

Novel Coronavirus Begets Novel Jane Austen Adaptation

By
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What did you do when the Coronavirus besieged the entire world and left you housebound and restless? Did you start baking sourdough bread? Were you inclined to take up knitting or to embrace the challenges of 1000 piece jigsaw puzzles? Perhaps you binge watched Jane Austen films or re-read her novels for the umpteenth time. I did something I had never ever contemplated doing. I wrote a 27-chapter Jane Austen adaptation in two months. For years I had lived in my own private world of fandom reading and rereading her books and information about her life. What possessed me to undertake such a project? I felt a bit like Alice in Wonderland looking down the rabbit hole. I had conjured an idea that caused me to peek over the edge, much like Alice.

The genesis of the idea I must attribute to the BBC series, *Dickensian* which was produced in 2015, although I happened to catch only a few of the episodes sometime in 2019. The series was based on the concept of a police inspector investigating the death of Jacob Marley, from *A Christmas Carol*. During the course of the investigation the inspector meets up with various characters from Dicken's novels such a *Great Expectations*, *Oliver Twist*, *Pickwick Papers*, and others. The series revealed the back stories of many of these well-known characters.

Enter the pandemic of 2020 with time on my hands, when the intriguing idea occurred to me that it would be wonderful to read a book that brought together characters from Jane Austen's various novels. I had read them all more times than I could count along with several

biographies, and my business trips to England had included weekend tours of Bath, Chawton, and Winchester. My dear friend and tour guide had attended the same school in Reading that Austen had attended two centuries earlier. The rabbit hole was drawing me closer.

Then there were my own fantasies; ideas I had imagined about what might have happened to certain characters after the story ended. Much like many Jane Austen fan fiction writers, including best-selling author, Colleen McCollough, who wrote *The Independence of Miss Mary Bennet*, I had my own ideas of life after the novel was finished. I'd been carrying those ideas in my head for years; thinking them up sometimes helped put me to sleep at night. By now my head was hanging deep into the rabbit hole.

The major question was the storyline to which the other stories could be appended. I had no police investigator to meet the assorted characters and provide continuity. I had to turn to Jane for guidance. Her novels were basically love stories told from the perspective of the heroine and her journey overcoming obstacles, internal and external, until finally achieving the perfect match. What of the location? The characters from the novels were scattered throughout the south of England so what would be the device to bring them together and at what location? The heroines from the novels had already found felicitous matches so where was the romance to be found and between whom? What conflict could be devised that needed to be overcome? That's when I started really slipping down into the rabbit hole.

I decided to experiment with ideas for character introductions by creating a matrix with a column for each of the six novels that identified characters who could provide introductions to

others. For instance, a colonel from one story could introduce a colonel from another story because perhaps they knew each other from the past. Below is a simplified version of my matrix. My handwritten version included details like the communities and the names of homes such as Pemberley or Mansfield Park. I often annotated first names of characters as I came across them while researching the novels. It was a necessary reference point to ensure accuracy and also to keep the characters straight in my mind. At this point, I had completely fallen into the rabbit hole and I was compelled to begin writing.

Note: Names are based on original novels and not all characters listed were used in *The Matchmaker of Pemberley, An Amorous Sequel to All Jane Austen's Novels*.

Northanger Abby	Persuasion	Pride & Prejudice	Sense & Sensibility	Emma	Mansfield Park
Mrs. Allen	Captain Wentworth	Mr. Darcy Georgianna Darcy	Mr. Willoughby	Mr. & Mrs. Elton	Sir Thomas Bertram Edmund Bertram
Mr. Tilney	Elliot Sisters: Elizabeth Anne Mary	Bennet Sisters: Elizabeth Jane Mary Kitty Lydia	Colonel Brandon	Frank Churchill	Fanny Price William Price
Catherine Morland	Lady Russell	Colonel Fitzwilliam	Marianne Dashwood	Jane Fairfax	Henry Crawford Mary Crawford
Miss Thorpe	Mrs. Smith	Lady Catherine de Bourgh	Mrs. Jennings	Mrs. Suckling	
	William Elliot	Mr. & Mrs. Collins	Mr. & Mrs. Palmer	Emma Woodhouse	
	Mr. Shepherd Penelope Clay	Mr. Bingley	Eliza		
	Viscountess Dalrymple Miss Carteret	Mrs. Reynolds			

I decided I would use my favorite character of all time, Elizabeth Bennet Darcy as the lead and make Bath the location, because one of my most interesting fantasies had to do with the fate of

Elizabeth Elliot from *Persuasion* in which Bath played a central role. Bath also had plot connections to *Emma* and *Northanger Abby* which covered three of the six novels.

The next step was to construct a basic outline for the story including the reason for Elizabeth and her companions to travel to Bath and how they would be introduced into local society. The order in which each new character could be introduced was based on specific dependencies, not to mention the social protocols of the time. I used the matrix and outline to identify timing of the introductions which included 14 basic transitions that evolved into the final 27 chapters.

Since Jane's novels are ultimately about courtship, I was prepared with the two fantasy matches that I had already conjured in my dreams. The two required creation of new male love interests to court existing characters, and another match was planned between existing characters who I felt ultimately deserved each other.

During the writing process unexpected relationships emerged and one of my new male romantic leads ended up with an entire family from which an additional match occurred. It was most unexpected, but greatly enhanced the story once I recognized the opportunity, even though small re-writes were required. Having an outline for a story and seeing new story lines emerge was the unexpected delight of the creative process, as was amplifying lesser personalities that we had come to know in the original novels. Now I was officially living in the rabbit hole.

My admiration for Jane Austen and the reason I re-visit her works over and over again has to do with her unique writing style. She uses dialog to set the stage, reveal the heroine's viewpoint, and carry forward the plot. She is not prone to elaborate descriptions of places, edifices, physical appearances, or even style of dress. Instead, much is inferred by her characters through conversation, as are her opinions of behavior which she cleverly delivers with sly humor. I committed to do my best to model her unique style of delivery.

Another unexpected surprise was the emergence of two themes that I had not considered at the outset, anti-slavery and women's rights. The first came about as a plot device to introduce Sir Thomas Bertram to the story as revealed in a letter from Mr. Darcy to Elizabeth.

...“I will be forever grateful for the insights and clarity of your thinking that allows me to unburden my family's reputation by disengaging from a most shameful enterprise. Had we not discussed my family's heritage and one of the means by which we accumulated our substantial wealth, I might have long overlooked this stain. My great grandfather's investment in property in Antigua helped to advance our family fortune, but it was built on a vile practice of debasing our fellow human beings for profit. When I inherited the estate from my father, I became aware of the investment but chose to overlook it. If not for your good and wise counsel, I might have continued on that path even though it ran contrary to my own conscience.

Tomorrow I will meet with the buyer, Sir Thomas Bertram, a widower from Northampton, who already has holdings in Antigua and is predisposed to expand his investment there.”

I didn't intend to introduce a feminist theme, but I've always felt Jane Austen had a feminist point of view based on her descriptions of the entailment of family estates and the pressure on single women to marry so as not to be a burden on their families. I was indirectly influenced by a good friend, Jess Wells, who is a published author of historical fiction which focused on the struggles of educated women during the Middle Ages for whom the pursuit of knowledge could be a very dangerous choice.

How difficult it would be to have a brilliant intellect and be relegated to a life dictated by social proprieties. I selected Miss Carteret from *Persuasion* as my feminist icon and provided a means to explain her persona. There are few references to her in the novel except that she was "plain and awkward". Perhaps she felt disdain for a society that left her little choice in life. In a discussion with Colonel Fitzwilliam she says, "*There is no role for an educated woman in the world; we must follow our own pursuits as we may, or society will condemn us to ignorance.*" In another passage she says, "*I judge marriage as a happy event for any husband because his wife becomes his possession with no rights of her own. A wife is subjugated entirely to her husband's will, a state to which I cannot imagine submitting.*"

Miss Carteret, much like Emma Woodhouse, may have little inducement to marry. To quote Emma, "Fortune I do not want; employment I do not want; consequence I do not want". Their attitude towards marriage may differ but they both have the freedom to choose.

When I started the project, I had no timeline in mind for completing the work, but once I was in the rabbit hole, I became obsessed. The idea had seized my imagination and would not release me until I completed it. I was eager for morning to come so I could continue the writing process. In the evening, I would have lines of dialog pop in my head and grab my iPhone to capture the lines in Notes for use the next day before I forgot them,

I have several collections of the novels, but my bible was a beat-up paperback, *The Complete Novels of Jane Austen*, that I picked up at a bookstore in Winchester and then read cover to cover. It is full of post-it notes as bookmarks and the cover is scuffed and torn. To some degree my book wrote itself because I was able to have characters reveal storylines to one another that Jane had already created. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Darcy's proposal is met with astonishment, anger, and recriminations. In my novel, when Elizabeth shares the story of Darcy's proposal to her now intimate acquaintance, Mrs. Smith, they both burst into peals of laughter over the poorly expressed offer of marriage and her response.

"That was his proposal?" laughed Mrs. Smith. "I've never heard such an impolitic offer of marriage in all my life. And did you accept him anyway?"

"Oh no, I told him he was the last man on earth that I would ever consider marrying."

Developing my original ideas to add to the narrative was the most enticing aspect of the project. I was particularly drawn to creating dialog for the least likeable characters. Miss Elizabeth Elliot

has a deliciously egotistical role in keeping with her personality and the words flowed easily. Her introduction comes when she returns from a visit to Ireland as a guest of the dowager Viscountess Dalrymple and her daughter.

“Catherine Carteret is hardly better company than her mother and the plainest young woman I have ever set eyes on. She has little by way of conversation and spends all her time reading or walking in the gardens. She has no particular talents to speak of and shows little evidence of superior taste.”

I was so happy there was a connection to Bath in *Emma* because it gave me the opportunity to introduce the annoying Mrs. Elton who met her husband in that setting. She is so exceptionally cloying as in this excerpt when the Darcy’s attend an event at Maple Grove.

“I hope you are pleased with Maple Grove. Everyone who visits is struck by its beauty; the extensive grounds, the grand staircase, all is enchanting. Mr. Darcy, I’m sure you must be pleased with all you see. People of property always appreciate homes of a similar style, is it not true?”

Dialog for Miss Mary Bennet was a challenge because of the need to reflect her propensity for conceited moralizing and platitudes. I made no effort to renovate her basic character but instead provided her with the perfect match.

“Thusly began the courtship of two people perfectly suited to one another in temperament, way of thinking, and resemblance of character. Both reflected a sort of pompous self-importance matched with a false sense of modesty. When the Rev. Mr. Wink took Mary to be his bride, she moved to the Parsonage where she immersed herself in providing musical accompaniment at all services and learned the Church of England hymnal by heart. What the parishioners thought of her accomplishments was a subject of much speculation between Mr. and Mrs. Darcy, but they were grateful that their family worshipped at the Parsonage in Lambton.”

Publishing the work never even entered my mind when I started because I was so compelled to write it. About midway through the process I realized I should probably consider it because I became convinced other Jane Austen fans would enjoy reading it. I started to investigate the size of her following and was astounded at the sheer volume of fan fiction novels that have been produced, let alone the legion of Jane Austen fans on Facebook and other websites. I knew I had found my tribe. My next project was to get the story published online and in print. Even though I’ve spent my career in marketing and embrace the new task, I know it won’t be nearly as rewarding or entertaining as the experience of conceiving and writing *Jane Austen’s Connexions* which was the working title at the outset. My publisher suggested a title change that would work better for search engines and *The Matchmaker of Pemberley, An Amorous Sequel to All Jane Austen’s Novels* became the final title.

The pandemic was a cruel blow to so many. It has taken lives, disrupted lives, and changed our collective consciousness forever. Who could have imagined in all that despair, that I would get

to jump down a rabbit hole and emerge with a loving tribute to my favorite author in all the world, and breathe new life into stories that were written over two-hundred years ago? It was such a wonderful escape and I already miss the rabbit hole.

Book Description

Three weddings and an engagement are the happy result of a trip to Bath for the season taken by Elizabeth Darcy, her husband, and their younger sisters, Kitty and Georgianna. Nursing an aching heart due to a recent miscarriage, Elizabeth is encouraged to take the journey as a means of raising her depressed spirits in a fresh and convivial setting.

Courtship and conflict occur when familiar characters from all six of Jane Austen's novels meet new ones and would be matchmakers try to affect outcomes. Wealth and consequence do not always equate to good character as Darcy learns. A vain and manipulative woman finds a path to restoring her status in a match bound to disrupt family life for her husband. Feminist themes emerge as shy Georgianna discovers newfound interests and builds self-confidence.

New and unique storylines pay tribute to the original works while plots are revealed from the Austen canon. Whether you are a reader familiar with the six novels or have never read any of them, you will have a uniquely satisfying experience being immersed in her Regency world of manners, mores, and romance.

About the Author

Catherine Kelly Hemingway is a first-time author of *The Matchmaker of Pemberley, An Amorous Sequel to All Jane Austen's Novels*. After decades as a global marketing leader for major technology companies, a role that allowed frequent visits to England, she turned her interest in Jane Austen into a passion. Guided by a British friend who attended the same school as Jane Austen in Reading, she also visited Bath, Chawton, and Winchester while immersing herself in multiple readings of the canon along with various biographies, Austen-country travel guides, and related works of other authors. With time on her hands during the pandemic in 2020, she was captivated by the idea of bringing together characters from all six novels and felt compelled to write her first novel. She is admittedly addicted to Austen and working on a sequel.