen-influenced texts to connect either Austen herself or a character based on or influenced by one of hers to one or both of two of her most famous male contemporaries, Lord Byron and the Duke of Wellington. Where either Wellington or Byron is invoked, what is often at stake is whether men and women should be regarded as fundamentally different and as needing to inhabit separate spheres, or whether the basic tenets of modern feminism are right. Does giving greater prominence to male characters result in the relegation of female characters, or is it possible to use an Austenian model to tell stories in which men and women think and act in essentially similar ways?

The bridge between Austen's own works and many modern appropriations of them is Heyer. Diana Wallace observes that 'Heyer uses the romance plot, as Jane Austen did, as a formal structure within which to explore the nature of gender roles and the possibility of an ideal marriage of minds and bodies',² and called upon to defend the title '20th century Jane Austen' for a piece he published in *The Sunday Telegraph* after her death, Duff Hart-Davis noted that 'For at least 20 years reviewers have compared the writing of Georgette Heyer with that of Jane Austen',³ while in Mary Fahnstock-Thomas' *Georgette Heyer: A Critical Retrospective*, the comparison with Austen is made over and over.⁴ Sometimes Austen is invoked only in order to put Heyer's own achievement in the shade or to note Heyer's admiration for her, but sometimes a more substantive point is made: reviewing *False Colours*, Elizabeth O'Rourke remarks that it 'is written in a leisurely detailed manner, reminiscent of Jane Austen' (Fahnstock-Thomas 193),⁵ and Marghanita Laski notes that

‘any of her characters may talk more “Regency English” in a paragraph than is spoken in Jane Austen’s entire corpus’.⁶ Both of these things are true: Heyer does indeed allow her narratives to take their time, and this affords the reader opportunity to savour both her brilliant evocation of atmosphere and her lavish use of colourful period phrases; her influence on Stephanie Barron, for instance, can be particularly seen in the reuse of phrases such as ‘high in the instep’.⁷

Heyer echoes Austen in many respects. In Heyer’s *The Convenient Marriage*, the hero, the Earl of Rule, who has proposed to Lizzie Winwood, is worth ‘twenty thousand a year, I have heard, and I daresay it may be found to be more’, leading Lizzie’s cousin Theresa Maulfrey to exclaim ‘only think of the position you will fill, the jewels you will have!’.⁸ Lady Winwood, like Mrs Bennet, is subject to nerves (25), and the Earl’s sister, like Darcy’s, has tried to elope (52). Finally the book’s heroine, Lizzie’s younger sister Horatia, marks her growing maturity by mentally resolving ‘a picnic to Boxhill: never!’ (252). In *The Devil’s Cub* Mary warns a parent against letting a sister expose herself as Lizzy warns Mr Bennet not to let Lydia go to Brighton, and tells Vidal ‘You have insulted me in every conceivable way’ just as Lizzy tells Darcy so.⁹ In *Venetia* the surname of one of the local families is Denny and one of the houses is called Netherfold. In *An Infamous Army* Lady Barbara has flirted with a man named Darcy, who consequently abandons a wife called Marianne,¹⁰ and in *Frederica* too there is a Mr Darcy who is one of Frederica’s unsuccessful suitors. *The Quiet Gentleman* Lady St Erth echoes both Miss Bates, when she says ‘the Stanyon apples, you know, are particularly good’, and also Lady Catherine de Bourgh, when she declares ‘I daresay I should have ridden very well, had I taken to it’;¹¹ in *Cousin Kate*, *Emma* is recalled again when ‘Dr Delabole rattled on, extolling the superiority of strawberries plucked and eaten hot from their bed over those bought in London’.¹² There are also signs of a close acquaintance with Austen’s biography and with her letters (first published in 1932 and so

available for Heyer to have read). In *Black Sheep*, the phrase ‘a poor honey’ echoes Austen’s own self-description as ‘a poor Honey at present’ (L 353), and Abigail and her sister Selina look after their niece, Fanny, as Jane and Cassandra sometimes cared for their niece Fanny, while Abigail cordially dislikes her brother James,¹³ the name of Austen’s own least favourite brother. In *Friday’s Child*, there is a butler called Chilham, and Chilham Castle, where Austen’s Kent-based brother had friends, is frequently mentioned in the family correspondence. In *A Civil Contract* Sidford tells Adam ‘By what I’m hearing, there’s upwards of two hundred county banks have stopped payment’,¹⁴ as happened to the bank in which Henry Austen had a share, and in *The Grand Sophy*, they go to Henrietta Street,¹⁵ where Austen stayed with Henry and his wife Eliza.

Heyer’s heroes, though, are not Austenian. In *Venetia*, Lady Denny assures Venetia that men are different from women:

I tell you this because I hold it to be very wrong to rear girls in the belief that the face men show to the females they respect is their only one. I daresay, if we were to see them watching some horrid, vulgar prize-fight, or in company with women of a certain class, we shouldn’t recognise our own husbands and brothers. I am sure we should think them disgusting! Which, in some ways, they *are*, only it would be unjust to blame them for what they can’t help. One ought rather to be thankful that any affairs they might have amongst what they call the muslin company don’t change their *true* affection in the least. Indeed, I fancy affection plays no part in such adventures.¹⁶

This socially conservative view that men and women are of different natures and belong in separate spheres is the bedrock of Heyer’s writing, and surely part of the reason for her not having become critically respectable. There is no element of feminism here; rather the books can be seen as almost homiletic in the way they construct a female reader equipped to be

constantly aware of the ways in which men are different and of how that must be catered for if a relationship is to succeed. In *The Spanish Bride*, for instance, Juana ‘knew enough about men to realize that Tom would like nothing less than to be obliged to escort all the way to London a sister-in-law who was labouring under all the miseries of homesickness and grasswidowhood’,¹⁷ and in *Devil’s Cub* Mary perfectly understands that Vidal must be managed. In *Friday’s Child*, Mrs Milborne says to her daughter ‘I wonder you should show so little delicacy yourself, Isabella, as to refer to those aspects of a gentleman’s life which no well-bred female should know anything about’,¹⁸ but actually in Heyer’s view it is a sensible woman who does know about those aspects and takes account of them.

Heyer’s men are rarely uniformly bad, but they are resolutely male. Men drink, which her women do not: in ‘Hazard’, one of the short stories in *Pistols for Two*, the Marquis asks Captain Dobell whether he has ever been drunk, and Dobell replies, ‘Well, sir, well - ! I must suppose that every man at some time or another -’.¹⁹ Men josh one another: in *Cousin Kate*, ‘Kate knew, from her military experience, that young gentlemen who were fast friends greeted one another in general by opprobrious names’,²⁰ and in both *The Spanish Bride* and *An Infamous Army* Wellington’s ‘family’ is made up of very young men who delight in teasing each other and regard the duke’s ‘crustiness’ as an indispensable attribute of command. Men are required to display a certain set of behaviours: in *The Talisman Ring*, Sir Hugh Thane tells his sister that Sir Tristram Shield ‘hunts with the Quorn. Bruising rider to hounds. Good man in a turn-up, too’. When she then asks ‘What is he like?’ he says ‘I’ve told you’.²¹ Men value physical prowess, even (perhaps particularly) if they themselves are on the receiving end of it: later in *The Talisman Ring*, Bundy regrets that time does not permit him to fight Sir Tristram (211) and Kettering tells Sir Tristram ‘I’m proud, surely, to have had a turn-up with you, even if it were in the dark’ (218).

Sometimes Heyer's men behave in ways darker than any Austen hero ever does. In *Friday's Child*, Viscount Sheringham boxes his wife's ears, an action that we would never see an Austen hero perform. In *The Spanish Bride*, after Wellington's army has taken Badajos 'Murder, rapine, and rape were the orders of the day, and no efforts of the officers could quell the unleashed brutality of men who had shot their way into the wine-shops, and tapped the barrels in the streets' (28). Still less would we expect an Austen hero to be attracted to one of his own sex, but Stacy Gillis argues that in *These Old Shades* there is a 'homoerotic relationship between Avon and Saint-Vire, Léonie's biological father',²² and in fact this gives rise to something of a minor tradition: in Reginald Hill's overtly Austenian *Pictures of Perfection*, the various heterosexual couplings are complemented by the gay romance between Wield and the bookseller Edwin Digweed after Digweed effectively proposes by declaring, in language borrowed directly from Mr Darcy, 'In vain have I struggled', pulling a fairytale ending out of the bag for the hitherto hapless Wield.²³ Hill's *A Cure for All Diseases*, a continuation of *Sanditon*, also offers a gay couple, this time Sir Edward Denham and Sidney Parker, and Arielle Eckstut's *Pride and Promiscuity: The Lost Sex Scenes of Jane Austen* has Frank Churchill propositioning Mr Knightley, who is left wondering how on earth he is to tell Emma.²⁴

Heyer is also prepared to make men the main focus of some at least of her narratives in a way that Austen never did, and which won her male readers: after her death her sometime agent Max Reinhardt noted in *The Times* that 'her male dialogue was always extremely good',²⁵ and her husband recalled that Law Lords prized her work and 'Lord Justice Somervell bequeathed his Georgette Heyer collection to the library of the Inner Temple Bench'.²⁶ *Sylvester* is named not after its heroine, Phoebe Marlow, but after its hero. Barbara Bywaters suggests that in *Sylvester* 'the narrative begins with a variation of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*',²⁷ but the more suggestive comparison is in fact with another Austen

novel, because Sylvester is to all intents and purposes a male Emma, whose mother is delighted when she finally sees him in love and in doubt of a return. Phoebe does not have to change at all, but Sylvester does. When Miss Penistone says “Well, that *was* a stupid thing for me to have said, wasn’t it?” he was provoked into replying, though with perfect suavity: “It was, wasn’t it?” (8); like Emma, he has spoken thoughtlessly, and like Emma, he must learn to be more considerate in his dealings with other people. In *The Grand Sophy*, it is Charles who is focalised, and also Charles who has to learn to know himself better and to behave more rationally, as when Eugenia repeats his own earlier condemnation of Sophy and he immediately and perversely disagrees with it: ‘Mr Rivenhall, who had decided that Sophy was to blame for his sister’s conduct, said without an instant’s hesitation: “You are mistaken: I never made any such remark!”’ (173). In both *These Old Shades* and *The Devil’s Cub*, the book begins with the hero alone, as no Austen novel ever did or could.

The focus on men is particularly noticeable in two novels: *Royal Escape*, which has no heroine at all but instead traces in blow-by-blow detail the escape of Charles II after the Battle of Worcester, and *An Infamous Army*, which is more interested in the Waterloo campaign than in the romance between Barbara Childe and Charles Audley. As Judith justly observes, in the second half of *An Infamous Army* Charles ‘behave[s] as though nothing were of the least consequence but this dreadful war’ (305); indeed pp. 311-90 are taken up entirely with a description of the battle, with no mention of any women. (We are also told Charles’s feelings about the broken engagement but have to guess at Barbara’s.) Some other novels too are ultimately more interested in male pursuits than in female ones. In *The Quiet Gentleman*, Miss Morville is a quiet presence in the background who is cast into deep shade by the excitements of the murder plot. Although she says towards the end ‘Because I have not spoken, do not imagine that I have not *felt!*’ (306), the reader may well find that they have had little attention to spare for whether she has felt or not. In *The Nonesuch*, much of the

focus is on the sporting prowess of the hero Sir Waldo Hawkridge, who to the fatherless Julian is ‘the big cousin who had taught him to ride, drive, shoot, fish and box’,²⁸ a very necessary supplement to Julian’s upbringing since to his mother Lady Lindeth

It was incomprehensible ... why any man should wish to risk his neck in the hunting field, or in a curricule race; or should derive the smallest satisfaction from *planting a flush hit* in the face of some unoffending acquaintance, encountered in Jackson’s Boxing Saloon; but she was fortified in her acceptance of these peculiar activities by the knowledge that no female was fitted to be a judge of such matters; and by the realization that nothing was farther from her ambition than to see her son joining the ranks of those who abjured violent sports.

(9-10)

This is the essence of Heyer: men must be men, and women must let them. The only one of Heyer’s novels prepared to flirt even faintly with the idea of gender equality is *The Spanish Bride*, where the indomitable Juana shares every hardship with her husband Captain Harry Smith, but even she does not go into battle, and the novel as a whole does not dissent from Wellington’s view that women have no place in war (226).

When the narrative of *The Nonesuch* is not centring on men’s riding, driving, or other attainments, it turns its attention to their clothes: we are told of Laurence Calver,

The beautiful arrangement of his pomaded locks, the height of his shirt-points, the intricacies of his neckcloth, the starched frill which protruded between the lapels of his tightly-fitting coat, with its short front and its extravagantly cutaway tails, the fobs and the seals which hung from his waist, and even the rosettes on his dancing-pumps, proclaimed him to be a Tulip of the first stare.

(9-10)

This is typical of Heyer, for where Heyer supplements Austen most notably is in her attention to the materiality of Regency life. In a 1978 essay called 'On Reading Trash' Lillian S. Robinson observed that 'Heyer's novels concentrate on precisely those minutiae of dress and décor that Austen takes for granted',²⁹ and *A Civil Contract* in particular tells us more about the domestic detail of Austen's world than Austen herself ever does when Jenny tells the housekeeper to use the Royal Crown Derby (220) or when we hear about her new Egyptian-themed bathroom fittings. This is particularly true when it comes to the detail of men's lives. When Mr Bingley leaves Netherfield to go to London, what does he do there? Reading Heyer helps us to guess what: he visits Watier's, White's, and Jackson's boxing saloon, and perhaps he accompanies Miss Bingley to Almack's, that strictest of dancing clubs whose rules were never relaxed even for the Duke of Wellington (if someone as unpleasant as Miss Bingley can convince one of the patronesses to give her vouchers; astute Lady Jersey and sweet-natured Lady Sefton would be unlikely to help, but the more coldly correct Mrs Drummond Burrell might be induced to oblige). Heyer, in short, offers a gloss on and a complement to Austen, and in particular she offers us a considerably fuller sense of what the lives of Austen's heroes might have been like.

If we want to know what Captain Wentworth does, though, we need Patrick O'Brian. At the end of Heyer's *Royal Escape* Charles II sails for France in a barque called *The Surprise*; a century and a half later, O'Brian's Captain Aubrey is on board a ship of the same name, known to its crew as 'the joyful *Surprise*'. O'Brian's twenty-odd novels are very much in the separate spheres vein. Aubrey, a fighting captain whose men will follow him anywhere, shows himself a colleague worthy of Frank or Charles Austen, though he has also something in common with Henry, the Austen brother whose bank failed, because Aubrey, peerless at sea, is not safe to be out on land, where no scam is too ludicrous for him to fall a victim to it. His wife, Sophie, exists only to bear children, write letters, and worry; his true

companion is his friend Stephen Maturin, officially the ship's surgeon but also a resourceful and multilingual spy, as well as an indefatigable naturalist whose animals provide much of the books' rich vein of comedy, as when his wombat eats Jack's hat. Stephen's own wife, Sophie's cousin Diana, makes herself a little more prominent by sheer bad behaviour, including promiscuity, an attempt to procure an abortion, and dabbling with espionage on the wrong side, but O'Brian's seafaring stories can provide no satisfactory narrative arc for Diana and she is eventually killed off in a carriage accident. In Stephanie Barron's *Jane and the Prisoner of Wool House*, Jane and her friend Louisa Seagrave see someone Louisa identifies as Sophie Aubrey and Louisa goes on to comment on Captain Aubrey's troubles;³⁰ there is no explanation, but readers of O'Brian's books would have no difficulty with the allusion, and would not be surprised when a character named Etienne (the French version of Stephen), who professes to be a naval surgeon, proves to be in fact a spy, nor that another character boasts the improbable name of Jahleel (55), for a character in the Aubrey books is called that, and Jack Aubrey gets into a difficulty when he supposes the name to be a joke. Anyone who recognises these allusions will be encouraged to receive Barron's books as similar to a series they already know and presumably like, but they will also be reminded of the very different social rules which obtain for women and for men.

Barron too gives considerable prominence to male characters. Barron's books, which start with *Jane and the Unpleasantness at Scargrave Manor*, all purport to be transcriptions of newly found manuscripts written by Austen herself, though the conceit is not very strenuously observed, and all chart her adventures as a detective alongside occasional romance interests, in the shapes respectively of the gentleman smuggler Geoffrey Sidmouth, the dashing government spy Lord Harold Trowbridge (who threatens to steal the scene to the extent that he has to be killed off at the end of *Jane and the Ghosts of Netley*), and finally Raphael West, another spy and the son of the painter Benjamin West. Barron does a

creditable imitation of an Austenian voice, but she, like Heyer, is also interested in other things. Readers can learn from her blog that she had studied Napoleonic France as an undergraduate,³¹ and initially knew more about France than about England at the time. Barron is clearly indebted to Heyer (not least in that both bestow the name Julian on as many of their male characters as they can); however, though Barron's novels accurately chart gender distinctions - her research is excellent - they also question them. Time after time Barron's Jane falls foul of early nineteenth-century expectations of women's behaviour, not least as voiced by her much properer, much duller sister Cassandra, and very often there is something of vital importance at stake, sometimes even national security, which notions of propriety threaten to prevent her attending to. In this respect Barron's books, though by some distance the most faithful of those I consider to Austen's own, are also the most impatient of the ethos of Austen's England. There is no nostalgia here for a difficult and insecure age in which policemen were semi-literate bullies and women's freedoms unreasonably curtailed; instead there is an admiration for an Austen who is no mere chronicler of a stylish and elegant age but an active agent of change.

Heyer and O'Brian are both predominantly comic. Heyer herself regarded her heroes as divided into two separate types, but though one kind may be rude and rugged and the other handsome and polite, they actually have much in common in that both kinds abhor any woman who threatens to enact them a Cheltenham tragedy, or becomes plaintive or emotional (or as Heyer would term it, turns herself into a waterspout). *The Spanish Bride* and *An Infamous Army* both include plenty of deaths, but it is considered morbid to mourn too long for even the closest fallen comrade. Barron, though, uses Lord Harold to do what no Austen novel ever does, touch on tragedy, since he is fatally wounded by a French spy and dies in Jane's arms declaring that he should have married her, a sentiment with which the reader may well feel sympathy even while understanding why it was not possible.

Most notably, Barron introduces both Wellington and Lord Byron, the former in *Jane and The Waterloo Map* and the latter in *Jane and the Madness of Lord Byron*. The two could hardly have been more dissimilar, and indeed Byron, who supported Napoleon, was appalled by the victory at Waterloo and directed some angry lines at Wellington, and yet they go some way towards acting as twin poles of masculinity in Austen spinoffs. Officially at least, Jane Austen herself would certainly have preferred Wellington: her cousin and sister-in-law Eliza de Feuillide had been married to a French aristocrat who was guillotined and her sailor brothers were both engaged in operations against the French, so she could never have shared Byron's sympathy for Napoleon. She cannot, though, have been indifferent to either Byron's genius or his fame, and she must have known when she switched publisher to Murray that he was Byron's publisher too.³² Although the most one can say about any actual connection is that parts of the 1996 film of *Emma* were filmed in the dining room of Stratfield Saye, Wellington's country estate, Jane meets the duke in Stephanie Barron's *Jane and the Waterloo Map* and is also connected to him in both Heyer and in Susanna Clarke's *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell*. Rachel M. Brownstein traces slightly more concrete links between Austen and Byron: she mentions him twice, once in *Persuasion* where Anne Elliot and Captain Benwick speculate on how the *Giaour* was to be pronounced, and once in a letter to Cassandra where she says she is writing because 'I have read The Corsair, mended my petticoat, & have nothing else to do' (L 268), but Brownstein argues that 'Austen and Byron, close contemporaries, beg to be talked about together' and notes in particular 'their force as figures for gender, she of the conventionally repressed feminine, he of the vigorous masculine'.³³ In Austen tribute texts, though, the distinction collapses, for when Austen herself or one of her characters is brought into contact with Byron, what tends to happen is that some of that vigour is transferred to her, mitigating repression. Wellington by contrast stands for a separation of the spheres; it may have been Byron who said 'Man's love is of

man's life a thing apart; 'tis woman's whole existence', but in Austen tribute texts it is Wellington who more typically embodies that ethos.

Byron is briefly mentioned by Heyer in *An Infamous Army*, but he is evoked only to be dismissed, as we are told of Lady Frances Webster,

That inveterate hero worshipper had found a new object for her affections, a very different personage from Lord Byron, less dangerous but quite as glorious. At the fête at the Hôtel de Ville her eyes had dwelled soulfully on the Duke of Wellington.

(75)

In this Lady Frances echoes Heyer's own preferences; for Heyer, the great figure of the age is Wellington, who appears in person in both *The Spanish Bride* and *An Infamous Army* and is mentioned repeatedly in other books (including *A Civil Contract* where Adam's faith in his former general leads him to gamble his entire fortune on a victory at Waterloo). Susanna Clarke also gives much greater prominence to Wellington than to Byron in *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell*. This is not an Austen spinoff novel, and in some ways it owes more to a heady mixture of *Tristram Shandy* and Shakespeare than to any single Austen text, but nevertheless there are clearly Austenian elements such as the use of Austen's own preferred spellings for words such as 'scissars' and 'surprize' and the observation that 'It has been remarked (by a young lady infinitely cleverer than the present author) how kindly disposed the world in general feels to young people who either die or marry'.³⁴ As part of his campaign to reinstate English magic, Jonathan Strange goes to both the Peninsula and Waterloo to assist a Wellington as irascible and peremptory as ever he is in Heyer. It is true that he also meets Byron, but the encounter is much briefer and much less formative for him, and is in fact shaped by the two men's different attitudes to Wellington: Strange informs his and Byron's mutual publisher Murray that 'we immediately fell to talking of the battle of Waterloo - an unhappy subject since I am the Duke of Wellington's magician and they all

hate Wellington and idolize Buonaparte' (714). For the narrator, by contrast, Wellington 'is Englishness carried to perfection. If the French carry Napoleon in their bellies (which apparently they do), then we carry Wellington in our hearts' (373), and Strange finds at the duke's table and in the society of his aides de camp a cheerful male camaraderie which makes his wife hardly recognise him on his return, while he does not at first notice that she has been abducted and replaced by a simulacrum of herself.

Barron too also has her Jane meet Wellington (in *Jane and the Waterloo Map*) and Byron (in *Jane and the Madness of Lord Byron*). Barron's bibliography for *Jane and the Waterloo Map* does not include Heyer,³⁵ but there is a striking consonance between Jane's view at the end of her meeting with the duke that 'As I followed Lord FitzRoy Somerset to the door of Apsley House ... I was much struck by this evidence of Wellington's good feeling: He had chosen to place at his right hand, a man who no longer had one to write with' (187) and the scene towards the close of *An Infamous Army* in which Judith tells Charles that the duke is employing Colonel Felton Hervey, who also had only one arm, as temporary military secretary until Fitzroy Somerset recovers and observes 'There is delicacy in such a gesture: Lord Fitzroy must be sensible of it' (425). Wellington, though, has only a bit-part; disappointingly for Jane, he is entirely uninterested in her writing and will not discuss the map at all until both she and his current mistress have left the room and only men are present, and it is a conversation which we too do not hear. Byron by contrast appears to Jane as 'A diabolical figure of licence and flame, armed with a pen' (Barron 2010: 50) who attracts Jane in spite of herself and, most crucially, is brought to recognise her quality and to acknowledge her to her face as 'a greater writer than I' (177), while the best return she can make is to damn him with faint praise: "'I have only looked into *Childe Harold*," I remarked mildly, "but enjoyed what little I read of it"' (177). Her Jane can compete with Byron, but can merely

intersect with Wellington, because he bespeaks a world in which men and women are fundamentally different and separate.

Wellington also haunts Emma Tennant's two *Pride and Prejudice* sequels, *Pemberley* and *An Unequal Marriage*. He is never openly named, but he is evoked repeatedly. In *Pemberley*, Master Roper, who will inherit Pemberley if Elizabeth fails to produce a son, asks the supposed Colonel Kitchiner where he lost his leg 'For I can see that it was not at Waterloo!';³⁶ later, Master Roper 'commenced a lecture on the campaigns in the Peninsular Wars in which the colonel had participated; along with a full description of artillery and musketry deployed' (137). Waterloo figures again when Mr Collins, who has now inherited Longbourn after the death of Mr Bennet, explains to Elizabeth that he is having its park restocked with 'miniature trees - which I plant in the form of battles. Over there ... will be Waterloo!' (179). Most tellingly, 'Colonel' Kitchiner is exposed as a fraud after Lady Catherine 'paid a call yesterday on the Dowager Countess of Mornington, at Mornington Park' (156). There was indeed a peeress of that name to be found in Regency England; she was Anne Wellesley, Countess of Mornington (1742-1831), and she was the Duke of Wellington's mother.

While the supposed Colonel Kitchiner was *not* fighting in the Napoleonic wars, Darcy was apparently spying in them (149). This is emblematic of his secretive, devious nature, which marriage to Elizabeth has, in Tennant's pessimistic reworkings, done little or nothing to change. By the end of the first two books his gloom at Elizabeth's continued failure to conceive and his intolerance of her relatives reach such heights that she actually leaves him, initially staying with the Collinses but contemplating a separation and a subsequent career as a teacher (in an obvious nod at *Jane Eyre*). Discovering that she is pregnant, she eventually accepts Darcy's apology, but by the start of the second book, *An Unequal Marriage*, the couple are in trouble again. It is now nineteen years later, and though their firstborn child

Miranda is wholly satisfactory, sixteen-year-old Edward is not: he is short, he gambles, and he appears by some means or other to have acquired a wife of dubious antecedents and even to have a child. Darcy's furious response to this alienates Elizabeth to the point where she again contemplates separation, until he eventually reveals that he will break the entail and settle Pemberley on Miranda and Edward jointly, as well as appointing Miranda agent to the land, a solution which would of course have been wholly impossible in Austen's day but which echoed closely with the circumstances of Tennant herself, who saw her father's title of Lord Glenconner, together with his estate, pass solely to her flamboyant brother, notorious for his playboy lifestyle on the island of Mustique and his close friendship with Princess Margaret, while she herself was bypassed. For Tennant, what Pemberley primarily represents is a world which is unfair and must change.

Byron, by contrast, tends to figure in texts which speak of potential liberty and of the possibility of emotional expression, especially when he figures as (improbably disguised as modern poet Brian George) in Michael Thomas Ford's *Jane Bites Back*.³⁷ In the past, Ford's Byron bit both Austen and Charlotte Brontë, turning both into vampires; in the present, he writes romantic novels under the pseudonym Penelope Wentz (as he observes to an unimpressed Jane, 'I am, after all, the most romantic man in the world' [243]) and seduces the boyfriend of the (male) publisher whom Jane has finally found for *Constance*, the novel she was writing when Byron seduced and vamped her, and which represents so marked a step forward in style and content that the undead Charlotte Brontë steals the manuscript and hopes to pass it off as one of hers. The resulting struggle between Austen and Brontë (in which Byron intervenes on the side of Austen) also stands for a deeper conflict between the ethos of *Pride and Prejudice* and the ethos of *Jane Eyre*, and the relative importance to women of self and marriage. Although all we see of *Constance* is in the epigraphs to each chapter, which collectively tell a fragmentary and loosely connected story, it seems clear that the heroine of

this new Austen book achieves both a relationship and a rôle as writer, just as Austen herself ends the book with both a man and a bookshop. She does not end it with Byron, though: despite her long-ago infatuation with him and his vow to reform his behaviour, Jane spurns him for the much less glamorous charms of builder Walter Fletcher, supplying the book with a structure which ostensibly conforms to the norms of romance but shies away from full commitment to them, since Walter will age and Jane will not and there will consequently be no happy ever after. Perhaps this does not matter, though, for Jane tells us early in the book that '*It never was about Darcy*' (10); it was, it seems, about women becoming the best versions of themselves that they can be, and men are a part of that process rather than its goal.

Byron is also an important figure in Maya Slater's *Mr. Darcy's Diary*. Here Byron and Bingley were at Harrow with Byron and go to stay with him at Newstead Abbey, where Darcy halfheartedly takes part in an orgy and some of Byron's other friends find themselves pursued by his pet bear Bruin. Byron is there partly to provide a foil for Darcy himself, whom the book is at pains to humanise. It opens with a reason for his bad temper at the Meryton ball:³⁸ he has just received a letter from Georgiana, who, we shortly learn, was in fact deflowered by Wickham and has been subsequently suffering from depression. There are traces of Heyer here, not least in Darcy's attention to his wardrobe and preference for tailoring by Weston (4, 13, 74), his fondness for boxing at Jackson's Saloon, and his interest in the doings of Wellington (though Slater lacks Heyer's attention to detail here, bestowing a dukedom on Wellington by the time of the siege of Almeida in 1810 [7], though he did not in fact receive it until 1814). The diary, which Darcy's mother first enjoined him to keep, affords him an articulacy he lacks in his day-to-day dealings, and also, in the classic fashion of the diary or the epistolary novel, allows the reader to see things about him which he himself does not perceive, such as how he repeatedly imagines Elizabeth interacting with children and the extent to which this reveals his present loneliness and isolation. Mr Darcy

has an active sex life with maids and courtesans but also takes his responsibilities very seriously, goes to church (which no Heyer hero ever does) and frequently sees things from the point of view of women, as when he sympathises with a laundrymaid who is assaulted by a young George Wickham (31) or reads Virgil's account of Dido and thinks 'O, the agony of her suffering!' (129). He also has a recurrent 'phantasy' (181) of Elizabeth; many Austen spin-off books (including this) might justly be termed female fantasy, but the idea of a man fantasising in the same terms is alien to the genre. The Heyer hero does not express his feelings, but that does not mean he cannot be understood. In *Frederica* Felix tells the Marquis of Alverstoke that he knows he doesn't like Lord Buxted. When the Marquis demands to know when he has ever said so, Felix replies, 'Oh, you don't say it, but a pretty good lobcock I should be if I didn't know it!'.³⁹ In *The Unknown Ajax*, the hero Hugo Darracott, speaking of his army service, says 'I joined as soon as I left - as soon as I was seventeen'.⁴⁰ His relations, to whom he is speaking, find nothing in this to shake their conviction that he is an uneducated lout, but the reader is easily able to supply the word 'school', and to guess that it will have been a good one (it proves to have been Harrow). It seems to be a primary aim of Heyer's books to teach women to read men. More modern texts, though, tend to want their heroes to talk: Mr Darcy must keep a diary ('As if he were a sixteen-year-old schoolgirl,' said my husband when he saw what I was reading), or must at least learn to tell Elizabeth what he feels. While the Darcy of *Pemberley* and *An Unequal Marriage* stands for reticence, the Darcy of *Mr. Darcy's Diary* stands for emotional openness, and Byron is the symbol of that openness.

If they want their heroes to feel more, some Austen tribute texts also want their heroines to do more. In *Pride and Prescience*, the first in her series of Mr. & Mrs. Darcy books, Carrie Bebris follows both Heyer and the 1995 adaptation in having Darcy fencing, but diverges from all known Austenian precedent not only by showing an all-male

conversation but by having Mr Darcy carry a gun on his way to a lunch party at Longbourn.⁴¹ *The Matters at Mansfield* ends, though, with Darcy giving Elizabeth a gun, a sop to modern feminist readers but equally inimical to the ethos of either Austen or Heyer. Bebris' books are littered with anachronisms and stylistic infelicities, but in this one moment they do allow us a clear view of an issue which lies at the heart of modern writers' reuse of Austen, which is whether or not she is a romance writer. Heyer, her first great imitator, always denied that she herself was romantic, and the primary impulse of her books is indeed comic, but it is a comedy fundamentally grounded in an acceptance of conventional gender roles. Other writers, though, want their Austen to challenge those roles and help negotiate a greater equality between women and men, and for this they often turn to Byron, who may have been mad, bad, and dangerous to know, but stands nevertheless as a figure of possibility and development in contrast to the conservatism and conventionality which are symbolised by Wellington.

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Notes

1. Georgette Heyer, *Regency Buck* (London: Arrow, 2004), 122.

2. Diana Wallace, *The Woman's Historical Novel: British Women Writers, 1900-2000* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 36.

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3. Duff Hart-Davis, '20th century Jane Austen', in Mary Fahnestock-Thomas, *Georgette Heyer: A Critical Retrospective* (Saraland, AL: PrinnyWorld Press, 2001), 260.
 4. Fahnestock-Thomas, *Georgette Heyer*, 100-1, 143, 149, 151-2, 161, 195-6, 198, 211, 219, 254, 305, 321-335, 349, 356-9, 364, 393, 404, 409-10, 412-16, 425-30, 432-3, 493, 517, 526, 528.
 5. Elizabeth O'Rourke, Review of *False Colours*, in Fahnestock-Thomas, *Georgette Heyer*, 192-3, 193.
 6. Marghanita Laski, 'The Appeal of Georgette Heyer', in Fahnestock-Thomas, *Georgette Heyer*, 283-6, 283-4.
 7. Venetia 'was neither familiar nor high in the instep' (284).
 8. Georgette Heyer, *The Convenient Marriage* (London: Arrow, 2013), 3 and 5.
 9. Georgette Heyer, *Devil's Cub* (London: Arrow, 2004), 33 and 102.
 10. Georgette Heyer, *An Infamous Army* (London: Arrow, 2004), 22.
 11. Georgette Heyer, *The Quiet Gentleman* (London: Arrow, 2005), 103 and 156.
 12. Georgette Heyer, *Cousin Kate* (London: Arrow, 2005), 255.

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13. Georgette Heyer, *Black Sheep* (London: Arrow, 2004), 15 and 7.
 14. Georgette Heyer, *A Civil Contract* (London: Arrow, 2005), 175.
 15. Georgette Heyer, *The Grand Sophy* (London: Arrow, 2013), 220.
 16. Georgette Heyer, *Venetia* (London: Arrow, 2004), 64.
 17. Georgette Heyer, *The Spanish Bride* (London: Arrow, 2005), 342.
 18. Georgette Heyer, *Friday's Child* (London: Arrow, 2004), 11.
 19. Georgette Heyer, *Pistols for Two* (London: Arrow, 2005), 164.
 20. Heyer, *Cousin Kate*, 184.
 21. Georgette Heyer, *The Talisman Ring* (London: Arrow, 2005), 73.
 22. Stacy Gillis, 'The Cross-Dresser, the Thief, his Daughter and her Lover: Queer Desire and Romance in Georgette Heyer's *These Old Shades*', *Women: A Cultural Review* 26.1-2: 57-74, 63.
 23. Reginald Hill, *Pictures of Perfection* (London: HarperCollins, 2000), 305.

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24. Arielle Eckstut, *Pride and Promiscuity: The Lost Sex Scenes of Jane Austen* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2003), 116.
25. Max Reinhardt, Letter to *The Times*, 12.7.1974, in Fahnestock-Thomas, *Georgette Heyer*, 257.
26. Fahnestock-Thomas, *Georgette Heyer*, 302.
27. Barbara Bywaters, 'Decentering the Romance: Jane Austen, Georgette Heyer, and Popular Romance Fiction', in Fahnestock-Thomas, *Georgette Heyer*, 498.
28. Georgette Heyer, *The Nonesuch* (London: Arrow, 2005), 4.
29. Lillian S. Robinson, 'On Reading Trash', in Fahnestock-Thomas, *Georgette Heyer*, 322.
30. Stephanie Barron, *Jane and the Prisoner of Wool House* (New York: Bantam Books, 2001), 29.
31. Online: <http://www.stephaniebarron.com/books.php>
32. Elizabeth Jenkins, *Jane Austen* [1938] (London: Sphere Books, 1973), 217.
33. Rachel M. Brownstein, 'Romanticism, a Romance: Jane Austen and Lord Byron, 1813-1815', *Persuasions* 16 (1994): 175-184, 176.

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34. Susanna Clarke, *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), 73 n. 5 and 74 n. 5. 116; on this and other Austen echoes in the book, particularly the presence of a character clearly based on Maria Rushworth, see Elaine Bander, 'Miss J. Austen, Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell', *Persuasions On-Line* 29.1 (winter 2008). Online: <http://www.jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol29no1/bander.html>)
35. Stephanie Barron, *Jane and the Waterloo Map* (New York: Soho Press, 2016), 310-11.
36. Emma Tennant, *Pemberley*, in *Pemberley Revisited* (London: The Maia Press, 2005), 110.
37. Michael Thomas Ford, *Jane Bites Back* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2010), 94.
38. Maya Slater, *Mr. Darcy's Diary* (London: Phoenix, 2007), 3.
39. Georgette Heyer, *Frederica* (London: Arrow, 2013), 236.
40. Georgette Heyer, *The Unknown Ajax* (London: Arrow, 2005), 64.
41. Carrie Bebris, *Pride and Prescience* (New York: Forge, 2004), 87, 130, and 128.