The Significance of Maintaining Character Integrity in Literary Retellings

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The Significance of Maintaining Character Integrity in Literary Retellings

A Thesis by

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The Significance of Maintaining Character Integrity in Literary Retellings

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by Sara A. Turner
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ABSTRACT

The Significance of Maintaining Character Integrity in Literary Retellings

by Sara A. Turner

Retellings of popular stories have become a prevalent form of storytelling in media and literature. This paper explores the background of the genre and the drive for creators to reimagine older stories, while also considering the “why” behind retellings. The claim is that maintaining the integrity of the characters from the original source material is what causes the story to translate and be received well by its audience. The characters that communicate the main themes of a story and they are what draw readers in, so if they are changed too drastically from the foundation created by the original author, then the story will fall flat and the thematic importance of the story will not be recognized. For this paper, this idea is explored by focusing on retellings of Jane Austen’s novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, and analyzing how the changes the authors of the retellings make affect the overall message of the reimagining. The importance of setting and character in a narrative is examined as well to assist in recognizing why a story could be compelling enough for a writer to retell it, specifically what appeals to readers from *Pride and Prejudice*. The way characters engage with the narrative is what allows Austen’s themes in *Pride and Prejudice* of complex relationships, societal expectations, and class issues to be communicated with the reader. The pattern noticed within all the retellings analyzed for this paper is that plot and setting could be adapted to fit whatever twist the writer put on the story without affecting the reader’s thematic understanding of the retelling. However, when the writers of these retellings change too much from the core of the characters, this interaction between
character and narrative cannot happen because the character motivations and actions change as a result. Therefore, changing the meaning and thematic importance of the story.
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Retellings of older stories have become a popular form of storytelling in modern media and literature. The media market is saturated with these adapted stories in written and film format. With retellings being such a popular genre for writers and filmmakers, I want to understand how retellings are connected to the original source material while also understanding why these stories get chosen to be retold by creators. It is my belief that if the core of the characters is maintained and faithful to the original author’s story than the rest of the aspects of the story will follow (i.e. setting, plot, conflict). Characters of the narrative maintain the heart of most stories and the main themes, which cause them to continue to be relevant to new, modern audiences. So, even if the reason behind the conflicts, setting, and plot devices change within the retelling, if the characters remain true to the source material the story’s themes and the impact it has on its audience will be consistent. The characters are what communicate the questions and ideas being addressed in the story to the audience, so making sure the character integrity is intact allows for these intended conversations and truths to continue to be acknowledged as the stories get retold.

Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* is one of my favorite novels, and is a well-known and beloved novel that has inspired authors and creators for their own work. The characters from *Pride and Prejudice* bring up questions about the human condition, complex relationships, and family dynamics that continue to be relevant to modern audiences. Since it has such strong and familiar lead characters, it is my aim to focus specifically on retellings of this story to explore the importance of maintaining character integrity. Characters are a central aspect to any story, but
*Pride and Prejudice* is a particularly character driven story. The interpersonal relationships and feelings between the characters drive the plot while Austen also gives her characters the room to grow and learn within the story. Nancy Roser, Miriam Martinez, Charles Fuhrken, and Kathleen McDonnold discuss why some characters are so memorable to their audience: “We can argue, perhaps, that the memorable characters are the ones we know the most about, the ones who wrestle with believable moral and ethical dilemmas, the ones we connect with (both positively and negatively), and the ones whose changes seem integral to their qualities, relationships, and goals” (549). Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy both grow and learn from each other throughout the novel, and the reader is able to see the way they each struggle with societal expectations, their own pride, and the way their own biases have affected their outlook on everything happening around them. The reader sees these characters address and learn from their own flaws, making them relatable and appealing to a larger audience. In Juliette Wells’s book, *Everybody’s Jane: Austen in the Popular Imagination*, she explains why people read Austen: “‘We read her novels to identify and improve, to laugh and to sympathize, to enjoy the present and revisit the past, and at times to escape our own muddled lives for a bit and find the clarity that only the best fiction can provide’” (71). Watching these characters grow and learn is what has contributed to them being beloved by the masses for so long. The sheer number of retellings/adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* demonstrates the love people have for the story and the characters, and how it continues to stand the test of time. The main idea with reimagining Austen is “keeping Austen alive, and making Austen more familiar” for both scholars and everyday readers (Wells 83).

By reading and analyzing retellings of *Pride and Prejudice* specifically for character integrity, readers can understand how well the retelling actually translates to an audience and if it
would be considered a faithful recreation of the original novel. By looking at a variety of reimaginings of *Pride and Prejudice*, I’ll be able to see just how integral characters are when a story gets repurposed by a new author with a different lens and how it affects the thematic threads when an author modifies a key aspect of the characters. Some of these retellings expand past the core novel Austen created, so exploring how the character integrity potentially varies when the time and place of the novel changes will show if it loses its authenticity. I will be comparing the retellings that take place around the same time period as the original novel against ones with a modern setting to discover what characteristics have to remain intact and what is allowed to be altered/forgotten without losing the heart of the original story and theme. While the setting can alter the ways the characters interact with the narrative around them, the characters continue to resonate with the reader because of their consistent strength and relatability. Analyzing these characters in different settings demonstrates how solid characters can persist and continue to be impactful to an audience regardless of the setting change.
For this thesis, I have researched the background of retellings, the importance of retelling a story, and what is important to include in any story so I can understand the background on the genre and the essential role characters play in stories. Since I am focusing on retellings of *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen I have also read a wide variety of novels inspired by that original text to understand if there is a link between character integrity being upheld and the story being received as a faithful retelling.

An initial pattern I noticed when I began my research is that there are many publications about the importance of retellings as a teaching method. James R. Kalmbach has a few different pieces that were published in 1986 that look at retellings from an instructor’s point of view and acknowledge retellings “have been used for the last 60 years to gather data in an amazing range of language based inquiries” (“Getting at the point of retellings” 327). Kalmbach explains that when researchers use retellings as a research method they can better understand story structure as well as their students as readers and ends up concluding that “Retellings of stories have two components: (1) what is recalled from the original story and (2) how what is recalled is structured into a unique narrative that communicates a point” (333). William Labov’s theory of narrative development that is brought up by Kalmbach is also interesting as it “is concerned with why narrators (or retellers) structure stories the way they do to a particular audience” in which “a fully-formed narrative typically has some or all of the following components: an abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, result or resolution, coda” (327-8). This theory can assist in my analysis of retellings, and Labov’s theory focuses specifically on the decisions
storytellers make when deciding how to tell their desired story to their audience. With modern retellings, especially ones that are based on popular stories, there are specific audiences the narrator is targeting.

However, Kalmbach contends in the same piece that retellings are used to study “‘recall protocols’” (327), which is also the main idea in Elizabeth Marsh’s piece. Marsh focuses on the science of retelling memories and stories, and the potential damage that recall can cause to the original memory and therefore the facts. Marsh states that even “the simple act of retrieving a memory can change the memory” and that “retellings are no exception; retellings have consequences for how events are later remembered” (17). The idea that memory recall can get distorted and damaged by retellings makes sense, especially in regards to retellings of *Pride and Prejudice* and other Austen works. Audiences often get confused, and their perceptions of Austen’s actual work gets distorted because the market is so oversaturated with Austen retellings. There are so many adaptations and retellings out there that the truth of Austen’s work gets hidden behind the quotes and scene changes created for these retellings. Austen fans can see this with the merchandise being sold with quotes or references to scenes from adaptations that never actually happened in Austen’s original text.

With this use of retellings in an educational setting, Kalmbach discussed the reader-response literary theory that developed as a response to the new criticism, where “practitioners of the new criticism such as Wimsatt (1954) focused only on the text itself . . . quite apart from the responses of actual readers to that text” (“Evaluating informal methods” 121). While other theorists, like Bliech (1975) and Fish (1980), “at their extreme, focus only on the responses of readers quite apart from the text itself” (“Evaluating informal methods” 121). Then Kalmbach references Rosenblatt who seemed to find a middle ground between these two theories and he
“argued that both the text and the reader are critical elements of literature, indeed that literature exists only in the transactions between texts and readers and that critics must be concerned with the contributions of both the text and the reader to these transactions” (“Evaluating informal methods” 121). With this concept in mind, it could be argued that fictional retellings are a genre made up entirely of an immense collection of Rosenblatt’s reader-response theory.

Kalmbach’s discussion of new criticism and reader-response theory connects well with Wells’s book where she relates reader-response criticism to the idea of “reception” which, “includes not only the process of taking in one’s reading but also the process of responding to that reading” (9). This idea is important to understand the “why” behind a retelling of an original text. It helps the reader understand that these retellings and adaptations are done in response to the source material. To further understand this “why,” we can explore a variety of sources that understand why this form of literature continues to be so prevalent after so many years. There is an extensive number of published magazine and news articles on this idea, but not many published, academic works on this subject. Rumaisa Khusru, Sarah Shaffi, and Toni Fitzgerald’s articles were some of the more informative ones I found that addressed both the history behind retellings and the popularity they have with modern audiences. The piece “Abridgements and Retellings of Classics” was one of the few scholarly works I found that discusses why retellings are so popular and explains, “The stories of Dracula and Frankenstein seem to have more lives than the monstrous creatures which they portray” (BFN, et al. 72). This highlights how some of these older stories get so many adaptations and are retold so many times; they are constantly in the public eye which can affect the public’s perception of the original work.

With understanding the “why” behind retellings, we must consider what makes a story stand out enough to readers for them to respond to it. It is imperative to consider the facts that go
into characters and setting within a narrative structure, and what within that stands out to a reader. Jerry Watson’s article provides key information regarding the importance of setting to a story: “The integral setting . . . exerts a great deal of influence upon the values, speech, and actions of characters, the movement of plot, and the presentation of theme and mood; integral setting can also serve as a symbol” (638). Watson’s piece also analyzes the ways a location interacts with character and plot, how setting can “unveil” the characters or characters “unveil” the setting depending on the situation and how setting can help create the mood, move the plot along, or reveal the theme of the story. Setting has a variety of possibilities for the role it can play in a story that depends on the author’s intent and the reader’s interpretation.

The important role characters play in stories and how that is achieved was another aspect that needed to be explored and understood more fully. The article, “Characters as Guides to Meaning,” focuses solely on the importance of character to a story and the role characters play in the plot and meaning of a work. It also discusses how “E.M. Forster (1927), in Aspects of the Novel, contends that although it is impossible to know everything about a real person, readers can thoroughly come to know literary characters. Many experts, thus, view characters as the driving forces of stories. Even so, we readers understand that characters cannot be lifted away from the narratives that enfold them” (Roser, Nancy, et al. 548). The view on characters “driving” the story is very similar to my argument on the importance of characters in retellings. However, the interaction between characters and the narrative as a whole is also vital to acknowledge because it is hard, if not impossible, for one to exist without the other. Alex Woloch also provides invaluable information about character and the way characters interact with one another. He brings up a similar idea to Roser’s: “the implied person behind any character is never directly reflected in the literary text by only partially inflected: each individual
portrait has a radically contingent position within the story as a whole; our sense of the human figure (as implied person) is inseparable from the space that he or she occupies within the narrative totality” (13). Both pieces acknowledge the fact that the characters are inseparable from the narrative space they occupy; they can have varying degrees of involvement or importance, but they cannot be separated from that role within the narrative they fill. Charles McCann expands these ideas about setting and character while discussing *Pride and Prejudice*. McCann’s essay ties together the importance of setting and character within a story while also analyzing popular Austen settings and the characters and ideas they symbolize.

Now having an idea of “why” a story would get retold and what makes a story compelling enough to a reader for them to decide to retell it, we need to consider why Jane Austen’s works continue to be so popular with readers for adaptations and retellings. Devoney Looser’s *The Making of Jane Austen* provides insight into the cultural influence Austen has had throughout time in a variety of formats. *Among the Janeites* by Deborah Yaffe tells the personal stories of different Austen fans and how they have come to interact with her works. *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen* outlines some valid concerns about adaptations and retellings of Austen’s work: “One effect of the tunneled vision of adaptation is to jettison the sophisticated system of manipulative social relations, encompassing both the subtle imbalances of power between men and women and between women and women, in which the novels trade” (Sutherland 225). Wells’s *Everybody’s Jane: Austen in the Popular Imagination* chronicles different ways readers respond to Austen’s work, including fanfiction, and the cultural and personal importance those interactions hold. These four books are invaluable for understanding why readers resonate so deeply with Austen and why certain stories get retold over and over, while others don’t.
The novels chosen for this thesis come from an extensive list, and have been condensed to the following: *Pride* by Ibi Zoboi (2018); *Eligible* by Curtis Sittenfeld (2016); *Pride, Prejudice, and Other Flavors* by Sonali Dev (2019); *Pride and Protest* by Nikki Payne (2022); *Death Comes to Pemberley* by P.D. James (2011); *Longbourn* by Jo Baker (2013); *The Other Bennet Sister* by Janice Hadlow (2020); *Pride and Prometheus* by John Kessel (2008); *Pride and Papercuts* by Staci Hart (2020); *Heartstone* by Elle Katharine White (2017); *Pride and Premeditation* by Tirzah Price (2021); *Bridget Jones’s Diary* by Helen Fielding (1996); *Unequal Affections* by Lara S. Ormiston (2013); *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* by Jane Austen and Seth Grahame-Smith (2009); *The Season* by Jonah Lisa Dyer and Stephen Dyer (2016); *The Jane Austen Book Club* by Karen Joy Fowler (2004). Some of these retellings have academic sources related to them or compelling reviews that are included in the literature surrounding them because they provide interesting insight or a new take on the story. These novels provide a variety of perspectives on Austen’s work and her characters. Reading each one and analyzing them carefully for character integrity is vital to my claim.

The literature around retellings as a genre is not extensive. There are not many academic sources, so I relied on published online articles from respectable, well-known websites to fill in that gap. There are many options in academic sources, however, when it came to analyzing fanfiction and its impact on the literary community, which allowed me to distinguish between retellings and fanfiction. My research works, then, towards filling in that gap for other scholars who are pursuing a similar path of study. All the sources I utilized helped provide me with the needed background to answer my questions of what makes a good retelling and why maintaining character integrity is so important to a retelling being received well by its audience.
Why Retell a Story?

The idea of retelling a story is not a modern one; retelling an older story for a new audience has been prevalent throughout history (like Dante’s *Inferno* or James Joyce’s *Ulysses*). It’s something that has gained more traction in modern spaces, whether written or filmed. This concept stated in “Abridgements and Retellings of Classics” focused on the fact that “old stories reappear in one generation after another—in new languages, new forms, new styles. Literature is a participatory democracy, and the people (or entrepreneurs who read the people’s minds), not scholars and critics, determine which stories are resurrected” (BFN, et al. 72). The piece even claims “these stories surpass any particular linguistic form and speak directly to the human psyche” (BFN, et al. 72). These writers take a story and reimagine it to achieve a certain goal depending on their take and adaptation of the original material. Unless it’s someone purely trying to capitalize on a story’s popularity, these stories are reimagined because something about that story stood out to the writer. These stories that get retold repeatedly are chosen because there is something within them that speaks to a person’s psyche and sparks their imagination. Some writers want to see their much-loved characters just exist and live past the end of the story; some want to use these treasured stories to showcase more diversity, or to pay homage to a work that made a large impact on them. Toni Fitzgerald writes about how “Retelling is often one of the first forms of storytelling a writer encounters . . . Those machinations can lead to new ideas based on our own interests and our own timelines” and that “it forces readers to rethink things they may have taken for granted . . . Giving a familiar story a makeover lets you view it in a new
light.” The possibilities are endless but it provides material for fans of the original piece to continue interacting with that beloved work.

While retellings are a favored form of media, there is still skepticism about retellings because “they believe that the original stories hold timeless value and don’t require reinterpretations or adaptations” (Khusru). There are some who idolize the original works and want them to remain untouched. This is a mindset that is found within certain Jane Austen fans who believe her works should remain whole. Yaffe notes, “Fundamental disagreements over interpretation are not uncommon in literary studies, but when Austen is the subject, the arguments sometimes seem especially impassioned. Austen matters in a way that many other writers, even some famous ones, don’t” (107). Yaffe discusses how loyal Austen fans can be and how hard they will fight to defend her work or their own opinions about her works, while others welcome these adaptations and enjoy reading them because it allows them to interact with a beloved story all over again. Yaffe explains that many who wrote spinoffs “seemed to be genuine fans driven by their unwillingness to say goodbye to Austen’s characters on the final pages of her all-too-short, all-too-few novels” (71).

There’s also the concern that audiences will get overexposed to Austen and end up purposefully avoiding her works. Looser addresses this concern: “Her reputation has shifted with the times and with the needs and desires of her multiple audiences . . . it’s ridiculous to wring our hands with worry that zombie movies, female-student-dominated college courses, or Etsy products are ruining Austen’s status in the literary canon” when “Austen’s critical and popular legacies have traveled quite well together . . . for a very long time” (217). These writers and creators adapt these stories because, most of the time, they are fans themselves and want to honor and interact with these stories on a different level. So, while it is understandable to want to
protect these original works from being repurposed in a harmful way, there should be room left for those who are genuinely wanting to expand on and pay homage to the original creator and their work.

Critics also argue that “there is an unoriginality about [retellings] but writers point out that myths and legends stem from a culture of oral storytelling, where tales were told over and over, each iteration bringing something new” (Shaffi). Sarah Shaffi quotes Sue Lynn Tan: “no story is ever the same with each writer bringing a new perspective, creating a different world and characters, or choosing to highlight a different element of the tale” (Shaffi). While these critiques are understandable given how oversaturated the market is becoming with retellings and adaptations, Rumaisa Khusru argues, “retellings can be a celebration of those original stories, breathing new life into them and allowing them to resonate with a contemporary audience.” The criticism behind retellings and adaptations of stories comes from the audience wanting to see new, original stories, not retellings, but at the same time discounting the creativity and work that goes into these reimaginings.

Retellings can vary greatly, such as Rick Riordan’s *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* series that reimagines Greek mythology against a modern background, Sarah J Maas’s *A Court of Thorns and Roses* series that is inspired by Beauty and the Beast, or *Heartstone* by Elle Katharine White that puts a fantasy twist on *Pride and Prejudice*. The retellings allow audiences to interact with works they were maybe initially intimidated by; it puts the characters and plot devices in a setting that is fun and potentially easier for the reader to understand. This then draws the reader to the original work and gives them a base understanding to work from. A retelling, according to Wells, “holds the potential to introduce a reader to Austen for the first time or to spur a formerly reluctant reader to a new encounter with her writings” (Wells 197). I got my first
introduction to Austen’s work through the film and television adaptations, and then wanted to know more and read the original source material. Retellings allow both audiences and creators to work with beloved stories and interact with them in a different and exciting way. It even gives them the opportunity to potentially read a favorite story for the “first” time again when it takes on a whole new perspective and focus than the original. Retellings open up a world of possibilities for writers, as Wells points out, “whatever is uppermost in the popular imagination will join Austen material, with the effect of delighting some audiences and disgusting others. Originality will be ever more challenging to achieve in a crowded field, yet some bold new approaches to Austen are sure to emerge from perspectives we cannot yet guess” (220). It is always a risk when retelling a beloved story that criticism will follow, especially when works like Austen’s are constantly reimagined and adapted. However, as Wells explains, for some it is a risk they are willing to take so they can pay homage to their favorite story in their desired way and delight a potential audience with it.
The Line Between Fanfiction and a Retelling

Fanfiction is defined as “stories involving popular fictional characters that are written by fans and often posted on the Internet” and has been popular in various forms since 1939, according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, while a “retelling” is defined as “a new version of a story” and the term has been in use since 1883 (“Retelling”). There seems to be a fine line between these two forms of expanding upon an already created story or characters. Wells notes that “fan fiction opens the reader’s eyes to the possibility of treating the source text in an active way instead of remaining a passive consumer” (180). Having fanfiction as an option inspires readers to think like writers and to think and work past the boundaries of the original source text.

At their core, retellings seem to be a more formal version of fanfiction, paying homage to a certain work as a whole, while fanfiction is informal and often focuses on creating new stories with the characters rather than utilizing the original story structure, setting, characters, and plot. Retellings tend to work with pieces that are not copyrighted and are in the public domain while fanfiction is often the opposite and takes characters from books, TV shows, and movies that are protected under copyright law. These copyright laws tend, according to Betsy Rosenblatt and Rebecca Tushnet, to “include among their considerations whether the new work is non-commercial and whether it transforms the purpose or meaning of the original” (385). That is why fanfiction is still legal on internet sites because some of the way copyright laws are written allow for writers to create fanfiction as long as they do not profit from it. When a piece of fanfiction gets extremely popular and a publishing house wants to publish it, the character names and allusions to the original work must be changed to avoid copyright. This happened with many
published books/series, like Ali Hazelwood’s *The Love Hypothesis* and E.L James’s *Fifty Shades of Grey* series. Retellings, however, can be published and sold to consumers while continuing to use the original characters’ names, plot elements, and setting as they are in the public domain. That is one reason why there are so many movies and books based on mythological stories, fairytales, and older written works because they don’t have to work around copyright laws. At the same time, creators are allowed to work with stories that resonated with them, or they remember from their childhood. This section is not to discredit any fanfiction pieces or fanfiction writers, as some published authors got their start in fanfiction because it serves as a place for them to work on their writing skills. However, it is important to understand the line between these two different forms of reworking aspects from an original work.
The way characters and stories resonate with an audience is what causes them to be retold and adapted by other creators. Characters play an essential role in any story, but understanding how characters become vital to a story and interact with the narrative to make an impression on a reader helps identify why a particular story would get retold. Woloch analyzes these interactions to help readers identify these relationships within a story and their importance to a story structure. Woloch defines character-space as “that particular and charged encounter between an individual human personality and a determined space and position within the narrative as a whole” and the character-system as “the arrangement of multiple and differentiated character-spaces—differentiated configurations and manipulations of the human figure—into a unified narrative structure” (14). Woloch argues, “all character-spaces inevitably point us toward the character-system, since the emplacement of a character within the narrative form is largely comprised by his or her relative position vis-à-vis other characters” and that “the space of a particular character emerges only vis-à-vis the other characters who crowd him out or potentially revolve around him” (18). Woloch’s statement has character-space rely on a character’s interactions, or lack thereof, with other characters. Understanding the significance of these interactions is key to fully grasping the meaning of the story and how the characters and plot work together. The distinction Woloch makes between a character-space and a character-system is important in order to understand the way characters operate within the story and the way they interact as the narrative structure around them progresses the piece. Austen’s stories focus heavily on characters and their interactions, so understanding character-space versus a character-

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system “highlights the way that the ‘human aspect’ of the character is often dynamically integrated into, and sometimes absorbed by, the narrative structure as a whole” (Woloch 17). It is imperative to understand how characters interact, or are sometimes “absorbed,” by the narrative and how that affects the reading experience for the audience. Characters resemble people, so readers tend to get emotional about what happens to them within the story. So, the idea of a character-system being comprised of overlapping and intertwining character-spaces allows for the significance of these definitive relationships between a character and the space, character, or narrative structure around them to be acknowledged by the reader.

The characters in Austen’s work can cause a variety of feelings in the reader that trigger emotional investment since

most often readers have understood Austen’s flat characters as a reasonable imitation of actual life. If there are round and flat characters in Austen, this is an accurate representation of the real social universe— which has a few sympathetic people (always including the reader or critic him— or herself) and many simple and superficial people (Woloch 43).

Readers often resonate, either consciously or unconsciously, with the message or theme of a story. However, the characters of the story are what frequently draw them in. Wells notes, “Austen’s work is all about character driven story lines . . . I like to look at who are the characters that I identify with the most” (91). Characters that readers relate to or ones that cause a large emotional reaction creates a bond between that reader and the story. While characters are there to help progress the plot, they are also mediums of communication between the author and the reader, especially since “Austen’s subject matter resonates well beyond her nation and period. Audiences around the world respond appreciatively to her depictions of such topics as
difficult family relationships, journeys of self-discovery, and cultural imperatives to marry” (Wells 5). The characters in Austen’s works allows these themes and topics to be received so well and create such meaning to her audience which is what allows Austen’s work to stand the test of time, as Wells explains. The way these ideas continue to be relevant enough that readers two hundred years later are still able to understand them and relate to these characters is how all these adaptations and retellings of her works continue to be prominent.

Due to Austen’s novels being a popular text for writers to be inspired by for their own retellings, a majority of the works focus on the major characters and their journey. Those who adapt her are able to understand her character-systems in place and as a result, deconstruct her story and characters down to their core so they can reconfigure them within a new story. This is seen in some novels like Bridget Jones’s Diary by Helen Fielding, Heartstone by Elle Katharine White, and Eligible by Curtis Sittenfeld. These novels are able to translate the motivations and actions of the characters and the way they interact with the narrative into their desired setting and interpretation of the original text.

Both Fielding’s novel, Bridget Jones’s Diary and Sittenfeld’s, Eligible, are able to take the main conflicts and ideas from Austen’s Pride and Prejudice and place them in a modern time while still exploring the same issues. Fielding’s book takes place in London and has her Elizabeth character, Bridget Jones, face the same challenges and dilemmas that Lizzy does in the original novel. Bridget Jones is struggling to fit into the mold society expects of women while also pursuing a relationship with her boss, Daniel, the Wickham character, while her family is trying to push her towards Mark Darcy, the Darcy character, who does end up being the healthy relationship choice. Bridget Jones’s Diary is able to communicate the complicated dynamics of a person’s interpersonal relationships and the effect societal expectations and power structures can
have on those connections. Curtis Sittenfeld’s novel, *Eligible*, mainly takes place in a modern-day Cincinnati, where Darcy is a surgeon and Lizzy works in publishing. Sittenfeld is able to translate the conflicts and character motivations from the original text because she found engaging ways to set the characters and their rapport up against a different background. Lizzy and Darcy’s connection is able to be expressed in a way that allows the reader to still resonate with it because they are able to see Austen’s characters and story paralleled within it. Since both of these novels have the characters remain true to how Austen initially established them, the readers to have a chance to relate to them in a way that more closely resembles what they, as a reader, might actually be going through. The relatability of Austen’s characters is what allows the novels to continue to be so popular among modern readers, so having these kinds of retellings allows readers a chance to more closely relate to and explore characters they already have a connection with.

On the other hand, Elle Katharine White’s novel, *Heartstone*, puts the characters of *Pride and Prejudice* into a fantasy setting where their actions have a new layer of importance and drama. White is able to keep the core traits of the characters from the original novel and translate them into a different genre. The reader is able to see Lizzy’s loyalty and pride from Austen’s story in White’s version because of the lengths she goes to protect her family after the death of Kitty. Kitty’s death in this novel also shows a pattern that I noticed in retellings, where Kitty is often killed and used as a plot device for character motivation or completely omitted from the narrative due to her flatness as a character. White also has the harm Wickham’s character attempts against Lydia’s character be a physical and emotional attack that parallels the way Austen has the threat Wickham poses be to her family name and reputation. The parallels White makes within her retelling keep the characters accurate to the original because she understands
the character-spaces Austen created. White is able to deconstruct them and rebuild them within a fantasy novel so it still resonates with the reader in a similar way as the original text.

These retellings show the importance character integrity has to a story and how the way characters interact with the narrative around them contributes to the story’s being memorable to the reader. These retellings would not have felt as accurate to Austen’s story as they did without the authors understanding and acknowledging the character-systems, as Woloch defined them, in the original text. Feilding, Sittenfeld, and White were able to recognize the importance of those interactions and dynamics between the characters and narrative around them so the story translates to both Austen fans and casual readers.
What is a Minor Character to a Story?

The characters that operate in the background, or minor characters, are also necessary to analyze when exploring the role of characters to a story. Minor characters play a vital role in a narrative because of the way they advance the characters and story around them. According to Woloch, a minor character’s distinction cannot be based simply on the brief moment during which he stands out; in fact, it is precisely the opposite. The minor character is always drowned out within the totality of the narrative; and what we remember about the character is never detached from how the text, for the most past, makes us forget him . . . the strange significance of minor characters, in other words, resides largely in the way the character disappears, and in the tension or relief that results from this vanishing (37-8).

Many of the minor characters in *Pride and Prejudice* are of the group that gets crowded out by others and “disappear.” They serve their purpose to the major characters as “Elizabeth’s centrality emerges only in dynamic interactions with the development of these (and other) minor characters, so that the narrative price of her achieved interiority is the distortion of many other human figures” (Woloch 34). Minor characters, while missing the depth the major characters possess, still serve an important purpose to the narrative and the major characters. They provide a bridge between the major characters and the story as “a dialectical process of rejecting different extremes (too much pride, too much sensibility) to find a middle ground. This process accommodates itself perfectly with an asymmetrical structure of characterization, as various minor characters exemplify certain traits or ways of thinking that the protagonist must learn to
discard” (Woloch 55). Since juxtaposition and comparison is so prominent in Austen’s writing, she uses her minor characters to show or say something that the major characters need to oppose. Those in the background help communicate certain events, provide plot-progressing information, or say things that elicit certain thought-processes from the protagonists.

Austen’s writing relies on juxtaposing opposite forces or people; even the titles of her two first published novels demonstrates that focus: *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*. Woloch touches on the way Austen contrasts her characters:

To be a character in Austen is to get continually contrasted, juxtaposed, related to others, and as such, to help bring thematic architecture that critics then discern. And if the weight of narrative signification seems to rest on all of these characters’ backs, it is the minor characters, in particular, who bear the heaviest portion: unequal partners in a dialectic that could not take place if attention were limited to the protagonist herself (43).

Minor characters, while not the focus of the story, are essential to the story resonating with its intended audience and communicating the author’s message. Charlotte Lucas “exists uneasily in the middle ground within this structure, illustrating the difficulties that inevitably occur when certain characters bear only a functional relationship to the protagonist” (Woloch 90). Charlotte demonstrates the harsh reality of the marriage market during the time for women, especially for women of her age, while Austen allows Elizabeth to be the romantic one and to aspire for a marriage that is based on companionship and love. Elizabeth’s interactions with Charlotte “allows Elizabeth to externalize her own viewpoints,” so Charlotte’s role is “externalizing Elizabeth’s own consciousness” (Woloch 90). The interactions between these two characters not only allows the audience to see the difference in their outlooks on their futures, but also the way in which Charlotte’s experience is there to juxtapose Elizabeth’s and help her grow.
Elizabeth’s sisters are also minor characters who provide a way for her to learn and grow. Each of them “are, certainly, what Elizabeth needs to get away from in order to be her own singular self—but on the level of narrative discourse they are precisely what she needs to have around” (Woloch 47). The Bennet sisters provide the opposition Elizabeth needs to learn more about herself and what she desires. If Elizabeth’s sisters were any different, there is no telling the way the story and Elizabeth and Darcy’s character development would have played out. Elizabeth’s family provides an obstacle for Elizabeth and Darcy’s potential relationship, as well as Jane and Bingley’s. Their flatness and lack of depth is what allows them to come off as shallow and naïve. They never change within the story; it is Darcy and Elizabeth who grow to disregard and overlook the Bennet family’s lack of decorum. The minor characters serve their role to the main characters by not changing and being the tool Elizabeth needs to progress in her own character growth.

Since Austen’s writing is character focused, these interactions the minor characters have with the main character are essential to the way the plot develops. The way these characters juxtapose each other, as Woloch states, helps communicate the narrative themes to the reader. Without the way the minor characters interact with the protagonists of the story, the novel’s exploration of inherent human flaw, complex family dynamics, complicated relationships, and societal expectations would not be recognized by the readers. These ideas are timeless and allow this story to continue to be relevant to audiences because the audience is able to identify with the struggles of these characters hundreds of years later.
The Expansion of the Minor Characters in Retellings

In Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, since the minor characters are flat and underdeveloped, they serve their purpose to the story and the major characters’ development. However, the literary space of retellings gives writers and creators the freedom to do more with those characters. Wells observes, “Austen’s present-day admirers certainly explore, dissect, and reconfigure her life and fiction, and it is common for such rewriters of Austen to elevate her minor characters to starring roles and to experiment with both sequels and prequels” (16). Mary Bennet is a popular figure for authors of retellings to highlight because she is reserved and overshadowed by the other Bennet sisters. Woloch states, “The narrative accentuates the small attention that Mary attracts, or her marginal position within novelistic totality, by always making the transitions toward her suddenly and cutting them off quickly” (71). Mary is given little to no time in the novel, and when she does appear, as Woloch discusses, she is moved on from quickly so her flatness as a character gives more space for new authors to invent.

Janice Hadlow’s *The Other Bennet Sister* and John Kessel’s *Pride and Prometheus* take Mary’s character and expand past the end of the original novel’s timeline and give her the room to grow and learn about herself and what she wants without the influence of her mother or living in the shadows of her sisters. Hadlow’s novel gives Mary an impactful voice which shows the other characters through her eyes and the way the events and actions from the original story would have affected her as a young, awkward girl. Jo Baker reviewed the novel as well and stated, “Hadlow builds an immersive and engaging new version of a familiar world; her approach feels at once true to the source material and to life. In Austen’s Elizabeth Bennet,
readers glimpse the person we might aspire to be . . . but in Hadlow’s Mary we recognize a more familiar figure.” Hadlow is able to craft a believable story for Mary after the ending of the original novel that shows her gaining confidence and strength from her support system in Mrs. Gardiner and Mrs. Hill. John Kessel’s novel, *Pride and Prometheus*, also develops Mary into a complex and dynamic character who is pursuing a career in paleontology and what she believes is right. The novel intertwines *Pride and Prejudice* characters with Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. Kessel stated in an interview with Los Angeles Public Library that he “sought to give her an interior life and full humanity. In [his] story she is thirteen years older, and a little wiser, but she is still unable to see Victor clearly.” He pulled what little the audience knew of her and what little was perceived of her and turned her into a strong-willed and determined woman. Constance Grady’s review on the novel discusses the ending and how it “offer[s] the possibility of a life of fulfillment and respect for Mary—a life worthy of the reader’s notice—without the necessity of male approval.” Grady also notices the way Kessel grew Mary’s character into one that is “worthy” and appealing to the reader. Kitty Bennet’s corpse in this novel is used by Victor Frankenstein to create the partner for the Creature, which again highlights this pattern in retellings where Kitty is utilized mainly as a plot device, if she’s even included at all, because she is such a flat character.

Other minor characters often spark the interest of writers as in Molly Greeley’s *The Heiress* (2021) which focuses on Anne de Bourgh, Amanda Quain’s *Accomplished* (2022) which has Georgiana Darcy as the main character, and Melina Taub’s *The Scandalous Confessions of Lydia Bennet, Witch* (2023) that gives Lydia Bennet the spotlight. Jo Baker’s *Longbourn* gives the staff of the Longbourn manor the main role while the Bennet family operate in the background; she humanizes and gives a voice to the staff the reader barely acknowledges in the
original. Woloch explains, “servants have always been used to exemplify minor characters . . . they embody (within the story) the narrative functionality which is central to the construction of minor characters and because . . . they come to stand for members of the working class” (119).

The fact that these characters are underused by Austen gives the retelling authors more freedom to develop the characters while still being able to pay homage to a much-loved story. In Baker’s novel, Longbourn, she gives the servants of Pride and Prejudice an opportunity to tell their story and provide a new perspective on Austen’s original plot. Baker shows what life is like for the servants of these households and how big of a wealth gap there was between the classes.

Viewing the main characters of Pride and Prejudice through the viewpoints of the servants is jarring as well, because the reader gets to see the main characters’ flaws through a new lens so they are not as endearing to the reader as they are in the original. The housemaid, Sarah’s, story paralleled Lizzy’s in many ways, showing that even those in the background can be dealing with complex relationships, financial struggles, and personal discovery. Anna Carey’s review dissects this parallel as well: “Sarah bears a slight resemblance to Elizabeth Bennet, and in some ways the Longbourn servants’ lives parallel those of their masters. Mrs. Hill is just as worried about Mr. Collins inheriting Longbourn as Mrs. Bennet is . . . and like Elizabeth, Sarah is drawn to two men, though neither is a Wickhamesque cad.” Longbourn adds depth to the characters of Pride and Prejudice while also endearing the reader to new characters along the way.

Writers take creative liberty within their retellings and original works to bring these background and minor characters to life. They take characters, like Mary Bennet, to whom the reader may feel indifferent, and turn them into the heroines of their own stories. The key to utilizing these minor characters most effectively for a retelling is to make sure they develop from the foundation that Austen created. Characters are essential to any story, but in one being retold
and reimagined, it is vital to maintain the core of the characters so the main idea and messages from the story are consistent. So even for minor characters, maintaining what little of their character is there from the original text is key to having a retelling that resonates with both die-hard fans and casual readers.
The Way Characters Work with Setting

Both major and minor characters contribute to the way the story is received by a reader, but the way a character interacts with the setting they are placed in helps enhance and deepen the readers understanding of the themes the author is exploring. Setting plays an important role in any story; however, the level of importance varies on the intentions of the author and the action within the story. Jerry J. Watson divides setting into two different categories, either as “integral” or a “backdrop;” when it’s as a “backdrop” it “implies that the setting has little influence on characters, plot, or theme . . . [and] contain[s] actions that could occur almost anywhere and anytime without specifying exact time and place” (638). While “integral setting” has “a great deal of influence upon the values, speech, and actions of characters, the movement of plot, and the presentation of theme and mood,” can also be a symbol, but has “a careful and full description of the setting” and “that characters move through the setting, not simply over it” (Watson 638). Setting in Austen’s novels is “integral” as Watson describes. Her locations play an important role in the novels’ symbolism, as well as advancing the plot and character development. Each of the main setting locations mean something to the characters and the story. Watson’s way of identifying location helps the reader distinguish between somewhere that is just a “backdrop” versus a location to pay more attention too. In Pride and Prejudice, the integral setting might be comparing the characters’ experience in London or Brighton versus places like Pemberley, Rosings, Netherfield, or Longbourn. London and Brighton are locations that are a stopover point for the characters and where action just seems to happen. These populated cities create a space where people can be anonymous rather than the country estates where anonymity
does not exist. The country estates provide a more enclosed setting where everyone knows everyone, which makes it difficult for the characters to avoid each other. The family estates where the characters spend time provide more depth and context to the characters’ actions and plot points. Charles McCann discusses these locations: “each is a recognizable emblem for a complex of social, economic, and intellectual realities. Thus, the pretentiousness of Rosings reveals Lady Catherine, as the nondescriptness of Netherfield does Bingley” and Pemberley “becomes a symbol of a fixed value, of a stable condition to which the heroine belongs, but from which she is separated by immaturity” (65-66). Each of these locations communicates something important about the person who resides there while also having significant influence on the way characters act while there and progress the plot as a result.

Netherfield communicates “nondescriptness” and, as Watson notes, the reader understands the estate is important to the neighborhood but the reader does not hear much about the house itself and “this pointed nondescriptness has an analogy in Bingley’s character, and a blandness already suggested in him as here intensified” (69). This parallel between Bingley and Netherfield is important because the audience is able to understand more about Bingley’s character from Netherfield’s description, or lack thereof. They are both of notability and communicate wealth but do not have any real depth or distinctive qualities. Rosings comes into the narrative, however, with a different angle. The reader is first introduced to Rosings by Mr. Collins and his biased point of view, which is the same way the reader is really introduced to a more in-depth description of Lady Catherine. The narrator lets us into Mr. Collins’s thoughts, believing that his patroness can do no wrong and everything she has and owns is the best: “The power of displaying the grandeur of his patroness to his wondering visitors, and of letting them see her civility towards himself and his wife, was exactly what he had wished for” (Austen 157).
So, both the reader and Elizabeth go into the scenes at Rosings expecting a similar level of pretentiousness and condescension. The Rosings estate is also the location where both Elizabeth and Darcy let their own pride and sense of self collide during Darcy’s marriage proposal. Darcy believes it would be impossible for his proposal to be denied due to his wealth and status; Elizabeth even observes, “she could easily see that he had no doubt of a favorable answer. He spoke of apprehension and anxiety, but his countenance expressed real security” (Austen 185). However, Elizabeth denies the proposal, which would have been beneficial for her family, but her own prejudice and misinformation causes her to reject him. Rosings provides a background to that scene which, symbolically, fits well due to the pride and pretentiousness that was expressed during the first proposal and by the estate of Rosings.

Pemberley and its connection to Darcy also plays a key role in the character development and the relationships they build. Initially, Pemberley is not depicted to be a welcoming place based on what the reader and Elizabeth have been told; all that is expressed is how magnificent and impressive it is for a family estate. However, they are both proved wrong. As Watson notes, “it is obvious that love works upon Darcy to open and soften his heretofore inapproachably proud character . . . this merely reveals how sensitive Darcy is to both setting and character . . . at Pemberley, where both setting and Elizabeth’s company are congenial to him, the forbidding manner slips away” and it “reveals a degree of complexity to Darcy’s character” (72). Both Elizabeth and the reader are introduced to another facet of Darcy’s personality; while he still is the foreboding and proud man, the effect of him being in a comfortable and familiar setting is evident. The reader is then forced to reevaluate their first impression of Darcy, at the same time as Elizabeth. She is taking all of the information Darcy exposed to her in his letter and placing it next to this more approachable and warmer version of him she’s being introduced to, now
thinking “of his regard with a deeper sentiment of gratitude than it had ever raised before; she
remembered its warmth, and softened its impropriety of expression” (Austen 240). Their
interaction at Pemberley causes both of them to reevaluate the other and approach their
relationship with more understanding. Pemberley is the antithesis of Rosings. Pemberley has the
opposite effect on Elizabeth and Darcy; they are able to begin healing the damage done from
their encounter at Rosings and accept some hard truths. Darcy is generous to Elizabeth’s
merchant-class aunt and uncle, despite his insult to her family in his first proposal, and he kindly
welcomes them all. Elizabeth is able to move past her own hurt pride now that she is confronted
with the new information and a new sense of Darcy’s true personality and accept she was wrong
about it.

Pemberley is also the backdrop to P.D. James’s murder mystery novel, Death Comes to
Pemberley, and it takes place six years after the original story ends. James develops the
characters as all of them are getting settled into their married lives; she keeps the core of these
characters but is able to have them translate to their current places in life without feeling
inaccurate. She develops Colonel Fitzwilliam’s character more and shows that he is pursuing
Georgiana for marriage while seeming more entitled and arrogant than he is in the original.
However, it also fits given the circumstances he’s put into due to his older brother dying, so he’s
now set to inherit his family’s title and estate. Austen also did not develop his character much in
the original. Pemberley as a setting is integral to this story: the murder occurs on the estate, but it
is also where the reader sees Georgiana forge her own romantic relationship with Henry Alveston,
the lawyer, which parallels the way Darcy and Elizabeth’s relationship developed on the grounds
of Pemberley.
Another principal symbolic location in the novel is Longbourn, Elizabeth’s childhood home that has an entail so it can only go to male heir. Despite Mr. Bennet being a gentleman in English society, Longbourn symbolizes the lack of dowries for the Bennet sisters and the family’s lower level of wealth. Due to this difference in wealth, the variance in magnitude between the other estates and Longbourn contributes to this wealth gap being communicated to the reader. Longbourn is behind Mrs. Bennet’s desperation to see her daughters married because they can be forced to leave their own home upon Mr. Bennet’s death. Nigel Nicolson discusses the way Austen “examines the hierarchy of the late eighteenth century, its rigid class system, its social cruelties, its hypocrisies, but also its merits, its approximation (but only an approximation) to a perfect society, its culture, and its taste” (173-174). The reader can see Austen’s analysis and commentary on society with the circumstances occurring at Longbourn. The home symbolizes the reality of Elizabeth’s life despite all her efforts to rebel against it, including her family that has no regard for social decorum, bringing prejudice against them from those of higher rankings, which Darcy notes in his letter: “The situation of your mother’s family, though objectionable, was nothing in comparison of that total want of propriety so frequently, so almost uniformly betrayed by herself, by your three younger sisters, and occasionally even by your father” (Austen 193). Darcy’s letter explains how the Bennet family’s poor behavior outweighs Mrs. Bennet’s familial connections when marriage is being considered. Elizabeth defends her family to others and does her best to steer them in the right direction, but their behavior is shown to have lasting consequences. She does understand the reality of the situation her family is in, but she will not sacrifice her own future and happiness for it by accepting Mr. Collins’s proposal. It is her childhood home but also a place she does not actually spend a great deal of time in throughout the novel. As a result, she may already show signs of being detached from the home, but it is also
where she defends herself and validates her own feelings when confronted by Lady Catherine toward the end of the novel. Longbourn seems to symbolize the complexities to Austen’s commentary and love for English society, and it also provides a location for the characters to learn and develop from these contradictions. This topic is also shown in Baker’s novel, *Longbourn*, where the reader sees the story from the staff of Longbourn’s point of view. The exploration of the inequalities and class differences of English society within Sarah’s narration and own journey of self-discovery in the novel shows the contradictions and intricacies of the estate itself and the complicated discussion of English society in Austen’s novels.

Despite the importance of these locations, setting is not just a physical location but also the time a story takes place. With retellings, the time the story takes place in can be changed quite drastically by the author. When the setting changes but the character integrity remains intact, it allows the story to continue to mean and communicate the same thing to the reader as the original. It still resonates but transfers the story into a different setting that the audience might want to identify with and allows the readers to continue to have an escape within the novel. Sonali Dev’s novel, *Pride, Prejudice, and Other Flavors*, is a gender reversed retelling set in modern-day San Francisco, California. It brings up issues the reader sees in the original novel, like societal pressures to marry, class differences, family dynamics, and the wealth gap while also addressing struggles like racial prejudices, police brutality, and loss. The reader is able to see the pride and feeling of invulnerability exhibited by Mr. Darcy in the female main character, Trisha, and the stubbornness, equal level of pride, and family loyalty shown by Elizabeth in the male main character, DJ. The emotional response that Dev’s characters invokes in the reader is reminiscent of the response to Austen’s characters.
Ibi Zoboi’s *Pride* and Nikki Payne’s *Pride and Protest* both address the issues of gentrification in lower-class neighborhoods that are predominately inhabited by people of color and the damage racial stereotyping can do. Ibi Zoboi’s *Pride* takes place in modern-day Brooklyn and has Zuri Benitez, the Elizabeth character, show her fierce loyalty to her family and pride in her neighborhood while facing the glaring class difference between her family and the new Darcy family across the street. Nikki Payne’s *Pride and Protest* is set in Washington D.C. and translates the characters and heart from the original into a modern setting with a modern/high-stakes conflict. *Pride and Protest* also does not include a Kitty character, which again demonstrates the pattern again where Kitty tends to get omitted completely or used as a plot device in retellings. The issues of race, gentrification, combatting stereotypes and microaggressions are seamlessly weaved into the plot from the original story and helps fuel both Payne’s and Zoboi’s characters into successful reflections of Austen’s due to the character motivations and actions within their given setting.

As discussed, setting plays an important role to a story overall but also to the development and growth of the characters. Some locations just provide the background to a scene or action while others are more integral to the plot and characters. In *Pride and Prejudice*, these “integral” setting locations are Longbourn, Rosings, Netherfield, and Pemberley. In retellings, specifically in modern retellings, these locations adjust and get repurposed into whatever the author sees fit. Since the time period changes for these stories, sometimes these locations get changed drastically but their effect on the characters is consistent. For retellings that take place at the same time as the original novel, or act as a sequel to the original, the locations remain the same as Austen’s version. While each location does not have an alternate in every retelling, each author tries to make sure there is a variation present for at least a couple of
these critical locations. The importance setting has to maintaining the core of the characters in retellings is demonstrated in the effort these authors put into keeping the effect it has on characters similar to the original. Keeping the interactions between characters and setting constant solidifies the themes and character actions being translated well from the Austen’s story.
Conclusion

I analyzed the way the characters translated between the original and the reimagining in a variety of retellings of *Pride and Prejudice* for this thesis. Some authors reworked the characters and plot of Austen’s novel into a new or modern setting, while some took what Austen had created and expanded beyond it, so it operated either as a sequel or as an exploration of a minor character’s potential. It was possible for the authors to change some of the elements of the characters but if the changes were too severe from what Austen had created it did not feel authentic or accurate. Those who retold Austen’s work either through a different character’s perspective or as a continuation/sequel of the original had more room to transform some characters from the foundation Austen created. With these stories, the characterization has the space to change from the original story because the reader is seeing the characters grow into their new lives past the ending of Austen’s novel and perceiving them from a whole new perspective.

The pattern I noticed amongst these was the setting could change, plot elements could change, but if the characters changed drastically then the story fell flat. This occurred with several of the retellings that were read for this thesis including: *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* by Seth Grahame-Smith and Jane Austen, *Unequal Affections: A Pride and Prejudice Retelling* by Lara S. Ormiston, and *Pride and Premeditation* by Tirzah Price. Smith’s novel focused more on the horror/shock factor he added which took away from and severely changed some of the character motivations and actions that are key to the characters, like Lizzy’s reasoning for not wanting to marry being completely altered. Ormiston’s story has Lizzy accept Darcy’s first proposal, which is wholly out of character for her, and this changes the tone and context to the
characters’ interactions for the rest of the novel and feels completely different from Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* as a result. Price’s novel changed the roles and core traits of the characters which caused it to feel detached from the original source material. The changes these retellings made to the character traits and motivations caused the story to be disconnected from the original story and detract from the themes and ideas that are consistently explored in Austen’s novels.

The interaction between a reader and a story is important to understanding why a story gets retold and why maintaining a certain level of authenticity to the original is essential for retellings. Retellings come from a reader’s desire to interact or respond to the story that affected them so profoundly. This brings Rosenblatt’s description of reader-response theory within Kalmbach’s work back to the forefront. Rosenblatt, as previously discussed, declares “that literature exists only in the transactions between texts and readers and that critics must be concerned with the contributions of both the text and the reader to these transactions” (“Evaluating informal methods” 121). Wells brings up reader-response in her book as well, *Everybody’s Jane*, to help her audience recognize the theory behind the way readers interact with Austen specifically. The response readers have to Austen comes from the idea that “writers inspired by Austen do not ‘talk back’ to her so much as converse with her” (Wells 16). These writers are inspired by Austen’s works to create their own, or work from Austen’s stories because they made a distinct impact on them during their reading experience. So, these writers use their own words and work to “converse” with Austen’s stories and can focus on what impacted them from the piece.

Characters give readers identifiable figures with which they can resonate. As Roser’s piece states, “Such characters draw us in and seem to claim us for a lifetime. Truth is, the ‘care-actors’ in stories cause us to care about what happens to them. But the best characters may do
even more: They may cause us to occupy their world for a bit longer . . . The characters we pause to consider can guide us to understand plots and ponder themes” (548). Characters are what draw people in to a story and make it impactful enough for a reader to want to continue interacting, even if it’s through work not created by the original author. As seen with Pride and Prejudice and its retellings, it’s the way characters engage with the setting around them that cause these questions about the human condition, exploration of complex relationships, complicated familial dynamics, the wealth gap and class issues, and societal expectations that Austen explored hundreds of years ago to continuously be impactful to audiences because people have never really changed. Modern audiences continue to connect with Pride and Prejudice retellings because these ideas are not confined to British society 200+ years ago, these issues and themes are still prevalent in today’s society and people want to interact with literature that they see themselves in.
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