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Jane Austen Camp

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Jane Austen Camp

Abstract

Austen camp has become prevalent, even omnipresent, today, in visions and versions of her and her fiction, using them as a canvas for zombies, porn, or roller derby. Some of it may be kitsch, but it's arguably camp. Investigating Austen as camp is a valuable way to understand her humor and her social criticism, as we now understand camp as a positive literary and social practice. But rather than asking if and when camp is "there," for Austen or for her past readers, we might instead investigate what aspects or elements of her reputation or her writing we notice differently when we elect to see her as campy. What do we miss out on by doing that sort of noticing? Finally, once you start to see Austen camp, can you, or how can you, un-see it?

Keywords

Jane Austen, juvenilia, camp, popular culture, gender, feminism

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At first glance, Jane Austen (1775–1817) might seem the furthest thing from a candidate for early modern camp since John Bunyan. The Austen-loving public has long been told that she is our go-to writer for no-nonsense politeness, solid morality, and straight-up romance. But as anyone who chooses to take a closer look at the imaginary portrait of her from 1873 might notice, the author is placidly and confidently flashing what appears to be a wedding ring (see fig. 1). There is more going on here than first meets the eye. Observers with a sense of humor might wonder if they have just been to Jane Austen camp.¹

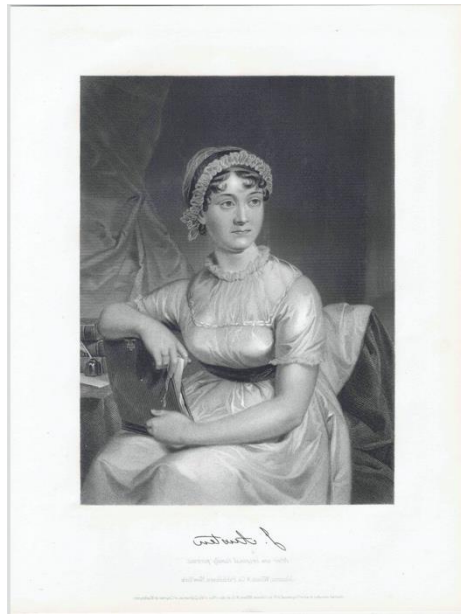


Fig. 1 Portrait from Evert A. Duyckinck's *Portrait Gallery of Eminent Men and Women of America* (New York: Johnson Wilson & Co, 1873)

This portrait would probably not have been readable as campy when it first appeared, during a time when visual representations of Austen were almost entirely unknown and when the cornerstone of her reputation as prim maiden aunt was first being laid. But now, at a moment when her image is repurposed with every manner of comic, supernatural, or vulgar embellishment, we might re-see this Mrs. Jane (or is she St. Jane?) Austen as a fabulously campy homage. We may—perhaps even should—laugh at this portrait, albeit not in a sneering way. We might appreciate its exaggerated absurdity, the curl of her fingers around the page she holds, the coolly pursed lips, the heave of the bosom, the far-away stare of haughty genius, and all of those well-placed ruffles. Indeed, we early twenty-first-century readers, students, and scholars of Austen may appreciate more readily the possibility of seeing this and other versions of Austen as campy than any generation before us.

Those contemporary repurposed versions of Austen that use her as a winking canvas for zombies, porn, or roller derby may fall under the umbrella of kitsch, but many are arguably camp. Their prevalence, in reimaginations of her and her fiction, as well as among her most visible Janeite enthusiasts, move the novelist into new territory. How could any self-respecting people in Regency dress today offer themselves up to public scrutiny in bonnet, tussy mussy, or waistcoat without some performative wink-wink, nudge-nudge? Austen scholar Claudia L. Johnson refers to Austen's fans as campy, declaring them "fay" (77). One response to this labeling is a simple shrug. So what if Jane Austen is campy? So what if Janeites are, too? But, at the risk of taking some of the fun out of it, we might benefit from looking a little more deeply.

This essay offers a foray into the past and present of Austen and camp, with an eye toward its future, especially its gender-camp or feminist-camp versions. My remarks are admittedly exploratory, not a definitive statement on the subject. (Anyone who dares put "definitive" and "camp" in the same sentence might be suspected of trying to pull one over on you.) As Ula Lukszo Klein and Emily N. Kugler's [introduction to this special issue](#) reminds us, camp has acquired "flexibility as a term." In asking how Austen brings out the camp in us—especially through costuming, manners, and comedy—we should not dodge the task of returning to the original writings. Asking whether Austen was read as campy in her own day is a difficult question that is made more difficult by the significant critical and popular play with her over the past two centuries. The first section of this essay sets out to define and describe Austen camp. Next, it considers the campy juvenilia text, "The Beautifull Cassandra," and several scenes from Austen's published fiction, illuminating moments of potential camp. The essay concludes with pop culture examples of campy Austen, in a vein I describe as vanilla camp. These explorations are offered in the hope of opening up further questions, rather than closing down or solving supposed problems.

Defining camp—however elusive and in-the-eye-of-the-beholder it may be—is helpful at the start, especially for those not already well versed in scholarly conversations about its features and history.² Camp was famously described by the late cultural critic Susan Sontag as a sensibility that purveys a failed seriousness, a "love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration" ("Notes" 274), "the spirit of extravagance" ("Notes" 283), a "sweet cynicism" ("Notes" 291). She locates its origins in the eighteenth century ("Notes" 280).³ In a later work, Sontag revises her sense of camp's being necessarily apolitical, suggesting instead that camp may have feminist implications.⁴ Critics after Sontag go further, arguing for camp's potential

to function “as a form of gender parody,” a political act in the face of strictures that dictate how femininity ought to be appropriately performed (Robertson 10).⁵

These preliminary definitions of camp and gender politics may serve as a jumping off point. (Those who want to delve further might turn first to Pamela Robertson’s *Guilty Pleasures*.) Entire books have been written on feminist camp, which itself seems dangerously close to a campy statement. I begin with a modest claim: Austen’s fiction exhibits feminist camp when it humorously and exaggeratedly reuses and recycles gendered plots, characters, and tropes. These textual moments have progressive potential, as their intentionally failed seriousness serves to remake, reconfigure, and draw attention to the artifice of gendered romance conventions, to echo Sontag’s and Robertson’s keywords (Robertson 142).⁶

“Camp” is not, of course, a word that Austen had access to in this particular sense. The concept had no currency in the English language of Austen’s day. In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, this form of the word “camp” dates to 1909, in its meaning of “[o]stentatious, exaggerated, affected, theatrical; effeminate or homosexual; pertaining to or characteristic of homosexuals” (“Camp,” *adj.* and *n.*5). Its etymology is, appropriately, described as “obscure.” But that *OED* first-recorded source indicates that the word is “[p]robably from the French.” (Even if you snicker at the “probably” here, it is important to note that scholar Mark Booth has traced proto-meanings of camp back to late 17th-century France and the French verb “se camper.”⁷) The source cited by the *OED* is James Redding Ware’s dictionary, *Passing English of the Victorian Era: A Dictionary of Heterodox English, Slang, and Phrase* (1909). Over the course of the twentieth century, the *OED* did not take up the first portion of Ware’s Victorian definition of camp, which describes “actions and gestures of exaggerated emphasis.” It does, however, quote Ware’s last sentence: “Used chiefly by persons of exceptional want of character. ‘How very camp he is’” (61).⁸

Any search for possible connections between Austen, camp, and alleged “exceptional want of character”—which seems a coded smear of homosexuality—brings up a question asked most directly in the *London Review of Books* in 1995. The *LRB*’s editors asked, in a headline that launched a thousand kerfluffles, “Was Jane Austen Gay?” (Castle). No matter how you think that question ought to be answered, or what you conclude about the conversations it has prompted, one thing is clear. Mass-produced visions of Austen’s campiness, perhaps even queerness, have gone mainstream in the twenty years since Terry Castle’s essay was published. Investigating the sexuality of any classic literary figure has changed in that period of time, especially in the case of Austen.⁹

The “[Notorious Jenny-A](#)” t-shirt sold online by Twisted Envy might serve as Exhibit A in support of the claim that Austen’s queerness has imprinted itself on our cultural fabric. In this t-shirt, a revision and embellishment of the 1873 portrait, the author is redrawn as a middle-aged drag queen, striking a pose, in an enormous purple sun hat, fluorescent green wig, and dark sunglasses.¹⁰ She is performing femininity as an act of campy celebrity play, and display, in which divas purse their lips and look beyond the frame, in order to convey powerful, bemused detachment from negative social judgments through over-the-top fashion.¹¹

Over the course of two centuries, readers and critics of Austen have changed more than our conceptions of her as queer, defining that word in the most expansive sense. The ways in which Austen is understood as sexual (in a literary if not a biographical sense) and theatrical (in a more traditional sense) have also shifted. These changes are all about transformed—and deepened—understandings of Austen’s life and writings. Popular discourse and scholarly conversation have converged over the past fifty years to reject the idea of Austen or her writings as small, quiet, and timid. Books for children and young adults package her as *Brave Jane Austen: Reader Writer Author Rebel* (2018) and, in a delightfully confusing title, *Ordinary, Extraordinary Jane Austen* (2018) (Pliscou and Corace; Hopkinson and Leng). It is interesting to speculate on the future impact of these titles on Austen’s evolving reputation, especially if these notions become standard ones for young adult readers. If courageous rebel sticks as Austen’s new normal, that may well bring a different sort of limiting orthodoxy. It will likely also widen out opportunities to read her and her writings as sweetly cynical and campy.

Looking for campiness in Austen’s fiction may not be an entirely new critical act, but it is difficult to sort it out from century-old debates about Austen as engaged in writing burlesque, parody, and satire. We have not come to a consensus about how any of those labels apply to Austen’s writings. Even so, you do not have to believe that Austen was intentionally making her female characters tell sodomy jokes, that she wrote elliptically about masturbation, or that she implied that girls who rode horses were sex fiends in order to be convinced that her fiction flirts with sexually-inflected camp.¹² More subtle, less controversial moments of Austen’s comic send-up of gender norms might be marshaled.

One such moment that has already been explored is D. A. Miller’s reading of *Sense and Sensibility*’s “puppy,” Robert Ferrars. Robert shops for and buys an ivory, gold, and pearl toothpick case—in the presence of the Dashwood sisters—which Miller interprets as a dandy-ish, campy moment. Here is the toothpick case shop scene, as Austen describes it:

[O]ne gentleman only was standing there, and it is probable that Elinor was not without hope of exciting his politeness to a quicker dispatch. But the correctness of his eye, and the delicacy of his taste, proved to be beyond his politeness. He was giving orders for a toothpick-case for himself, and till its size, shape, and ornaments were determined, all of which, after examining and debating for a quarter of an hour over every toothpick-case in the shop, were finally arranged by his own inventive fancy, he had no leisure to bestow any other attention on the two ladies, than what was comprised in three or four very broad stares; a kind of notice which served to imprint on Elinor the remembrance of a person and face, of strong, natural, sterling insignificance, though adorned in the first style of fashion. (*Sense and Sensibility* 250-51)

Robert is described as “beyond . . . politeness.” He is “giving orders” for “ornaments,” with “inventive fancy,” attending to object-details while oblivious to the human needs of others, except for “three or four very broad stares” he doles out, demonstrating his self-regard and his lack of care for others, alongside being dressed in the “first style of fashion” (*Sense and Sensibility* 251). This is vanity, yes, but it is vanity presented to readers as wrapped up in power, play, and entitlement.

Readers might conclude, with Miller, that Robert projects the look of someone who knows he is being looked at and cares not. Elinor takes this scene in the shop, and him, very seriously, of course—as she should, in the circumstances—but we as readers may not need to. Perhaps we ought not to. Perhaps we are *not meant to*. If Miller is correct, then Elinor is unknowingly and unhappily watching a dandy who is consciously performing a diva’s role. The narrator tells us that Elinor notices his conceited, fashionable indifference, although Marianne seems “oblivious” to the man’s performance (Miller 26). We as readers watch the whole show. What Miller calls “style” might be rechristened as “camp.”

Other moments in Austen’s fiction, too, seem ripe for Miller-style re-evaluation. What is *Emma*’s odious Mrs. Elton’s suggestion that she’ll find a donkey to ride fashionably in on to a gathering at hero Mr. Knightley’s Donwell Abbey but an invitation to camp? Perhaps so many critics have missed the potential for it because Mr. Knightley is himself underrated as a comic hero. In this scene, he cunningly insults Mrs. Elton by assuring her that he wants “every thing to be as much to your taste as possible” (Austen, *Emma* 386), implying that her taste is tasteless, showy.

This is the conversation between the officious Mrs. Elton and amused-annoyed Mr. Knightley:

“I wish we had a donkey. The thing would be for us all to come on donkies, Jane, Miss Bates, and me—and my caro sposo walking by. I really must talk to him about purchasing a donkey. In a country life I conceive it to be a sort of necessary; for, let a woman have ever so many resources, it is not possible for her to be always shut up at home;—and very long walks, you know—in summer there is dust, and in winter there is dirt.”

“You will not find either, between Donwell and Highbury. Donwell-lane is never dusty, and now it is perfectly dry. Come on a donkey, however, if you prefer it. You can borrow Mrs. Cole’s. I would wish every thing to be as much to your taste as possible.”

“That I am sure you would. Indeed I do you justice, my good friend. Under that peculiar sort of dry, blunt manner, I know you have the warmest heart. As I tell Mr. E., you are a thorough humourist.—Yes, believe me, Knightley, I am fully sensible of your attention to me in the whole of this scheme. You have hit upon the very thing to please me.” (*Emma* 386-87)

In encouraging Mrs. Elton to follow her heart and arrive on a donkey—imagining that she will put Jane and Miss Bates on them, too—Mr. Knightley invites his other would-be guests (and Austen’s actual readers, of course) to a campy, circus-like show. Austen, through Knightley, compels us to entertain comic visions of Mrs. Elton’s excesses. If Mrs. Elton wants to do something colorful, over the top, and ridiculous, then Mr. Knightley will not stand in her way. His line, “I would wish every thing to be as much to your taste as possible,” seems designed for the observant reader’s laughter.

The wished-for donkey scene never materializes, but the conversation encourages readers to conjure up the image: Mrs. Elton, with her entourage, would ride in to the party on an ass, as her caro-sposo husband promenades beside her like a groom, twice over. The conjured scene mimics an arrival into Bethlehem, although Mr. and Mrs. Elton are no biblical Mary and Joseph. That Mrs. Elton would also put Jane and Miss Bates on donkeys offers up a further outlandish biblical approximation. It’s hardly Three Wise Women arriving to pay homage. The narrator suggests that, as much as Mrs. Elton’s ridiculous plan would annoy Mr. Knightley, it would also delight his dry, blunt sense of humor. So this conjured scene would—or should—both annoy and delight the astute reader of Austen. Mrs. Elton’s performing the

role of a coddled, wealthy, fashionable Virgin Mary, with Mr. Elton as her sycophantic, accompanying spouse-groom (to an ass no less) is campy-priceless. Seeing the possibility of camp embedded in such scenes ought to make Austen's earliest unpublished writings, with their scenes of female drunkenness, comic murder, amoral thefts, and light cannibalism, seem much less of an outlier or a surprise.¹³

If any of Austen's works deserve to be described as fully realized camp literature, then it is her earliest surviving writings, known as her juvenilia. A close look at just one short text serves to make the general case. "The Beautifull Cassandra" is "a novel in twelve Chapters" (Austen, *Juvenilia* 53) in which the dedication, at five sentences, proves longer than many of the chapters. The humorously miniaturized story follows its protagonist, who shares a name with its dedicatee: Austen's sister, Cassandra. The story follows its Cassandra through a day of adventures. The heroine's birth is described in the most ridiculous way possible. She is called "noble" for being descended from a "near relation" of a Duchess's butler (*Juvenilia* 54). Thus having dispensed in a sentence with the pretensions of heroines and good birth and breeding, Austen further flouts the conventions of romance. Her heroine falls immediately in love, not with a hero but "with an elegant Bonnet," stolen from her mother's shop and bespoke by a Countess (*Juvenilia* 54). The story involves theft, gluttony (devouring six ices), more theft (refusing to pay for them), and paying for a hackney coach by putting her stolen bonnet on the coachman's head and running away.

In this story, the usual features of romance novels have run amok. After she's stiffed and forcibly cross-dressed the coachman, Cassandra next has several verb-filled, silent run-ins with a female friend (trembling, blushing, turning pale) and then a widow (accosting, squeezing, curtsying). But the most campy part of this novel-in-miniature may be what happens when Cassandra confronts the man who would, in every other novel of the day, turn out to be her handsome hero: "The first person she met, was the Viscount of— a young man, no less celebrated for his Accomplishments and Virtues, than for his Elegance and Beauty. She curtsyed and walked on" (*Juvenilia* 54). The Viscount is described with words normally reserved for heroines. He typifies romantic perfection in feminine terms. That's certainly campy. Cassandra's response is also the polar opposite of what one would expect from a chance encounter in a romance novel. After barely acknowledging him, she moves the plot forward without him and walks away. The active verbs and the Mr. Darcy-like brushing off of a Viscount—by the daughter of a near relation of the butler of a Duchess, no less!—are not only turn-the-tables funny. They may mean more. This is striking gender parody and intentionally failed seriousness. This is camp.

Once it's identified as Austen camp, it may be best described with a further adjective: vanilla camp. It is not camp that sets out to overwhelm or to deeply shock. It is a form of camp that provokes harmless, mild sexual surprise. It is *safe* camp—camp that might even fly under the radar, should the reader's eye not be fine-tuned to note it. It is safe-for-work camp. Here Austen delivers not the sort of obvious, troubling camp that prompts the later Victorian criticism, "How very camp he is." Hers is not camp as "used chiefly by persons of exceptional want of character." It is camp that leads viewers and readers to do a double take, and to ask, "Did I just see what I think I saw? If so, well, then, oh my!" It is camp that draws readers in to a collusion with it, without perhaps even realizing that we have been drawn in. Readers are given the option of refusing to see, and, like *The Beautiful Cassandra* herself, of blithely continuing on.

Some critics may object to vanilla camp deserving to be called camp. The point of camp is that it is exaggerated and unsubtle. It calls attention to itself. It generally does not give a s***. So what is gained by recognizing something in literary history, and in Austen, that may seem closer to camp lite? There is a potential answer here that may make sense of Austen's enduring appeal with both critical and popular audiences, as well as her being claimed as the rightful property of people of all political persuasions. Sontag suggests that the most effective forms of camp do not knowingly present themselves *as camp*—a sort of naïve camp, as opposed to deliberate camp. This may seem almost oxymoronic. By this definition, you can't create good quality camp on purpose. Sontag would have it that the best camp is artifice exaggeratedly pointed out with innocence and naïveté.

I find this intriguing and absurd. Scholars of the eighteenth-century world, with more extensive knowledge of early novels and their heroines, might raise a knowing eyebrow as well. What Sontag proposes is strikingly similar to how early English novels set out to teach their eighteenth-century female readers to be artless. How can girls and women be schooled in artlessness? The value of artlessness is, by definition, that it is untaught. But let's give Sontag the benefit of the doubt for a moment. If we are compelled to classify Austen as belonging on one Sontag-inspired pole or the other—as either campy-artless or campy-knowing—where would we place Austen's fiction? The exuberant juvenilia seems campy-knowing, with the mature novels harder to define. They enact, or seem to enact, greater artlessness in presenting their greatest camp moments. That's amusing, of course, because the more experienced author (adult vs. teen) demonstrates greater skill at presenting artful things as artless ones. It is a bit dizzying.

Regardless of what we readers and critics conclude about Austen's intentions in creating camp, it is clear that, in the flurry of it, camp begets more camp. Most of today's new-made Austen camp—even the most ostentatious, showy, and outrageous takes on her—continues to cluster around the vanilla, whether or not it displays it with knowingness. There are those who claim that contemporary Austen's redrawn campiness carries us too far afield from her original novels—or that somehow she would be offended by it. Maybe! Who knows? Yet it is important to acknowledge that today's campy Austen-inspired texts seem to be in keeping with many of the qualities displayed in her original writings. Austen's novels are so chastely and exaggeratedly sexy that generations of readers and critics have overlooked the sex. They've missed it perhaps even more often than overlooking her fiction's humor, irony, and social criticism. In today's popular incarnations of Austen—in print, on stage, and on screen—any residually mistaken assumptions (“There is no sex in Jane Austen”) are made out to be adorably, artificially, and exaggeratedly old-fashioned. They are themselves transformed into ur-vanilla campy moments of literary history (i.e. “How cute. Classic novels by women used to try to hush up sex.”)

Three quick examples from today's popular culture demonstrate the point. The first is Burr Steers's film *Pride & Prejudice & Zombies* (2016), a zombie comedy or zom-com based on Seth Graeme-Smith's novel of the same title. The film proved to be a disappointment at the box office. That may be because its clever exaggeration and ostentatious artificiality were ultimately unsustainable. The film's campiness was positively jumbled. The first half included comic, witty Regency scenes that did not do enough to delight zombie gore-lovers. The second half, which shifts to self-serious violence, alienates those who came for the comedy, without echoing the genre's anticipated ultra-gore. Not even *P&P&Z*'s Hot Topic campy lingerie product tie-ins could overcome the impact of the film's vanilla PG-13 rating.¹⁴ *P&P&Z*'s camp arguably hadn't gone far enough, for long enough. It couldn't keep up the smirking laughter. The com denuded the zom, and the zom couldn't outstrip the com. The film became only half-vanilla camp. (Most of that half resided in actor Matt Smith's hilarious, scone-obsessed, scene-stealing portrayal of Mr. Collins.)

Twenty-first century Austen erotica faces similar challenges in establishing and sustaining a compelling relationship to camp. Much of this work is in the mold of mommy porn, à la *Fifty Shades of Grey*, only it is a lot funnier, whether intentionally or not.¹⁵ Even serious Austen porn is often risible, and it is difficult to imagine what we as readers are meant to do with it. Here, by way of example, is one line from the mash-up Clandestine Classics version of *Northanger Abbey*, by Jane Austen, with added sexual content by Desiree Holt: “Tilney's expression

heated as he watched her. ‘Do you fancy the taste, then?’ Catherine nodded mutely” (Austen and Holt 2006). Is this the heroine-in-training whom Austen describes in the original novel, rendered in campy-oblivious-terms? In Austen’s version, she’s the heroine who artlessly claims she cannot speak well enough to be unintelligible. Holt’s porn-inspired novel presents Catherine’s post-sex-act actions and gestures, with exaggerated emphasis. Catherine’s muted nod is a—knowing? unknowing?—sweet cynicism of campy sexual contact.

A final example might be found in the rhetoric of the British television mini-series, *Lost in Austen* (2008). Time-traveling contemporary heroine, Amanda Price (Jemima Rooper), wakes up in the nineteenth-century bedroom of the Bennet home in *Pride and Prejudice*. She discovers that she has been spooning all night with Lydia Bennet (Perdita Weeks). For Lydia, climbing in bed with a strange woman is presented as within normal limits for sleeping arrangements. For twenty-first century Amanda, it is not. In her shocked, over-the-top response finding herself in bed with another woman, Amanda speculates about whether there are imaginary cameras in the room, recording their “girl-on-girl” action. Amanda wonders if she is actually starring in a contemporary reality television show, rather than having landed in a nineteenth-century time-travel scenario. Pretending to give the camera what it wants, she flashes her pudenda to Lydia, rather than to the viewer. Lydia expresses surprise at Amanda’s body, which Amanda explains first in twenty-first century terms. She tells Lydia that she has a landing strip. When Lydia seems puzzled, Amanda re-describes it in more Regency-friendly terms as a kind of “pubic topiary.” More vanilla camp.

Any exploration of how we might best define Austen camp is not without its complications. Debates *ought* to ensue. For those well-versed in the finer points of Austen’s fiction, there is a seemingly endless supply of material for debate. Which is the least campy of Austen’s novels? (My vote: *Mansfield Park*. Heroine Fanny Price’s earnestness seems beyond camp, no matter what the naughty Mary Crawford might do.) Which is the most? (*Northanger Abbey*, surely. The double entendres are rapid fire, and Isabelle Thorpe is a brilliantly ineffective diva.) *Lady Susan* seems inarguably camp extraordinaire. And it is no accident, given the rise of campy Austen, that we are living in the moment of *Lady Susan*’s first coming to the big screen, in Whit Stillman’s fine film *Love and Friendship* (2016). How campy is *Sanditon*, a text that begins with a carriage crash and features a gluttonous would-be hypochondriac? Perhaps the new television series will help us see that anew as well. There are questions, too, about Austen’s works seen in comparison to each other. Did Austen’s fiction become more or less campy as she aged? (Less, it seems to me, although more brilliantly, subtly vanilla camp, as I’ve argued.) What

is the relationship, if any, between youth, age, and camp, in Austen and beyond? I leave it to be settled by whomsoever camp may concern, as one might say.

No matter where studying Jane Austen camp may lead us next, it seems clear that investigating it both in the originals and in her reception history provides the most fruitful approach. That twin-focus would afford us with opportunities to grasp the potential interconnections of artifice, exaggeration, humor, and social criticism. Austen camp cannot be said to *reside in* either Austen's originals or in us. That said, we will certainly not discover it in the originals without first choosing to look for it ourselves. It is only after entertaining the possibility of its positive presence that we will enjoy—to twist the thoughts of Lydia Bennet—"all the glories of the camp" (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 258).

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¹ The portrait first appeared in Duyckinck I: 408. Claudia L. Johnson discusses this image, concluding that the engraver "manifestly has no idea who Jane Austen is, other than the fact that she is a woman and an author" (44). On an actual experience at a Jane Austen summer camp, described in a way that is delightfully campy, see Scheinman, *Camp Austen*.

² I do not masquerade here as an expert in camp theory or the history of camp. I am decidedly a student of both. Nor do I mean to suggest that Sontag ought to be the beginning and end of our conversations on camp. She is not, although she certainly remains the most frequently referenced thinker on the subject. A great body of work on camp has emerged in areas relevant to Austen, for instance on the Gothic and on film adaptations. Let other pens dwell on such subjects. See, for example, Cleto, ed. *Camp* and Drushel and Peters, *Sontag and the Camp Aesthetic*.

³ All of Sontag's examples of camp authors are from the late seventeenth to the nineteenth century and are male.

⁴ Sontag argues, "Camp's extremely sentimental relation to beauty is no help to women, but its irony is: ironizing about the sexes is one small step toward depolarizing them. In this sense the diffusion of camp taste in the early '60s should probably be credited with a considerable if inadvertent role in the upsurge of feminist consciousness in the late 1960s" (Sontag et al., "Women, the Arts" 40). One might say the same about Jane Austen's impact on the later nineteenth-century women's movement. See my work in *The Making of Jane Austen*.

⁵ On the problems of imagining camp as either politically progressive or conservative, see Dyer, *The Culture of Queers*.

⁶ We can see the simultaneous support and ridicule of eighteenth-century sentimentality in Julie Beaulieu's reading of Sterne in this issue.

⁷ Sontag, too, notes this connection and indicates that the *Oxford French Dictionary* translates *camper* as "to posture boldly." See Sontag et al., "Women, the Arts" 41.

⁸ An earlier dictionary gave it far different meanings: "To go to camp, To go to bed; to take rest" (Australian), "To take into camp, To kill" (common) and "To camp, to surpass; to 'floor'" (Australian). See Farmer and Henley, *Slang* II: 23. A later edition notes that "a Camp-follower" was a prostitute. See Farmer and Henley, *Dictionary* 85. Again, this merely scratches the surface of a very rich body of scholarly work, but it may open up the territory to further conversation.

⁹ For more on today's queer Austen and its colorful history, see my *Atlantic* essay, "Queering."

¹⁰ For more on the importance of pose and the mixing of high and low culture, see Ery Contogouris's reading of Emma Hamilton's *Attitudes* in this issue.

¹¹ You can almost see on the t-shirt a harkening back to the eighteenth-century macaroni-dandy, described in this special issue by Freya Gowrley.

¹² For more on Jane Austen, sexual humor, and double entendre, see Jillian Heydt-Stevenson, *Austen's Unbecoming Conjunctions: Subversive Laughter, Embodied History*. Today's critical debates about Austen and sodomy jokes arise from Mary Crawford's line about "Rears and Vices" in *Mansfield Park*. On Jane Austen and masturbation, see Sedgwick.

¹³ On Austen's juvenilia and its comic treatments of vice and criminality, see Sutherland and Johnston and McMaster.

¹⁴ See Rachel Berkey, "New Pride and Prejudice and Zombies Hot Topic Fashions."

¹⁵ For more on the history of Austen-inspired erotica, see my *Salon* essay, "Fifty Shades."

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