



The Library Owl 🌻🏠🦉
@SketchesbyBoze

Oscar Wilde: I'm writing a novel about a man who makes a Faustian pact with the devil

Friend: never gets old!

Oscar Wilde: ... how could you possibly have known that

6:05 PM · May 11, 2020 · [Twitter Web App](#)

1.9K Retweets 11K Likes



Drunk Austen 🍷📖
@Drunk_Austen

I (30M) tried to propose to the love of my life but she (20F) said she would never marry me because she didn't like my *honesty* about how much her family sucks. I was just trying to point out how lucky she'd be to marry me. AITA?

11:25 PM · Feb 25, 2020 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)

356 Retweets 1.9K Likes

What Does It All Meme?: The Influence of Memes and Tweets on People's Perceptions of Jane Austen and Oscar Wilde

MA thesis for Literature Today

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the possible influence memes and tweets have on people's perceptions of authors, focussing on Jane Austen and Oscar Wilde. The thesis will use the most common academic debates and their themes as the state of the art. Memes and tweets have been collected for the purpose of this thesis, all relating to Austen and Wilde or their works. These memes and tweets will be analysed and then compared to the state of the art in order to explore whether the content from memes and tweets differ from academic debates. Lastly, questionnaires have been conducted to gauge whether respondents have similar perceptions as those presented by memes and tweets, as perhaps the respondents have been influenced in their perceptions by memes and tweets. The thesis works within the premise of the Heritage Industry and the concept of afterlives, as memes and tweets, and people's perceptions of authors all contribute to the afterlives of authors.

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INTRODUCTION

With the rise of social media networks such as Twitter and Tumblr – which were launched in 2006 and 2007 respectively – internet memes gained new platforms to spread. Memes can be created about any topic at all, as long as they are funny and easily comprehensible. This includes memes made about authors and their works. The same goes for tweets, although with tweets there is less pressure to make funny statements. Memes and tweets created about authors (and their works) contribute to the cultural afterlives of these authors, as they keep the authors in the media. The purpose of this thesis is to research the afterlives of Jane Austen and Oscar Wilde in relation to the internet. The question this thesis will concern itself with is: within the concept of afterlives, how has the internet influenced Austen's and Wilde's afterlives, specifically the way these authors are perceived amongst modern-day audiences? Nowadays many opinions about Austen and Wilde circulate on the internet, sometimes as plain tweets expressing opinions, but sometimes also more disguised in the form of parodies, memes, and tweets which generalise plot points of their works in order to make a funny or witty statement. It is these memes and tweets which this thesis aims to investigate. This introduction will provide some information on Austen and Wilde, elaborating more on the choice to have them as examples for this thesis. A brief definition of how the concept of afterlives will be used in this thesis will also be provided. Moreover, a general introduction to memes and tweets and their purpose will also be provided in this introduction.

The following paragraphs will present information on Austen and Wilde, and give a justification as to why they were chosen as examples for this thesis. This paragraph will be dedicated to Austen, whilst the following will deal with Wilde. Now, basic information on Austen will not be provided here, instead a few details will be highlighted. First of all, it must be noted that Austen still has a large media presence – both on the internet and also in general media such as on the TV, as new movie or TV adaptations of her work appear almost every

year. Furthermore, television programmes about Austen, such as documentaries about her life, or places she lived, still appear regularly. For example, in 2020 a new adaptation of Austen's 1816 novel *Emma* appeared, directed by Autumn de Wilde. A year before that, in 2019, the BBC aired a new mini-series adaptation of Austen's unfinished work *Sanditon* (1817) between August and October of that year. In 2001, 2004 and 2016 movie adaptations of the *Bridget Jones* series premiered. The *Bridget Jones* novels, written by Helen Fielding, drew inspiration from Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), with one of the main characters even sharing Darcy's surname. The 1995 movie *Clueless*, directed by Amy Heckerling, is a modernised adaptation of *Emma*, and became a cult classic. There are more movie adaptations and TV series which have come out recently, but for the sake of space, those will not be mentioned here. The point is, over the past couple of decades Austen's work was still presented to audiences in various ways, be it through movie adaptations or TV series.

Alongside adaptations of Austen's novels still appearing regularly, TV shows, documentaries, and biographical movies (biopics) continue to be brought out too. In 2007 a biopic titled *Becoming Jane*, directed by Julian Jarrold, premiered. Jarrold's movie has had a mixed reception, as how true a biographical narrative it is remains disputed. The movie draws heavily on the narrative of *Pride and Prejudice*, using the storyline of the novel to substitute what is unknown about Austen's life. Moreover, new editions of Austen's novels are brought out regularly. The editions often feature new, visually appealing covers, such as the cloth-bound classics published by Penguin Classics. For example, Penguin Random House, under their imprint of Puffin Classics, are releasing a new edition of *Emma* in 2021, created in collaboration with the Victoria and Albert Museum in London; it will feature a cover design created by the V&A, inspired by the clothing of Austen's era. New editions of Austen's novels might be published to appeal to Austen's fans, but considering the number of new editions appearing regularly, it is evident they sell well. Austen is, then, still a public figure,

with movie adaptations and new editions of her novels coming out regularly. This, alongside the fact that many memes and tweets are created about Austen and her work led to the decision to choose Austen as an example author for this thesis.

Similarly, Oscar Wilde still has a large media presence. Wilde's works are still being adapted into TV series and movies, and new biopics come out regularly too. For example, in 2009 a new movie adaptation of Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was released (1890). The character of Dorian Gray also featured in a TV series which ran from 2014 to 2016 called *Penny Dreadful*, which was a series based on penny dreadfuls and drew on characters from Gothic literature in the public domain. Although *Penny Dreadful* creates its own story lines with these characters, Dorian Gray is still similar to Wilde's Dorian, as the TV character is immortal, charismatic, and has a portrait which ages and becomes ugly instead of the person. Wilde's play *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) was also adapted into a film in 2002, directed by Oliver Parker. These are some of the most recent adaptations of Wilde's works. Moreover, in 2018 a new biopic about Wilde premiered titled *The Happy Prince*, written by, directed by, and starring Rupert Everett. However, the biopic that was probably most influential premiered in 1997: *Wilde*, directed by Brian Gilbert. The point here is, Wilde still features often in media, whether it be through adaptations of his work or biopics. Alongside new adaptations and biopics being created regularly, Wilde's works are still often published in new editions too. For example, Penguin Classics have released a version of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in 2017 as a hardback, forming part of the collection of faux-leather bound hardback books. Like the new editions of Austen's novels, it is possible that the new editions of Wilde's novels are published for his fans – although in general it appears that books which are considered classics are continuously published in new editions, regardless of the author. These factors combined, such as Wilde still being a public figure,

alongside the fact that many memes and tweets are posted about him, led to the decision to have Wilde as an example in this thesis.

Now, the fact that Austen and Wilde are still public figures as their works are regularly adapted into TV series and movies, and their works are still being published in new editions etc. is part of their afterlives. But what exactly is an afterlife in the context of this thesis? How does this thesis define the term? Generally speaking, the afterlife is a term used to indicate life after death in a spiritual sense, i.e. believing there is an afterlife in the form of heaven. However, within the concept of the Heritage Industry, the afterlife is used more specifically to indicate a person's continued presence on earth after death. People can create objects of cultural heritage which can exist and be passed down to following generations, including things such as novels, letters, poetry, and essays. The afterlife within the Heritage Industry is also defined by audiences' engagements with an author's work, such as creating movie adaptations of novels, but also by contributing or engaging with critical writing about the author, or the author's appearance in the press. The afterlife also consists of buildings which might have been important to the author, or objects that the author owned. Especially houses where authors have lived which can be open to the public to visit are very important to the Heritage Industry too. So, all the aforementioned adaptations of Austen's and Wilde's works, as well as the biopics about these authors, and the new editions of their works, all of these contribute to the afterlives of Austen and Wilde. It is this definition of afterlife that will be used in this thesis.

Moreover, the research question posed by this thesis is relevant because although much research has been done on Austen's and Wilde's afterlives, there have been no recent studies which include the influence of the internet. It is important, however, to consider the possible influence the internet has on the afterlives of authors, as it is a place in which information and opinions spread. The internet is quite a democratic place, as anyone with

access to internet is free to post their opinions on anything. In a way, by researching the opinions given on the internet, an image of the general reader can be created. That is, a general reader who has access to the internet. Moreover, it can give insight to a different demographic. Most of these social media websites have a young demographic, so it will also be interesting to see how age factors into the perception people have on authors. But it must also be considered that it is possible for people to form opinions on authors without having ever interacted with any of the author's works.

To move on, a brief elaboration on memes and tweets will be provided. These paragraphs will explore a few aspects of memes and tweets, such as their creation and purpose. To start with, the term "meme" was coined by Richard Dawkins, who wrote about memes in *The Selfish Gene* (1976). In this work, Dawkins defined a meme as a unit of cultural transmission, something that is imitated or replicated often by coming into contact with or by being created by humans. Memes always arise because of human beings, as a person will take a cultural unit, and replicate or mimic it, but the cultural unit itself has also been created by a person. In essence, this definition works for internet memes as well – they, too, are units of culture which are transmitted through the internet and are often replicated or imitated by the receiving audience. Internet memes are often created by taking visual media, such as photos, videos, or screenshots of videos, and putting a piece of text over them to make a certain statement. Often, the text is put over the image to make a funny comment, or to express a (generally) relatable emotion. Essentially, nowadays memes are created mostly to be funny. With time, some memes have become very complex and layered, making several references to various media in one image, which means that to understand memes one has to understand what is being referenced in the memes. Memes might copy texts from videos that went viral and put over images taken from a completely different context, all with the purpose to create a humorous meme. Although memes can be very layered with many

different references to other things in them, generally the content is quite superficial in meaning. As stated, most memes are created with the intention of being funny, which means that they often lack depth and detail about the thing they are commenting on. Generally speaking, most memes – whilst also being created to make a funny cultural statement – are created to generate a larger number of followers for the creator of the meme. Most memes are posted on social media websites, such as Twitter, Tumblr or Reddit, where people create accounts and follow other accounts. Most users of these platforms aim to get as large a following as possible, and memes contribute to this purpose.

Although tweets can have a very similar purpose as memes do, Twitter was originally intended as a different type of social media. To this day, when a twitter user wants to send out a tweet, the box where they have to type it in asks them “what’s happening?”. Twitter was used more for stating what the user was doing that day, or what they were feeling. However, recently Twitter has started to become a platform on which memes are spread and go viral. Memes on Twitter can still take the classic shape of an image with text put on the image, but sometimes they take shape more as a funny tweet just based on text. On Twitter, accounts dedicated to anything can be created; there are accounts focussing on reviewing books, supporting sports teams, lifestyle advice accounts, and also accounts which focus on specific authors. For example, there is a SparkNotes Twitter account, which is the account from the SparkNotes website. SparkNotes is a website which provides accessible content about novels, such as synopses, analyses, character lists etc. The accompanying Twitter account mainly tweets funny, sometimes slightly vague, statements about novels, summarising the novel in a concise, derisive, humorous way. Similar to the creators of memes, most Twitter users aim to have as large a following as possible and creating funny tweets can be a good way to achieve this. Memes and tweets will be the focus of this thesis when it comes to researching the ways the internet might have influenced people’s perceptions of Austen and Wilde.

Now that the reasons for choosing Austen and Wilde as the case studies for this thesis have been provided, alongside a short explanation as to what memes and tweets are and what their purposes are, the following paragraphs will give a short overview of the content of this thesis.

Chapter one will provide an overview of the state-of-the-art of criticism written about Austen and Wilde. The chapter will explore the prevalent academic debates relating to Austen's and Wilde's works, such as the ways academics read the works by these authors. In a way, this chapter will provide the critical heritage of Austen and Wilde. The chapter will focus mainly on most recent criticism, although it will also briefly discuss the development of both authors as heritage objects. The academic criticism written on Austen and Wilde will be used as the basis against which the rest of the thesis will be measured.

Chapter two will provide an analysis of memes and tweets about Austen and Wilde. This chapter will search for any common ground between the various memes and tweets that circulate the internet about these two authors. The analyses are provided in order to elaborate on what the creators of them might think of the authors, as memes and tweets can express opinions too. Moreover, the analyses will be used to compare to the results of two questionnaires which were created for this thesis.

Chapter three elaborates on the two questionnaires which were created for this thesis. The questionnaires are focused on respondents' engagement with various social media platforms and their engagement with memes and tweets relating to Austen and Wilde. There is a questionnaire for each respective author. In the questionnaires an example will be given of a meme or tweet about the author in order to explore whether the respondents understand it. The purpose of the questionnaires is to research what the respondents' perceptions of Austen and Wilde are, and to try and see whether there is a connection between the respondents' perceptions and their interactions with memes and tweets about the

authors. Moreover, the purpose of the questionnaires is to explore whether there is a viable connection between the content of memes and tweets and respondents' perceptions of the authors. Perhaps the results will show that memes and tweets deviate from the status quo, and that respondents mimic the perception of the memes and tweets. It is also possible that the memes and tweets are influenced by the critical tradition, and that respondents are influenced by those memes and tweets. The results, combined with the analyses of memes and tweets, could show a likeness to each other but deviate from the critical tradition, or they could be similar to the critical tradition. If the former is true, it would be viable to say the memes and tweets have influenced respondents' perceptions of the authors if they have interacted with said memes and tweets. If the latter is the case, it will be more difficult to find a possible correlation between the respondents' perceptions and the content of memes and tweets, meaning it will be more likely that the content and the respondents' perceptions could both be influenced by the critical tradition.

In the conclusion all the information gathered for this thesis, such as the current academic debates surrounding the authors, the analyses of the memes and tweets about the authors, plus the results of the questionnaires will be analysed in relation to each other. The conclusion will debate whether the internet, and especially memes and tweets, have any influence at all on the audience's perceptions of authors or not, or whether there is no link between the internet and people's perceptions. As will become clear in the conclusion, the statements will be very tentative, as not much hard evidence is found.

The aim of this thesis is to provide insight into the (possible) influence the internet, and especially memes and tweets, might have on the audience's perception of authors. Although this thesis explores subjects such as the critical heritage of Austen and Wilde, which has been researched by many academics before, none have factored in a possible influence of the internet of the audience's perceptions. Moreover, generally speaking

academic research about the critical heritage and afterlives of both authors have not focussed on the internet at all. This thesis will try to close the current gap in the research on Austen's and Wilde's afterlives by providing insight on opinions which circulate the internet.

Chapter One - A Discussion of Current Day Academic Criticism Regarding Jane

Austen and Oscar Wilde

This chapter will concern itself with academic criticism written about Jane Austen and Oscar Wilde, giving an overview of the critical tradition from their first publications onwards, before focussing on the critical tradition of recent years. The main purpose of the exploration of the state of the art in this chapter is to gauge what the current themes are which academics explore in relation to Austen and Wilde. It is necessary for this thesis to explore what the most common debates are within academia, because the state of the art will be used as the basis which the results of the questionnaire will be compared with and contrasted to. In order to see whether the opinions on Austen and Wilde which circulate on the internet differ much from what academics generally think of the authors, the state of the art must be elaborated upon. This chapter will do so by looking at academic writing regarding Austen and Wilde separately, in that order.

Austen

Academic criticism about Jane Austen and her work has had varying foci; however there are certain topics which academics have returned to again and again. Good historic accounts have also been given of the development of and common themes of criticism written on Austen, such as B. C. Southam's two volume set titled *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage*, which traces criticism written on Austen since the publication of her first novel in 1811 up to the beginning of the Second World War in 1940. Similarly, Claudia L. Johnson has provided an accurate overview of Jane Austen's critical heritage and the history of Janeites in her book titled *Jane Austen's Cults and Cultures*. Both Southam and Johnson have traced the development of criticism on Austen and the perception of Austen in their works. This section

will focus on the common themes highlighted in Southam and Johnson's work, whilst also giving an overview of debates their work did not cover.

As Southam states, "in many respects the birth and growth of Jane Austen's critical reputation was a dull and long-drawn-out affair" (1: 1). Critical writing on Austen was few and far between before the publication of *A Memoir of Jane Austen* by James Edward Austen-Leigh (1870). In fact, Southam even goes as far as to claim that "more detailed studies of the individual novels and of the major aspects of the novelist's technique" did not become common until the 1940s (1: 28). Southam would argue, then, that academic criticism on Austen is a relatively recent endeavour. This does not mean that between these two periods of 1870 and 1940 there was nothing worthwhile written on Austen. However, according to Southam the writing of that period does exhibit "a certain uniformity" (2: 13). In this period, Austen's work was not considered at such great lengths as close reading accounts or studies do nowadays. Austen's "novels are prized for their 'perfection'. Yet it is seen to be a narrow perfection, achieved within the bounds of domestic comedy" (Southam, 2: 13-14). Critics of the period between 1870 and 1940 seemed to have difficulty separating the author from her gender. Austen's achievements were seen in relation to her femininity and in turn related to the gender norms of the time. Her achievements were notable, for a woman.

What critics seemed to disagree on in this period is how well-read Austen was in her lifetime but also during the critics' lifetimes, as "it was a matter of journalistic convenience whether Jane Austen's following was accounted as universal, or small in numbers" (Southam, 2: 47). The turn of the nineteenth century into the twentieth did allow for a new channel of criticism to be created, as formal studies of literature at universities became more prevalent (Southam, 2: 70). But this did not mean, as Southam shows, that professors had very different opinions from critics who published in newspapers and magazines, as the professors "were ready to pronounce judgement and the most important of their works remained in print,

unchanged, for many years” (2: 70). In fact, it was not until the 1920s that more “scholarly editions of the novels and minor works” began to appear as well as more academic studies performing close readings (Southam, 2: 107).

In this period there was a divide between critics who still saw Austen as the maidenly Aunt, their *dear* and *gentle* Jane, whilst others, influenced by Harding’s essay on Austen titled “Regulated Hatred” embraced “the new, caustic Jane Austen” (Southam, 2: 128). The maidenly aunt image was a remnant of the *Memoir*, which was sentimental in many regards. This distinction between the way critics saw Austen is one that is still prevalent today amongst her fans, as some praise her wit and sarcasm, whilst others highlight how gentle she was.

It is true that systematic criticism on Austen did not flourish until the Second World War, as Johnson shows that this is the “time when she becomes a major part of curricula in English Departments” (*Cults* 10). Before this, as Southam has shown, criticism written on Austen was irregularly published and of varying degrees of quality. Around the Second World War another change occurred concerning the fans of Austen’s work, the so-called Janeites. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Janeites were “a discernible and decidedly (though not exclusively) masculine readership” (Johnson, *Cults* 8). However, after World War II, the fandom surrounding Austen and her work was feminized, and nowadays “Janeites are likelier to be seen as batty ladies than as supremely discerning connoisseurs” (Johnson, *Cults* 10). In part, Johnson argues, this has to do with “her vigorous marketing in the form of print, television, and motion pictures” (*Cults* 10). Johnson’s argument here implies that Austen’s growing presence in society through different types of media was the reason for the gender shift of the Janeites, and this image has persisted into modern day society too. Austen is sometimes called the mother of chicklit. As Nicole Peters has argued, “contemporary Austen adaptations and sequels have almost completely crossed the boundary into women’s

literature and romance genre” (78). Austen’s place as either a “highbrow” or “lowbrow” writer is challenged by branding her as a romance writer, as “Austen’s texts and readers fluctuate between genres and audiences so easily” (Peters 78-79). This is due to the fact that Austen’s popular readers challenge and “resist institutionalized readings of her” showing that the critical tradition is “unstable” and “gendered productions of value” (Peters 79). Janeites, Peters argues, are “frequently trivialized for focusing too much on the romantic elements of the plots,” which reduces “the texts and reading to ‘genre’ function” (80). Chicklit is, after all, well-known for its focus on romance in the plot.

However, when it comes to how Austen is perceived by her admirers and critics, there is no common theme. Johnson argues that “there is no single ‘Jane Austen’” as each period of criticism had a different way of reading Austen, for both her work and herself (*Cults* 13). There is the witty Austen, who was a master of words, but also a dear and gentle Austen, who was like an aunt to those who read her. There is an Austen who was seen as representing something very distant to the reader, writing of times and morals of the past, but there is also an Austen who “was understood to be not apart from the real world, but quite a large part of it” (Johnson, *Cults* 125). None of these versions of Austen are reconcilable with each other. Johnson further argues that Jane Austen’s bodilessness to her audience, i.e. that it makes the audience/Janeites uncomfortable to look at Jane Austen’s likeness, is an important part of her reception (*Cults*, 66). However, due to the scope of this thesis this aspect of Johnson’s argument will not be elaborated upon.

To move on, during the World Wars the perception and reception of Austen changed, as her work came to represent England and the English character. During the First World War Austen’s work represented home for the soldiers fighting on foreign fronts, making her “beloved in foreign parts” (Johnson, *Cults* 127). Although Austen was still well-read during World War II, there is a difference compared to how she was received during World War I.

The Austen of World War I provided comfort to soldiers abroad, reminding them of their home, whilst during World War II “Austen moves toward the center of a version of English identity felt to be coextensive with a cherished civilian home front under attack” (Johnson, *Cults* 128). Moreover, Austen came to represent English identity during World War II because “Austenian places are the objects of attack,” as cities linked to Austen, like Bath, were bombed (Johnson, *Cults* 134). This is even further reflected in the forming of the Jane Austen Society (of the UK), which happened in 1940. The aim of the Society was not necessarily to appreciate Austen’s novels, instead aiming for “the preservation of Austenian property in the neighborhood” (Johnson, *Cults* 138). The Austenian landmarks had become quintessentially English things, representing the nation and its character.

Although it is important for this thesis to detail Austen’s critical heritage, there are a other academic debates that have taken place beyond Southam’s and Johnson’s scope, as they do not discuss the critical tradition of the past 75 years in their work. The more recent developments in academic criticism are equally important. The following few paragraphs will elaborate on the most recent developments in academic criticism on Austen, such as the rise of feminist readings and the discussion on Austen’s standpoint on slavery.

From the late 1970s onwards, academics began to approach writing from certain perspectives, including feminist perspectives. In 1979 the seminal work titled *Madwoman in the Attic* was published by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in which they provide feminist readings of several female authors like Austen. A few years later Margaret Kirkham published her work titled *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction* (1983), and in 1988 Claudia Johnson published her work titled *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel*. These works have all provided feminist readings of Austen’s novels. However, as Carole Gerster argues, critics disagree about Austen’s position as a feminist writer as “some critics find Austen’s novels staunchly feminist; others find them submissive to the status quo” (115). What is most

difficult about reading Austen's writings as either feminist or not, is that there is no hard evidence in her writings on her position. As Peters argues, Austen's "silence and isolation on many issues make her novels and her authorship so transferable to all these discussions; she is made to fit nowhere and everywhere" (75). Hence, academic critics have disagreed on Austen's position on feminism.

Another recent development in academic criticism regarding Austen has been the rise of postcolonial criticism. In 1993 Edward Said published his book titled *Culture & Imperialism*, which featured an essay titled "Austen and Empire." Said's work makes a connection between Austen's countryside and its relationship with the slave trade by exploring *Mansfield Park* (1814). Said argues that Austen marginalizes slavery and colonialism, and Said condemns the silence that follows Fanny's questions to her uncle about the slave trade. However, some critics have pointed out flaws in Said's arguments. For example, George Boulukos has pointed out that Said's argument "derives from his methodology rather than from historical and textual evidence" (364). Based on his own reading of *Mansfield Park*, Boulukos suggests that Fanny "has a favorable view of amelioration, whatever form it takes" and that Jane Austen and the denizens of Mansfield Park "were well aware of slavery" (364, 377). Boulukos' argument suggests that Austen was conscious of her complicity in the slave trade. Furthermore, Corinne Fowler has pointed out that several key aspects of *Mansfield Park* are ignored by Said. For example, Fowler argues that Mrs. Norris is named "after a slave-trader, and Mansfield Park was named after a man who prevented slavery on British soil" (366). Further biographical study on Austen, Fowler reveals, highlights "the influence of pro-abolition figures in Austen's family" and "studies of her reading reveal her approval of pro-abolitionist writers" (380). Fowler disagrees with Said's argument. Moreover, Fowler acknowledges that "Austen's writing has been, and remains, a battlefield for competing vision of British history, literature, and rurality" (379).

Another academic who disagrees with Said's stance is Paula Byrne, who in her work *The Real Jane Austen: A Life in Small Things* argues that Austen read abolitionist works (2014). Byrne argues that Austen's reading shows that she was committed to the abolition of slavery. Like Austen's feminism, her stance on slavery is one that academics do not agree about.

Of course, there are other areas within Austen academia that have interesting debates and new developments, such as adaptation studies. However, due to the scope of this thesis, the focus has remained mainly on the aforementioned critical heritage studies and academic debates. For the main, recent debates, what stands out are the debates about Austen's feminism and her stance on slavery. These feature most often in academic debates.

Wilde

Like Austen, Oscar Wilde's canonical status guarantees that he is still written about by academics regularly. Wilde's critical heritage differs from that of Austen, though, as he was written about much more quickly and in larger numbers too when he first published his work (see Karl Beckson's *Oscar Wilde: the Critical Heritage Series* (1997) for a detailed account of his reception). However, during the twentieth century, as Josephine M. Guy and Ian Small argue, his work was not often reassessed because "Wilde's disgrace obstructed critical reassessment ..., and the celebrity which Wilde enjoys today has depended to a large extent upon a revaluation (perhaps even a fetishization) of the life" (1). This revaluation, Guy and Small argue, took place around the end of the 20th century. Despite this lack of critical reassessment throughout the twentieth century, there are a few common ways in which academics view and discuss Wilde and his work which will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

First of all, perhaps the most pervasive lens through which Wilde's work is read and assessed is that of the 'gay' Oscar Wilde. In fact, Guy and Small argue that the 'gay' Wilde

“as an area of enquiry... has dominated academic and popular interest for the last twenty years” (3). This one side of Wilde’s identity, his sexuality, has been the subject of many academic papers, as critics read his work in an almost biographical manner, seeing his sexuality “to be expressed through his works at a subtextual or coded level” (Guy and Small 3). Wilde’s sexuality plays an important part in critics’ reassessment of him, and even to the public he is often well-known for his sexuality. To many readers of Wilde, he is a gay martyr, someone who was unjustly imprisoned for loving men. Wilde’s status as a gay martyr is ultimately part of the reason why he has such a prevailing celebrity status and why he is idolized by many. This, Sandra Mayer argues, has to do with the “seemingly inextricable interdependence of life and work” which has created a “tangled web of art, biography and politics, which feeds a perpetual cycle of critical, scholarly and artistic reassessment and resignification” (116). To many, it is impossible to see Wilde as separate from his work. In part, this is due to Wilde having had control over his public persona, as he “actively co-authored his public image as a celebrity ... long before he achieved fame as a writer” (Mayer 113). Furthermore, Wilde was often led in his work by public opinion, as he craved recognition and commercial success, which “rendered him susceptible to artistic compromise, in order to placate the conservative tastes of late-Victorian upper and upper-middle class theatergoers” (Mayer 115). Wilde’s control over his public persona and his versatility in constructing his own persona caused him to be “a singularly pliable icon that readily lends itself to a wide range of critical, historical, political and aesthetic appropriations” (Mayer 125). Wilde’s art has often been read and written about in relation to his life, though his sexuality has definitely been the most pervasive lens through which his work has been perceived.

A more recent development in criticism on Wilde has been the acknowledgement of his Irish nationality. Wilde has generally been read as an English icon, and his “appropriation

as an English heritage icon relies first and foremost on his status as a canonical writer and his astounding mastery of the English language” Lucy Krämer argues (360). For Irish nationalists, Wilde’s appropriation as an English icon stands for the suppression of the Irish genius by the colonisers. However, depending on the critic, Wilde is either condemned for working with the coloniser, or seen as a victim of colonisation and colonial oppression (Mulder). Moreover, even to the Irish heritage industry, Wilde has only recently been accepted as an Irish icon, as it was not until 1997 that a statue of Wilde was erected in Dublin’s Merrion Square Park (Mayer 112). Wilde’s reclamation as an Irish writer is as new as his “career as a major object of the English heritage industry” (Krämer 360), which will be the focus of the next paragraph.

The interest in Wilde as a heritage object can be dated to 1995. It was in this year that Wilde was added to the Poets Corner at London’s Westminster Abbey, by the dedication of a stained-glass window (Krämer 360). Nowadays, Wilde is a common choice for memorabilia, his epigrams and aphorisms are printed on t-shirts and stationery, usually with his name printed next to them. His wit has become a product of the heritage industry. Furthermore, Krämer argues that like the objects relating to Wilde, he turned “himself into an object that would capture people’s attention by its outrageousness and eccentricity” (364). Despite their decontextualization, his quotations placed on mugs work, as they “retain some of their parodic and subversive potential” (Krämer 364). Wilde’s image that he created for himself is still reflected in objects that have his words printed on them, precisely because they fit the Wilde the public knows: the Wilde who was a wit and an eccentric man. Wilde in the heritage industry cuts a different figure, then, than Austen did. The industry surrounding Wilde is less obsessed with objects that once belonged to him, or buildings he might have visited. Instead, the focus is more on Wilde as a person and a wit.

The evident focus on Wilde as a person is in part due to biopics about Wilde's life, and it is really biopics that have established Wilde the Gay Icon in mainstream media. Biopics have played an important part in ensuring Wilde's afterlife, as Oliver S. Buckton points out: "the re-entrance of Wilde into mainstream cinema, after a generation's absence, occurred in 1997, with Brian Gilbert's film *Wilde*" (349). The biopic directed by Gilbert helped bring Wilde back into the limelight at the end of the 20th century, but also helped to perpetuate the image created of Wilde as a Gay Icon. As Dianne F. Sadoff argues, Gilbert's version of Wilde in this biopic "paradoxically identifies Wilde as gay culture's mediator, as historical origin and as model for imitation" (201). Furthermore, H. Shachar has also argued that Gilbert's adaptation portrays Wilde as "the queer martyr", and that the movie "rather than exploring the interior, subjective experience of the 'mystery' of the authorial genius and creative mind, Wilde is instead rendered a public and radicalised heritage icon" (44, 45). The biopics, and especially Gilbert's *Wilde*, have helped establish Oscar Wilde as a figure in mainstream media, and to create the idea of Wilde as a Gay Icon. The biopics were influential, then, in how Wilde is portrayed in media to this day.

Ultimately, as Shelton Waldrep argues, "we keep reinventing him [Wilde] each time he reappears" (56). The continuous reinvention of Wilde as a person and as a writer is something Wilde himself also did. He continuously worked on his public persona to either gain more fame, or to become more well-respected as a dramatist. This, too, is where we find a difference between Austen and Wilde. Austen, unlike Wilde, was never a public figure. Wilde, on the other hand, had fame even before he was a writer and constantly reinvented himself. Wilde was simultaneously more in control of his public figure, whilst also being more susceptible to scrutiny and criticism.

To conclude this chapter, it must be said that an awareness of the debates and common themes surrounding Austen and Wilde is necessary for the rest of this thesis. In the

chapters that follow, the results of the questionnaires about Austen's and Wilde's presence on the internet and their reception on it will be posed against the debates among critics. But first the meaning of memes and tweets that circulate the internet must be explored in order to get a firm understanding of how they either subvert or agree with the status quo of academia. This will be elaborated upon in the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO – AN ANALYSIS OF TWEETS AND MEMES ABOUT JANE AUSTEN AND OSCAR WILDE

This chapter will concern itself with an analysis of tweets and memes relating to Austen and Wilde. This will be done by performing close readings of some tweets and memes, with the purpose to see if there are common themes that they concern themselves with. It is important for this thesis to analyse the tweets and memes that circulate about the authors and their works, because it is on the basis of the information garnered from these analyses that a comparison can be made between the common themes discussed by academics and the ones discussed on the internet. What will become apparent during the analyses made in this chapter is that the memes and tweets created about Wilde focus more on him as a person, which is in contrast to the memes and tweets about Austen, which focus more on her novels. In this chapter, a few examples of tweets and memes will be given to explore the analyses made. As there are more memes and tweets about the authors than there is space to discuss, appendix A is attached to this thesis for more examples of memes and tweets about Austen and Wilde. Like in the previous chapter, an analysis will first be given of tweets and memes relating to Austen and her work, before moving on to analyse those pertaining to Wilde. The chapter will be concluded with a brief overview of how the authors are portrayed on the internet and how this compares to the common academic debates surrounding the authors.

Austen

Similar to the academic criticism written on Jane Austen, the tweets and memes that circulate regarding Austen and her work have varying foci too. However, there are a few of her novels and a few aspects of her character that are tweeted about most often. For example, *Pride and*

Pride and Prejudice seems to be a fan favourite to make memes about. This section will explore some of the main themes of the media circulating on the internet on Austen.

As stated above, a common focus memes and tweets have is the plot of *Pride and Prejudice*, specifically Darcy's proposal to Elizabeth. There are several other plot points which memes and tweets focus on, such as Lady Catherine de Bourgh's visit to Elizabeth to order Elizabeth not to marry Darcy, or Elizabeth's change of mind after her visit to Pemberley. However, these will not be elaborated upon in this chapter; examples of such memes and tweets are included in appendix A. Often, memes and tweets about the proposal scene are summations of the scene in short, visual media, highlighting the comedic tone of the proposal scene in the novel. For example, this tweet uses screenshots from the 2005 movie adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* to summarise the scene:



Fig. 1: @macbethish. *Twitter*, 12 April 2020, 8:34 AM.

The text put here instead of Darcy's actual words comes from a Vine, which is a platform which no longer exists. Vine was a social media platform in which people could make short, funny videos, which were usually shorter than a minute long. The Vine from which this text

was taken is an internet classic, and this format circulates a lot, putting the text of the Vine over images. The idea behind the text is that it is an insulting or mean way to tell someone that you love them, which is what Darcy does in this scene.

Moreover, the proposal scene is often summarised in tweets in a few lines in order to highlight the comedic effect of the scene. See, for example:



Fig. 2: @Drunk_Austen. *Twitter*, 25 February 2020, 11:25 PM.

This tweet by the account Drunk Austen sums up the proposal in a format which follows the style of an online forum called ‘Am I The Asshole’ on reddit.com (this is what the abbreviation AITA in the tweet stands for). The AITA forum is used by redditors (people who use reddit) to ask others’ opinions on situations where they are in doubt about their role in the situation. Usually, the responses will be simple: yes, you are the asshole; or no, you are not. Most of the AITA posts concern themselves with relationship situations. In this tweet the 30M (thirty-year-old male) refers to Mr. Darcy, and the 20F (twenty-year-old female) is Elizabeth. The tweet expects the reader to already know the plot of *Pride and Prejudice* as it is not explicit about the characters’ names or the title of the book. However, for anyone who has either seen the movie adaptations or who has read the novel, it is instantly clear that this refers to *Pride and Prejudice*. Considering the name of this twitter account, Drunk Austen, that is not surprising; it is an account aimed largely at Janeites, so to be explicit would not be

deemed necessary. The creator of this tweet already made an assumption based on Darcy's character in this tweet. The creator expects the reader of this tweet to say that yes, Darcy is the asshole in this situation. It shows that the creator has interpreted Darcy's character in such a way, and perhaps is choosing Elizabeth's side in this situation. It is almost a celebration of the fact that Elizabeth rejected Darcy, too, as the tweet condemns Darcy's words and actions. Perhaps, the tweet could even be seen as the creator celebrating the feminism of it all, as rejecting marriage proposals from wealthy men was not what would have been expected of a woman of Elizabeth's status. The tweet is a simplified telling of the events of *Pride and Prejudice*, which is not surprising, as tweets such as these tend to be reductive. This tweet and its format are used mainly for its comedic purposes. Most of the people active on twitter would be familiar with this format of AITA, and it highlights how funny the proposal is to modern audiences. This tweet, then, highlights the wit Jane Austen holds as a writer. In fact, many of the tweets and memes about this specific scene in *Pride and Prejudice* highlight the comedic effect of the scene, often with a focus on Darcy's character and his behaviour. This focus on character in memes and tweets is something this chapter will return to at later point. Similar examples which highlight the proposal scene and its comedic effect can be found in appendix A. Jane Austen is, then, portrayed as a writer with a high comedic value in her writings, or at least in this scene, which is something that will also become apparent in the analysis of other memes and tweets later on.

What many of the memes and tweets also show, is that Austen is relevant in all situations by putting her quotes or characters' behaviours into a modern-day context. Specifically, right now as the world is going through a pandemic of a deadly virus, there has been a rise of using Austen to relate to current day events and feelings. Consider the following two examples:



Fig. 3: @SparkNotes. *Twitter*, 30 April 2020, 4:47 PM.

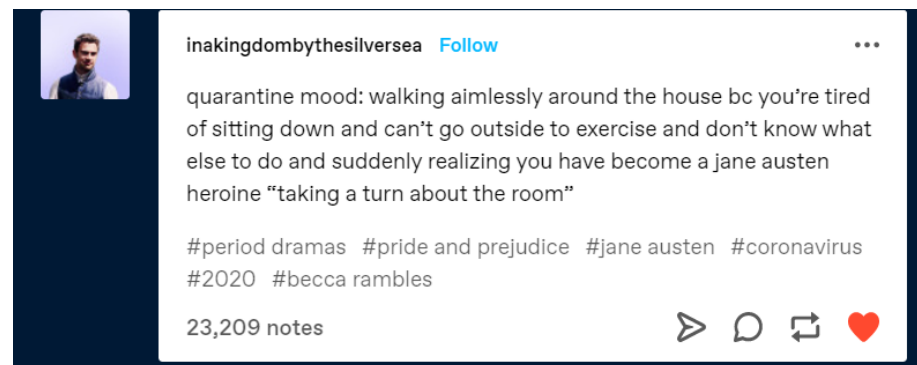


Fig. 4: @inakingdombythesilversea. *Tumblr*, 2 April 2020, 11 PM.

The first is a tweet by the twitter account called SparkNotes, which is also the name of a website that publishes study guides for literature (amongst other things). Its twitter account focuses mostly on literature. The tweet by the SparkNotes account is a parody on the opening lines of *Pride and Prejudice*, and is explained by the time it was tweeted in. When SparkNotes tweeted this, the Covid-19 pandemic was in full swing and many countries were in lockdown (or quarantined) which meant that everyone was required to work from home as much as possible. As such, it has become commonplace to inquire after the health of colleagues and their family's health in business emails; and the common phrasing used for this inquiry is "I hope this email finds you..." as used in the tweet. The tweet highlights the usability of Austen's work in the current day situations, whilst also making a funny reference to her work. Similarly, the Tumblr post by user inakingdombythesilversea shows that people still relate to Austen and her characters, as the user states that they are finally able to relate to

characters of Austen's novels when they "take a turn about the room". Again, this post references the home situation of the user, who also has to stay at home because of the pandemic and feels connected to Austen's work because of it. However, this also hints at the creator's sense that there is something wrong at the moment; the reason they relate to Austen's characters who walk around their rooms is because they feel displaced in their current situation. The creator is used to being able to go outside and go for walks, but because that is currently not possible, they now relate to Austen's characters who do the same thing, i.e. walk around inside the house. There is a sense of displacement, perhaps even of estrangement, from the current world which leads the creator to relate to Austen. For more examples of tweets and memes using Austen and her work to make a point about the pandemic, see appendix A.

To move on, as mentioned, before many memes and tweets seem to be focused on specific characteristics of characters written by Austen. Again, these seem to highlight how funny certain characters and their actions can be. The emphasis of memes and tweets often is on the comedic aspect of a novel, because the goal of a meme or a tweet is to entertain the people who come across them. For example, some of the memes and tweets are dedicated to Darcy's awkwardness or crudeness, or Mr. Collins' obsession with his patroness Lady Catherine de Bourgh. Take the following image as an example:

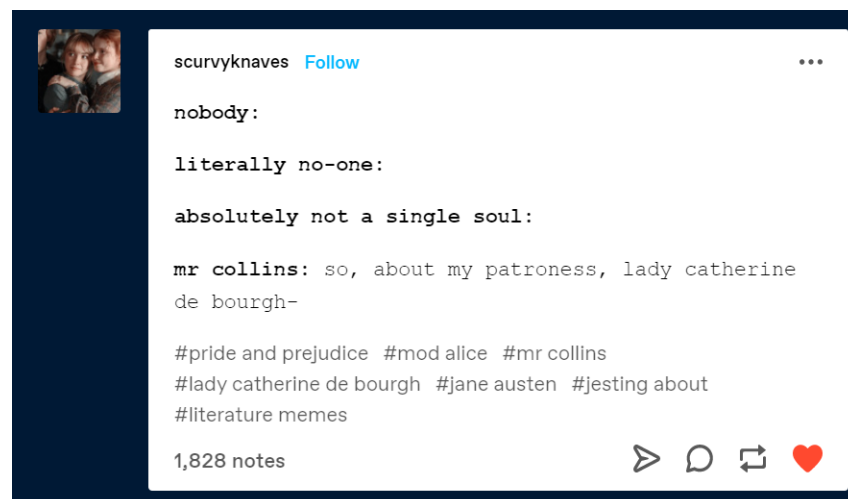
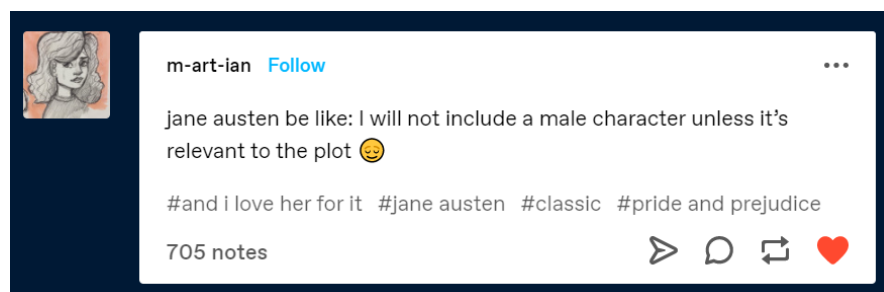


Fig. 5: @scurvyknaves. *Tumblr*, 14 August 2019.

This post by user *scurvyknaves* emphasizes the fact that Mr. Collins talks about his patroness Lady Catherine de Bourgh a lot. It does so in a common format used often on the internet to draw attention to someone talking about a certain subject a lot. The format it takes text-wise, with the blank spaces behind “nobody:” etc are there to create an illusion of silence. The idea of the format is that there are people in a silent room and, with no one talking, until – in this particular example – Mr. Collins breaks the silence by talking about his patroness. This format is commonly used to highlight the fact that a certain person never stops talking about a certain topic. The creators of these types of content form a stereotype for the character and then exaggerate that stereotype for a comedic effect. In this case, it is Mr. Collins’ inability to stop talking about his patroness that is caricatured in the meme. This particular example also expects the reader to know the reference being made, as is often the case with memes and tweets. The post shows the reader an exaggeration of Mr. Collins’ character, with the aim of being funny. However, as with the proposal scene from *Pride and Prejudice*, the focus on character also shows that the writers of the memes and tweets think of the characters (and thus Austen’s work) as funny.

Furthermore, there are also tweets and memes in which Austen is portrayed as a feminist who was ahead of her time. For example:

Fig. 6: @m-art-ian. *Tumblr*, 6 June 2020.

Here the Tumblr user m-art-ian states that Austen's apparent reluctance to include male characters in her works unless they are relevant to the plot is something they enjoy about Austen's work. The creator of this post celebrates the fact that Austen only seemed to include male characters for the benefit of the plot, which is implied here that it is not common to do so. This post is also a celebration of the fact that Austen's novels seem to be driven by women. This sentiment is also reflected in this Tumblr post:

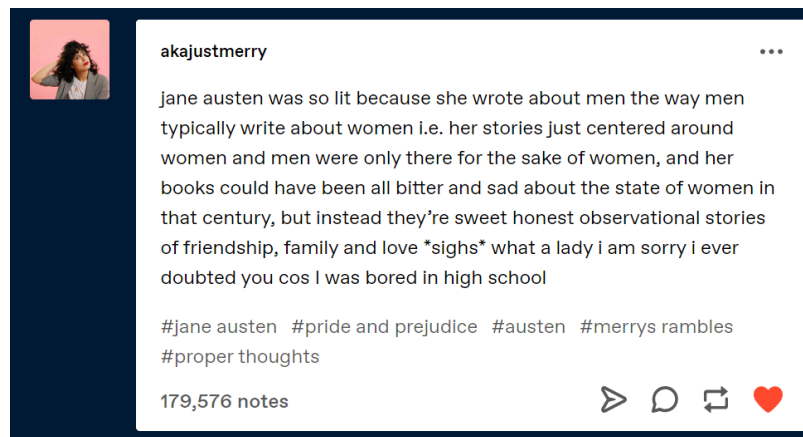


Fig. 7: @akajustmerry. *Tumblr*, 2016.

In this post by akajustmerry, the creator states that Austen “was so lit” because of how she wrote her stories. Being lit is internet slang for something being really good. This post echoes the spirit of the other post as well, as both celebrate the fact that Austen only wrote male characters into the plot if necessary for the female characters. These posts could be interpreted as a celebration of Austen's feminism. The idea of Austen as a feminist is even further reflected in the following Tumblr post:

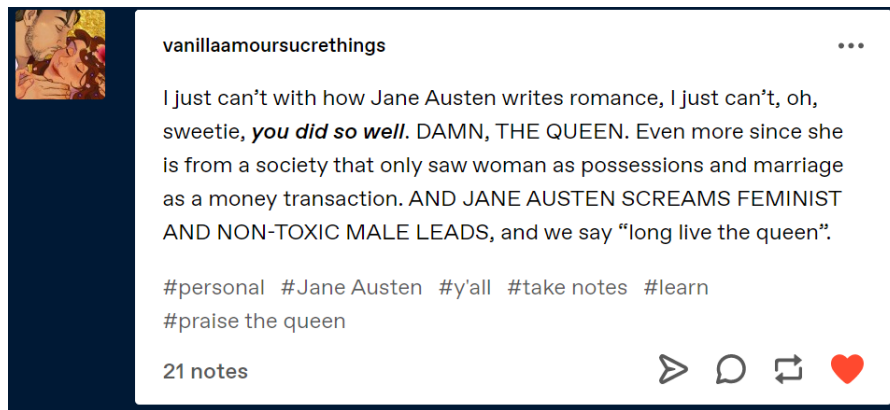


Fig. 8: @vanillaamoursucrethings. *Tumblr*, 18 June 2020.

This post by vanillamoursucrethings states their admiration for how Austen wrote her novels, using a lot of internet slang phrases. Especially the beginning sentence “I just can’t with...” is a popular internet phrase used to express that the person cannot deal with something, leaving out the word “deal”. This particular post is more straightforward in their praise of Austen, stating that her work “screams feminist and non-toxic male leads”, which the creator of the post really appreciates. All three of these posts state their praise for Austen and how she wrote feminist works. Although none of these posts are particularly meme like, they do show that the creators engage with Austen’s works and decided to create something about it. The posts still have a comedy factor to them in the way they are phrased, and they show that Austen is seen as a feminist too.

As has been shown in the previous paragraphs, the main portrayal of Austen and her work in memes and tweets is to show how witty and funny Austen’s work is to her modern audience. Most of the memes and tweets take comedic aspects of Austen’s novels and exaggerate them with the goal of creating funny and relatable content for the readers. Interestingly, there are not many memes and tweets about Jane Austen as a person, as most take a focus on her novels. Ultimately, many of these tweets and memes are very superficial. Most will highlight one tiny aspect of a character or of a plot and create something funny or

relatable out of this. The focus on Austen's works, as will be shown in the following section, is in contrast to what can be found about Oscar Wilde on the internet. Generally, the memes and tweets assume that the reader has read the novels or seen adaptations of the novels, as they are not explicit about the references that they make. Furthermore, the usage of Austen's novels in modern day settings shows that there is a relevance to Austen and her writings even now, two centuries after her work was written and published. The prevalence of memes and tweets about Jane Austen is unsurprising considering that her work is still constantly adapted for movies and tv series, and she is on many school's reading lists too. Memes and tweets make Austen's content accessible to younger people, and perhaps even help them to enjoy it.

Wilde

Likewise, as there are many varying debates in academia about Wilde and his writing, there are also different types of memes and tweets about his work. In contrast to the memes and tweets found about Austen, there are also many about Wilde himself. The common themes of memes and tweets about Wilde will be explored in the following paragraphs.

First of all, it must be noted that the majority of the memes and tweets about Oscar Wilde's works are on *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which is his only novel. It is, perhaps, his most accessible work precisely because it is a novel. Similar to the memes and tweets about Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, there seems to be a focus on a particular aspect of the novel, which in this case is Dorian's portrait. For example:

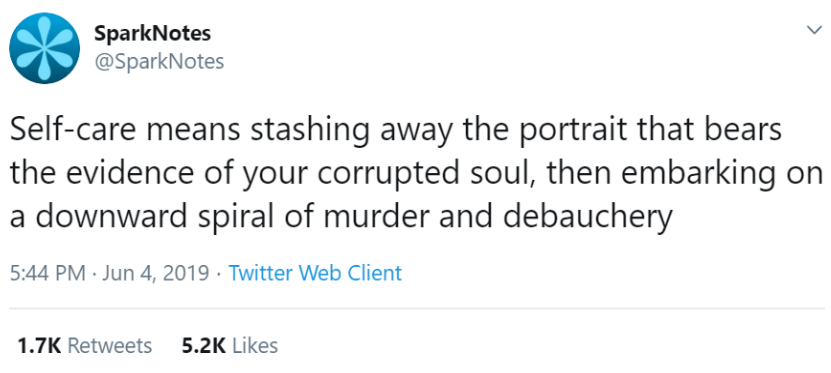
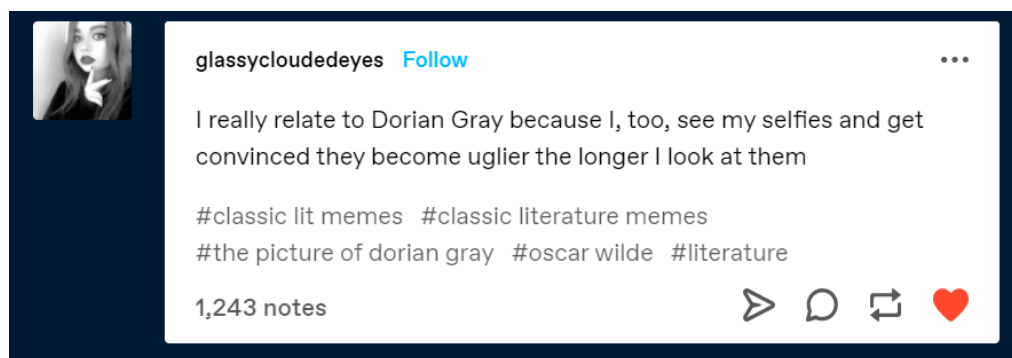


Fig. 9: @SparkNotes. *Twitter*, 4 June 2019, 5:44 PM.

This tweet by the SparkNotes account is a parody on Dorian's actions in the novel. The format it takes of 'self-care means...' is a common format used to parody people's actions in the name of self-care. Like most memes and tweets with literary subjects, the reader is expected to know the reference being made in the tweet, as it is not explicitly stated that this tweet is about *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The tweet focuses on just the one aspect of the novel to make a funny comment, which is not surprising considering the format. The fact that Dorian has a portrait that he stashes away when it shows his corrupted soul is something many internet users seem to parody, but some also find his initial reaction to the portrait relatable. Take, for example, this post:

Fig. 10: @glassycloudeyeyes. *Tumblr*, 25 May 2020.

Here, Tumblr user glassycloudeyeyes states that they find Dorian Gray a relatable character because they experience a similar thing as Dorian does in the novel. The user, then, finds common ground between their own feelings and the actions and feelings of a fictional character. Similar to the tweet by the SparkNotes account, this post has a comedic tone to it as well. The comedy of this post is, also, only properly understood if the reader is familiar with the plot of the novel. Presumably, this aspect of the novel is focused on for similar reasons as the focus put on the proposal scene in *Pride and Prejudice* – because it is funny to

modern-day audiences, and oddly relatable too. Oscar Wilde's work is, then, used in tweets and memes because of their comedy, and the creators want to highlight and exaggerate this for their own purposes. In turn, this also relates to the fact that creators find Wilde's work to still be relevant to modern day situations and use his work to visualise modern day experiences.

Other than the memes and tweets about Oscar Wilde's novel, there are also quite a lot to be found about Wilde himself. Most of these portray Wilde as the 'gay icon', and some aspects of his life are almost overly romanticised. For example:

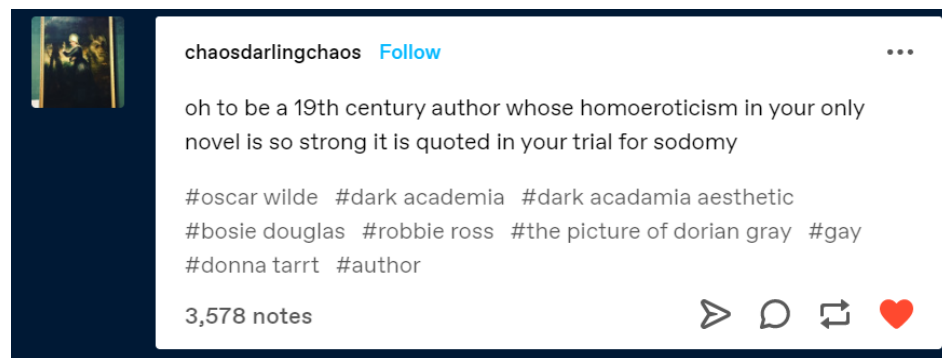


Fig. 11: @chaosdarlingchaos. *Tumblr*, 11 January 2020

This post by Tumblr user chaosdarlingchaos shows that they have an idyllic view of what it must have been like to be Oscar Wilde. This post like the others in this chapter is not explicit about the author they refer to, although the hashtags do tell the reader that it is in reference to Oscar Wilde. The creator of this post takes on a wishful tone indicated by the phrasing of 'oh to be...'. They seem to be yearning to be put in a similar position as Wilde was, meaning to have written a novel full of homoeroticism that it is used as proof of your sexuality.

Considering that Wilde was imprisoned because of his sexuality, this aspect seems to be disregarded by the creator of this post, showing that they romanticise the idea of writing homoerotic novels, but without the consequences Wilde faced. This idea also plays into the

concept of Wilde as the ‘gay martyr’, as it does briefly mention his trial too, although his trial is not the focus of the meme.

Moreover, Wilde is often portrayed as a gay man who was far from subtle about his sexuality, especially in his writing. Consider this example:

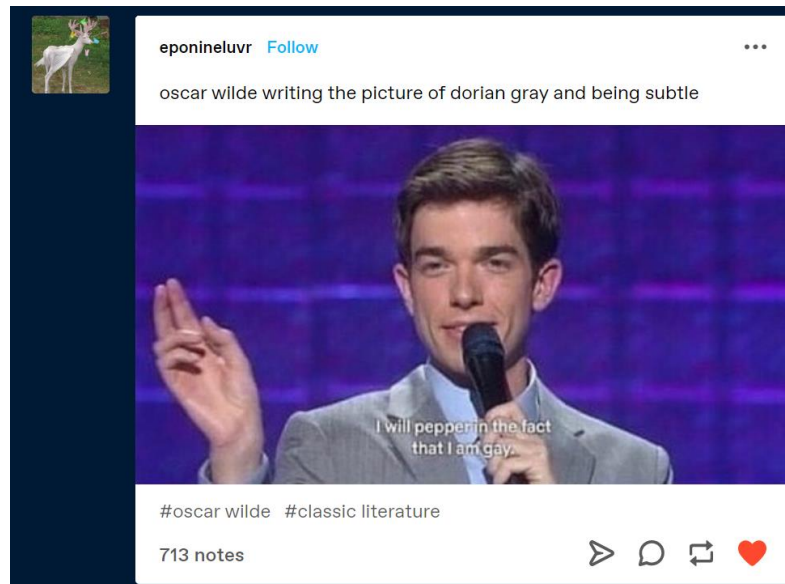


Fig. 12: @eponineluvr. *Tumblr*, 18 January 2020.

This Tumblr post by eponineluvr uses text in combination with a screenshot from a stand-up comedian to make a statement. The screenshot comes from comedian John Mulaney’s show called *New In Town*. The screenshot is taken out of context here, as in the show Mulaney discusses how he met a homeless man on the street and how this man introduced himself to Mulaney. This screenshot is often used to highlight that a certain person who is obviously gay but trying not to emphasise their sexuality will behave, because they will “pepper in the fact that I am gay [*sic*],” i.e. only give small hints to show their sexuality. Although sometimes it also specifically used to emphasise someone’s sexuality. The format plays on someone’s ability to be or not to be subtle about their sexuality. The creator of this post is likely using the screenshot to an ironic effect, meaning that Wilde might have thought he was being subtle about his sexuality in writing *Dorian Gray*, but in reality is not subtle at all. The post is also a

reflection of the fact that the novel is often read as being about gay men too, as there is homoerotic subtext present in the novel. Within the realm of the internet, this perception of *Dorian Gray* is not uncommon. This is unsurprising, as Wilde is often seen as a Gay Icon on the internet, which causes fans of his work to seek and overemphasise the homoerotic subtext in his work. Coincidentally, the homoerotic subtext in Wilde's works was also used as evidence during his trials. For more examples of memes and tweets that portray Oscar Wilde as a gay icon, turn to appendix A of this thesis.

Moreover, there are also memes and tweets in which Oscar Wilde is portrayed as a, for lack of better word, badass person who did not care for what others thought of him.

Consider this post:

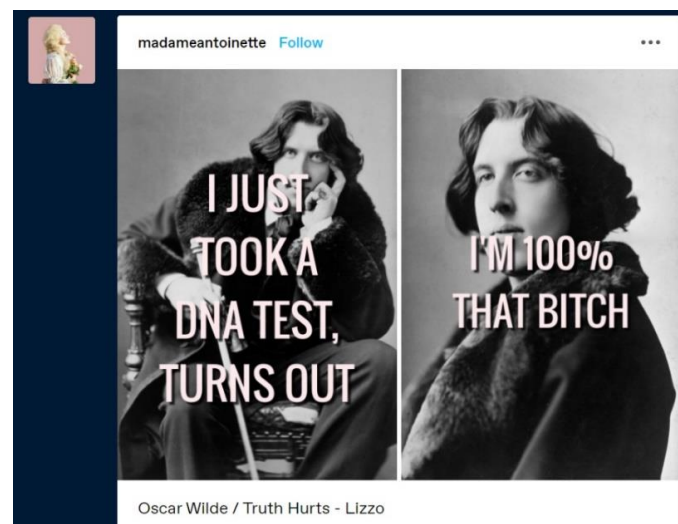


Fig. 13: @madameantoinette. *Tumblr*, 27 September 2019.

This post made by madameantoinette uses two photographs of Oscar Wilde and lyrics from a song by the artist Lizzo. The post puts the lyrics of Lizzo's song over photographs of Wilde, implying that they are either quotes by Wilde or that they are applicable to Wilde. The meaning of the phrase "I'm 100% that bitch", according to the urban dictionary, is that the phrase denotes a person everyone else is extremely jealous of, it's a person (usually a woman) who everyone wants to be (100% that bitch, Urban Dictionary). Generally, this kind

of person is also considered as a devil-may-care type, who disregards what others may think of them. The user suggests then, that Wilde is a person everyone should be extremely jealous of, that he was a person others tried to emulate. This shows that the user thinks of Wilde as such a person too, and perhaps even admires him for it. The portrayal of Oscar Wilde in this way is a common perception of him on the internet, and more examples of that can be found in appendix A.

To summarise, there are a few ways in which Wilde is perceived as based on the memes and tweets about him. First of all, the wit of his work is highlighted through funny media about his works (with a focus on *The Picture of Dorian Gray*). Secondly, Wilde is still portrayed as the gay icon (or martyr), who wrote works with plenty of homoerotic subtext. The gay icon version of Wilde is also often seen as an ideal, something others romanticise in their memes and tweets about him. Lastly, the prevalent view of Wilde is that he was a badass person who others were/are extremely jealous of, and which members of the internet also see as a goal to be that way themselves.

The academic Austen and Wilde versus the internet Austen and Wilde

This section will briefly explore the differences between the common academic debates surrounding Austen and Wilde and what the most common themes are for memes and tweets about these authors.

When it comes to Austen, it is apparent that the only common theme for both academics and memes and tweets is the ‘Jane Austen the feminist’ viewpoint, although exactly how feminist Austen might have been is still up for discussion. As shown in chapter one and in this chapter, academics have debates about Austen’s feminism and in memes and tweets she is also portrayed as a feminist author. The other main foci of academic debates as stated in chapter one are not found in memes and tweets about Jane Austen or her work.

Although when considering Austen's critical heritage her wit was something that was often highlighted in the past by critics and now by memes and tweets, this has not been a subject of academic debate in the past decades. There is a real disparity, then, between the academic debates regarding Austen and the foci of memes and tweets. However, considering what the general purpose of these memes and tweets is, i.e. to entertain and be funny to the readers, it is not completely surprising that the focus is put on Austen's witty aspects. Exploiting an author's wit for memes and tweets is a logical step to take and it explains the differences between the common academic debates and the common themes of memes and tweets.

Similarly, when it comes to Wilde there is one topic that overlaps both the academic debates and the themes of memes and tweets: Wilde as a gay icon. As shown in chapter one, there is a lot of debate about Wilde's sexuality and reading him in a queer context, whilst in memes and tweets he is portrayed as a gay icon. This difference can be explained when looking at the purpose of memes and tweets as well, as they are not places for debate. What tends to happen is that one aspect of someone's character is taken and then used as representative of who that person was on a whole. With Wilde, his sexuality is fixated on by the creators of memes and tweets. It is in the very nature of academic debate to argue and research and not focus on just one aspect of a person's life. So, although there are debates about Wilde's sexuality within academic circles, the way he is seen by academics is more fluid than how he is perceived by creators of memes and tweets. Again, this is not surprising considering the differences between academic content and memes and tweets.

In short, only Austen's feminism and Wilde's sexuality are topics featured in both academic debates and memes and tweets. The other topics mentioned in this chapter are not found in academic debates about these authors, but considering the goal of memes and tweets this is not entirely surprising. Memes and tweets will exaggerate one aspect of a person or novel and makes it the signifier of the person or novel. Entire novels are flattened out to one

scene, which are recreated in meme and tweet format over and over, making it possible for loads of people to come into contact with it, absorb the knowledge, without ever reading the novel. The knowledge gained from this analysis will be used when considering the results of the questionnaires and the final conclusion, which will follow this chapter.

CHAPTER THREE – THE QUESTIONNAIRES, SET-UP, ANALYSIS, RESULTS

In this chapter the two questionnaires which were conducted as part of the research for this thesis will be discussed. Part of the aim of this thesis is to find out whether memes and tweets influence how people perceive Austen and Wilde as authors and as people. In order to gauge what the public thinks of Austen and Wilde, two questionnaires were created and circulated. The questionnaires focussed on the respondents' engagement with various social media platforms and with both the authors' works. This chapter will provide an overview of the set-up of both questionnaires and discuss the results. A more thorough discussion of what the implications of the results are will be provided in the conclusion to this thesis. This chapter will look at the questionnaire made for Austen first, followed by the one for Wilde. Both sections on Austen and Wilde will include an elaboration of the set-up of their respective questionnaires and an analysis of the results. The chapter will be ended with a conclusion. There is also an appendix for this chapter, appendix B, where all the answers given by respondents to some of the questions can be found.

Austen

The set-up of the questionnaire

For the questionnaire Google Forms was used to create the questionnaire and to collect the answers. The questionnaire included thirteen questions. The following paragraphs will elaborate on the questions asked, and where necessary will explain why these specific questions were asked or phrased in that way.

The first three questions collected basic data, such as the respondents' age, gender, and nationality. This basic information was necessary to collect, as it can help provide insight

into the differences age, gender and nationality can possibly make on the reception of the author.

Question four asked the respondent if they have ever read any of Austen's novels. Based on their answer, they would either be directed to question five, or be sent to question six. If the respondent said they had read Austen's novels, they were directed to question five.

Question five asked the respondent which of Austen's novels they have read. Only Austen's completed works were listed: *Northanger Abbey* (1817), *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, *Persuasion* (1818), and *Lady Susan* (1871). The respondent was not limited to choosing one novel they had read. Instead, they were able to choose all the novels they have read.

Questions six to eight were about the respondents' use of twitter. Question six asked the respondent whether they have a twitter account. Question seven then followed up on that question by asking the respondent whether they follow any twitter accounts that tweet about Jane Austen. The eighth question asked if the twitter users follow the SparkNotes twitter account. Especially the eighth question was important to ask, as the SparkNotes account is used solely as a platform to make witty or funny tweets about classic novels or works, including Austen's works. It is partially their twitter account which inspired the subject matter of this thesis.

Question nine gave an example of a tweet about one of Jane Austen's novels and asked the respondent if they recognize which novel is referenced in the tweet. If yes, they were asked to note down which novel they think it is a reference to. The tweet that was used as an example is this one:



Fig. 14: @Drunk_Austen. *Twitter*, 25 February 2020, 11:25 PM.

This example was chosen because of two reasons: one, it is a tweet which is not explicitly about a Jane Austen novel, only someone who has read the particular book (or seen a movie adaptation) will realise that it is about *Pride and Prejudice*; two, it is a tweet in a format that is quite common. As discussed in chapter two, this tweet follows the format of an online platform called Am I The Asshole. This particular tweet is, then, a good example of the types of content which circulates the internet about Austen.

Question ten asked the respondents whether they found the content of the tweet funny, which they were able to answer with ‘yes,’ ‘no,’ and ‘maybe.’ This was asked to gauge the type of response the respondents had when confronted with a meme or tweet about an author.

Question eleven asked the respondents whether they recognize the format the tweet took, i.e. do they know where it took inspiration from. This particular question was asked in order to see whether the respondents realised the format of the tweet was copied from AITA posts.

The last two questions were focussed on the respondents’ perception of Austen. Question twelve asked what their opinion of Austen is, specifically of Austen as a person, whilst question thirteen asked the respondents what their opinion of Austen’s work was.

These questions were, perhaps, the most important ones, as they provide insight on how the respondents perceive Austen and her work.

The Results

In total, the questionnaire received 23 responses. This section will give a brief overview of the basic information gained from the questionnaire, before going into more detail about certain responses. Especially the information such as age, gender, nationality, and whether they have read Austen's works will be briefly discussed, whilst the other results will be discussed at greater length.

For the basic information, such as gender, age and nationality the respondents were divided as such: 17 of the respondents were aged 18-25 (73,9%), 5 respondents were aged 26-30 (21,7%), and only one respondent was aged 30-35 (4,3%). Of the 23 respondents, 20 identified as female (87%), 2 as male (8,7%), and 1 as non-binary (4.3%). Nationality wise, 10 respondents were British (43,5%), 8 were Dutch (34,8%), and then there was one of each of the following nationalities: American, Danish, Irish, Romanian, and South African (4,3% respectively). 13 out of 23 respondents were, presumably, native speakers of English, making up 56,5% of the respondents. Moreover, of the 23 respondents 16 had read a novel by Austen (69,6%), when 7 had not (30,4%). In short, the majority of the respondents to this questionnaire were aged 18-25, female, native-speakers of English, and had read at least one work by Austen.

With regards to the 16 respondents who had read a novel by Austen, all of them read *Pride and Prejudice*. Moreover, of the 16 respondents, 7 had also read *Northanger Abbey*, 5 had read *Emma*, 4 had read *Sense and Sensibility*, 4 had read *Mansfield Park*, 3 had read *Persuasion*, and only one had read *Lady Susan*. Although the divide is not specified in this questionnaire about how many of Austen's novels each respondent have read, it is clear based

on the statistics that approximately half of the respondents have read more than one Austen novel (as 7 out of 16 have also read *Northanger Abbey* besides having read *Pride and Prejudice* too). It appears to be so that *Pride and Prejudice* is the most popular book, as all of the respondents who have read Austen read it.

To move on to the twitter related sections, out of the 23 respondents, 19 said that they have a twitter account (82,6%), whilst 4 did not (17.4%). Of the 19 who have a twitter account, 7 follow accounts that tweet about Austen and her work, 8 of the respondents answered that they were unsure if they followed such accounts, whilst 4 of the respondents who have a twitter account answered that they do not follow such accounts. Only 3 of the 19 respondents who have twitter follow the SparkNotes twitter account. So, the average respondent has a twitter account, but does not follow accounts that tweet about Austen, or follow the SparkNotes account.

When it comes to the example tweet given in the questionnaire in question 9, the average respondent knew that the reference made in the tweet (as seen in the image above) is to *Pride and Prejudice*, as 15 out of 23 respondents answered as such. Three out of those 15 made educated guesses, as their phrasing of the answer indicated that they were unsure about their answer: “no but maybe P&P if I had to guess?” answered one respondent. The three who made correct guesses are included in the average here. 7 out of 15 respondents said that they did not recognize which Austen novel is referenced in the tweet, which corresponds exactly to the number of respondents who had not read an Austen novel. One respondent answered that they recognized which Austen novel is referenced here, but does not state which one they believe it is from, and as such this answer is not counted. Question 10 follows from question 9, asking the respondents if they think the tweet given as an example is funny. 13 of the respondents said yes, 6 said no, and 4 said maybe. Furthermore, question 11, which asked respondents whether they recognised the format the tweet took, 17 of the respondents

identified it as coming from reddit.com, and a further 11 of those 17 were even able to specify that it is from the Am I The Asshole forum. There was one respondent who gave an answer which is not necessarily wrong, but is not what the question asked: they responded that they thought the tweet is about Darcy trying to understand that Lizzie Bennet does not want to marry him after he insulted her family. It is possible that this particular person misunderstood the question asked, or did not know about the AITA forum. The fact that 17 respondents knew of the format the tweet took means that the average respondent is familiar with the AITA forum. Tweets consisting of screenshots of funny AITA posts circulate often, and tweets parodying this format circulate just as often too. However, it is (obviously) also possible that the respondents know of the AITA forum from the original source on reddit.com. Respondents were not asked to specify how they knew this forum, as just recognising the format was enough for the purpose of this questionnaire.

To move on, the following paragraphs will look at the common themes in the answers respondents gave on the question “what is your opinion of Jane Austen?” For the sake of space, these have been subcategorised into certain themes. For all of the answers given by the respondents to this question, turn to appendix B. Some of the respondents gave elaborate answers, so the general theme of these answers will be explored and discussed.

The most common opinion the respondents had of Austen is that they think she is a great writer. Now, that idea can be subdivided into several categories, as most respondents had more to say about Austen than just the fact that they think she is a great writer. Several of the respondents pointed out how Austen was “ahead of her time”, whilst another stated that they think Austen is “one of the greatest writers to have come from the Georgian period”, and one respondent summed up their thoughts on Austen with just one word: “Legend”. Furthermore, what can be seen as a subdivision of how great a writer Austen is to the respondents, is that her wit in writing is pointed out by respondents too. One respondent

dubbed Austen “a brilliant satirist who was able to expose the ridiculous things that were commonly accepted in her space”, whilst another said they thought of Austen as “clever, bit old fashioned, funny”. Moreover, one respondent said that they admire that Austen “was a successful female writer writing romances and how she popularised common tropes we see in romance narratives today”. In general, Austen’s work seems to be valued for the wit found in it, based on the reactions of the questionnaire, and most seem to think that Austen was a great writer who pioneered certain elements of writing. A minority of the respondents also hint that perhaps they perceive Austen as being the mother of chicklit.

Furthermore, some respondents answered that they perceive Austen as an independent or feminist woman. One respondent stated that they admired Austen because she was “an independent female author who needed no man in her life”. Similarly, another respondent “admire [*sic.*] the fact that she did not marry for convenience”, but lamented the fact that Austen “felt the need to cover up and hide her writing, and I resent the fact that she was only able to be a full-time author because she inherited money from a rich aunt”. Another respondent called Austen a “protofeminist”, whilst yet another respondent summed their thoughts on Austen up by stating they think of Austen as a “feminist queen”. This is another way, then, that Austen is perceived as: as a feminist or independent woman.

The last common opinion the respondents have on Austen is that they think of Austen as a romantic person. The respondents unfortunately did not elaborate on why they think Austen is a romantic person. Perhaps the respondents believe Austen was a romantic person due to the subject matter of her novels, but this is pure speculation. One of the respondents who stated that they think Austen is romantic, added that they believe Austen was “someone who sees [*sic.*] the funny things in awkward or difficult situations”, which does not necessarily have to do with Austen’s romantic qualities.

However, 8 of the 23 respondents acknowledged that they do not know enough about Austen to form an opinion on her. One of those 8 stated that they did not know much about Austen as they never studied her works in school, but that they do think of *Pride and Prejudice* when they think of Austen. The fact that respondents who do not know much about Austen, but still relate her to her work is a common response. For example, the respondent who made the comment about Austen being a successful female writer, as quoted above, acknowledged that they do not know much about Austen as a person.

In fact, when the answers given by respondents are closely analysed, it will become clear that the majority of the respondents have given opinions on Austen the Writer, not on Austen as a person. One of the respondents even stated as such in their answer: “I mainly think of her work, rather than her life in general” when they think of Austen. The fact that she is perceived as a wit is – likely – based on her writings. The opinion people have of Austen that she is a great writer speaks for itself. Possibly those who perceive Austen as a romantic person base that idea of the subject matters of her novels too. Arguably, those who commented on Austen being an independent woman or a feminist are the ones who see Austen as a person outside of her profession. It is possible, though, that the respondents with this particular perception of Austen have formed this idea based on Austen’s work, as not much is really known about Austen’s life. In short, most of the respondents find it difficult to separate the work from the author, and have formed opinions on Austen based on her work, instead of what they know about the Austen’s life and character.

Finally, the respondents’ opinions on Austen’s work will be discussed in the following paragraphs. Similar to the discussion on the responses about Austen as a person, the responses to the question about what the respondent thinks of Austen’s work can also be divided into several categories. These will be discussed here. It must be kept in mind, though, that only 16 respondents have read Austen’s novels and can give a true judgement of the

work. However, there are three respondents who have not read any of Austen's novels and yet have given their opinions on them. For all the responses given by the respondents, turn to appendix B.

The main answer given by the respondents on their opinion on Austen's work is that they think she writes funny and witty novels. One respondent noted how they think that Austen "wrote incredibly clever and witty books, which also have a lot of heart", whilst another noted that "her novels were always sharp witted and gave [*sic*] an excellent commentary on societal values". One of the respondents commented on the fact that they think most of Austen's wit and mockery is lost on the modern audiences, and that they resent the fact that "people sometimes love her work as surface-level glamorization of her time period. Which kinda [*sic*] misses the point". Especially Austen's wit in making subtle societal commentary seems to be appreciated by the respondents. However, one respondent stated that although they think the novels have funny moments, overall they "are a bit dull". Regardless, generally the respondents find Austen's novel to be funny and witty.

Furthermore, as a general consensus, respondents think Austen's novels are good. One respondent noted that they really enjoy Austen's work, and that although they have not read all of her novels yet, that they do plan to. Another respondent remarked that they have loved most of what they have read, and that they especially love Austen's prose and characterisation. Yet another respondent simply said: "I think they are well written", whilst another respondent elaborated on the fact that they enjoy the books, but prefer the TV and film adaptations. Most of the respondents who have read Austen's novels enjoyed reading them.

What else became clear through the answers the respondents gave, is that some find Austen's novels difficult to read due to our time period and language use being so different from Austen's. One respondent noted that they believe that Austen's novels are "difficult to

read, and thus to grasp the meaning behind certain situations or uses” becomes more difficult for modern readers. And as stated above, one respondent lamented the fact that Austen’s wit is no longer appreciated or seen as much as it used to, because it belongs to “her era” and not ours. Perhaps, this is also what led some respondents to say that they find Austen’s work boring, or dull.

Lastly, of the respondents who have actually read Austen’s novels, some also stated that they think Austen wrote good female characters and relate her work to feminist thought. One respondent gave quite an elaborate answer on their thoughts on Austen’s novels, stating: “I admire that she wrote about strong, female characters who are not afraid to defend their opinions and take own decisions [*sic*]. ... Yet, her main characters still all got married and complied to the strict societal standards and those who don’t ... get shamed into compliance, which I don’t agree with”. This particular respondent ended their statement with stating they have conflicted feelings about Austen’s novels because of this. The answer given by the quoted respondent is the most elaborate one about their feelings on Austen’s work. One of the respondents who has not read any of Austen’s novels, did state that they think of feminism when they think of Austen’s novels. It would have been interesting to have gotten more information from this particular respondent who has never read Austen’s works but associates her with feminism. It is possible that this respondent has been influenced by memes and tweets about Austen, in which Austen is portrayed as a feminist, or maybe they have seen a movie adaptation, or a biopic, or read articles about Austen, which portrayed Austen as a feminist.

As stated above, there were three respondents who gave their opinion on Austen’s work despite having never read any of her novels. One of the three said that they think of feminism when they think of Austen’s novels; another said they do not like Austen’s writing style, but that they do enjoy the TV and movie adaptations; and the third stated that they

believe Austen's novels are classics "and has to do [*sic*] with a certain time period and certain social classes, but the personal stories can relate in some ways to any person". The remaining respondents who have not read Austen's novels did not pass judgement on her works, and simply stated that they have not read them.

Summary of results

In short, the questionnaire has given insight as to what the average, modern audience of Austen looks like. The average respondent, based on the results of this questionnaire, is between ages 18-25, female, a native English speaker, has read at least one novel by Austen, and owns a twitter account. The average respondent was also able to recognize that the tweet given as an example in the questionnaire was about *Pride and Prejudice* and that it took its inspiration from the reddit forum called Am I The Asshole.

When it came to the opinions the respondents had on Austen as a person, there were a few things that stood out. Firstly, most of the opinions given still related to Austen as a writer, and did not focus so much on Austen as a person. Secondly, respondents tend to think that Austen was a great writer, especially because of her wit. Moreover, she is perceived as a feminist, or an independent woman. Lastly, the respondents answered that they think Austen was a romantic person. These results make it clear that none of the respondents knew a lot about Austen as a person (which some admitted to in their reactions). This is not entirely surprising, as not much information is known about Austen's private life.

Lastly, when it came to the opinions respondents have of Austen's novels there were some common perceptions. The main perception of Austen's work is that she wrote funny and witty novels. Moreover, the majority of the respondents who read Austen's novels enjoyed doing so. Some noted that it can be difficult at times to truly understand Austen's

work, as her era and ours are very different from each other. Furthermore, respondents admire that Austen wrote good female characters and relate her work to feminist thought.

What instantly becomes clear here, is that there is quite a bit of overlap between what respondents think of Austen as a person, and what they think of Austen's novels. She is perceived as a wit in both her own character and in writing. Austen is also seen as a feminist in writing and as a person. A further analysis of what these results mean in relation to the subject matter of this thesis will be provided in the conclusion.

Wilde

The set-up of the questionnaire

The way the questionnaire relating to Oscar Wilde was set up was very similar to that of Austen. Google forms was used for this questionnaire too. Furthermore, the first four questions were the same as they were on Austen's questionnaire: they asked respondents for their age, gender, nationality and whether they have read any of Wilde's novels.

Likewise, question five asked the respondents who have read Wilde's works, which they have read. The following options were provided: *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *De Profundis* (1897), "The Ballad of Reading Gaol" (1898), *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892), *An Ideal Husband* (1895) and an option "other" in which respondents were able to list any works they have read by Wilde which were not provided as options. Only those who answered "yes" to having read Wilde's works (question four) were directed to question 5. The rest was directed to question 6: "do you have a twitter account?".

Questions 7 and 8 were the same in both questionnaires, as they asked the respondents whether they follow any twitter accounts that tweet about the respective author, in this case Wilde, and whether they followed the Sparknotes twitter account.

Question 9 provided an example of a tweet about one of Oscar Wilde's works and asked the respondent whether they recognized which work by Wilde is referenced here. If yes, they were asked to note down which work they think it is, if not then they were asked to answer so. This was the example provided:

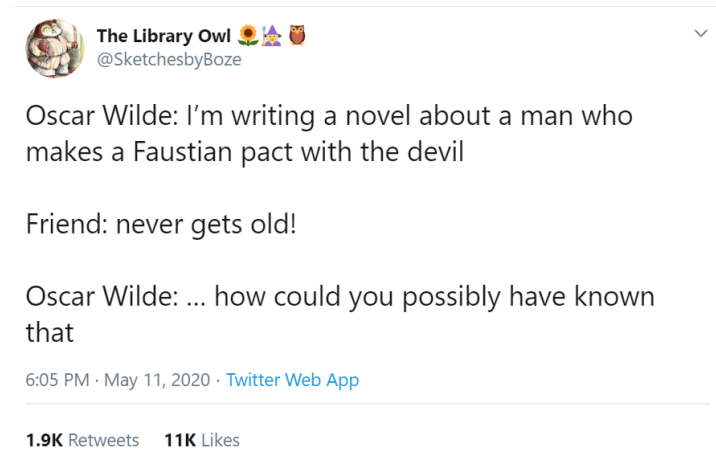


Fig. 15: @SketchesbyBoze. *Twitter*, 11 May 2020, 6:05 PM.

This tweet was chosen as an example because it is not explicit about what work by Wilde it is referring to, so only those who have read *The Picture of Dorian Gray* will understand it is about that book. This tweet was also given as an example for its comedic value.

Question 10 asked the respondents whether they found the content of the tweet funny, whilst question 11 also asked whether they understood the joke made in this tweet. Respondents were asked to elaborate on their answer given for questions 11.

Question 12 is where the questionnaire diverges from the set-up of that of Austen, as there is no question here asking if the respondents recognize the format the tweet took. This was not necessary here, as the tweet did not follow a specific format from a different medium. Question 12, then, asked the respondents if they know what Wilde's nationality is. This question was specifically asked because there is a rise of reading Wilde's work in an Irish nationalist setting within academic criticism. It would be interesting, then, to see if the

average respondent knows Wilde's nationality, especially as so far (as seen in chapter two) there are hardly any memes and tweets made about Wilde's Irishness.

Questions 13 and 14 were the same in both questionnaires: asking the respondent what they think of the respective author as a person, and what they think of the respective author's work.

The results

In total, the questionnaire received 22 responses. This section will give a brief overview of the basic information gained from the questionnaire, before going into more detail about certain responses. Especially the information such as age, gender, nationality, and whether they have read Wilde's works will be briefly discussed, while other results will be discussed at greater length.

To start, the basic information gained from this questionnaire such as age, gender, nationality are as follows: 16 of the respondents are between ages 18-25 (72,7%), whilst 6 are between ages 26-30 (27,3%). 17 of the respondents identify as female (77,3%), 4 identify as male (18,2%), and one respondent identifies as non-binary (4,5%). 12 of the respondents were British (54,5%), 7 were Dutch (31,8%), and then there was one South African respondent, an American respondent, and a Romanian respondent, each making up 4,5% respectively. The majority of the respondents were native speakers of English. Of the 22 respondents, 14 said that they have read works by Wilde (63,6%), whilst the remaining 8 (36,4%) did not. Based on this information, the average respondent of Wilde is a female, aged between 18-25, a native speaker of English, and has read at least one or more works by Wilde.

To move on, question 5 concerned itself with the works the respondents have read by Wilde. Of the 14 respondents who have read one or more works by Wilde, 13 had read *The*

Picture of Dorian Gray; 10 had read *The Importance of Being Earnest*; 4 had read *An Ideal Husband*; and 2 had read *Lady Windermere's Fan*. One respondent said they had read *De Profundis*, another respondent had read *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*, and lastly a respondent stated they had read *The Model and the Millionaire* (which should have been *The Model Millionaire* (1891) to be the correct title). Surprisingly, none of the respondents have read "The Ballad of Reading Gaol". *The Picture of Dorian Gray* appears to be Wilde's most popular work, with *The Importance of Being Earnest* coming in second.

Questions 6, 7 and 8 were the questions relating to twitter. Of the 22 respondents, 18 (81,8%) stated that they have a twitter account, whilst 4 (18,2%) do not have a twitter account. Of those who have a twitter account, 4 (22,2%) stated that they follow twitter accounts that tweet about Oscar Wilde, 9 (50%) stated that they maybe follow such accounts, while 5 (27,7%) said they do not follow such accounts. Moreover, only 4 (18,2%) of the respondents who have a twitter account stated that they follow the SparkNotes twitter account. The average respondent, then, owns a twitter account but does not necessarily engage with content about literature or Oscar Wilde.

When it comes to the example given in question 9, only 2 of the respondents stated that they did not know which work by Wilde was being referenced in the example. The remaining twenty all recognised it as being about *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. This is quite a surprising result, considering that only 13 of the respondents have read this particular work. How the other 7 respondents knew that this tweet was about *Dorian Gray* is unknown, as they were not asked to specify why or how they knew this. With these seven respondents, it is of course possible that they knew it referred to *Dorian Gray* because of a cultural familiarity with the novel, or because of the internet, or perhaps they saw movie adaptations of it. The respondents were then also asked if they found the content of this tweet funny, to which 19 (86,4%) responded yes, 2 (9,1%) responded maybe, and one respondent said no. The

respondents were not asked to elaborate on their answers, so the reason why two of the respondents answered maybe will remain unknown.

The next question asked the respondents whether they understood the joke made in the example. Of the 22 respondents, most stated that they understood the joke – only one said they did not know – but only 15 of them actually explained it properly. The answer that was expected of those who said they understood is that they recognised that the friend who responds “never gets old!” in the example, means that the Faustian pact trope never gets old, while Wilde assumes the friend means the character never gets old. This is, of course, the plot of *Dorian Gray*. The comment made by the friend serves as a double entendre. The 15 respondents who gave this answer explained it in simpler ways, such as: “because Dorian made a deal with the devil to never grow old”. There were a couple of respondents who thought they understood the joke, however, their answers indicate they did not. One respondent stated: “Yes, the ‘never gets old’ is a common joke but the implication is that the story line of the book hasn’t been revealed yet thus making Wilde question it”. It is not entirely clear here, what the respondent means with “the story line has not been revealed” which makes “Wilde question it”. A different respondent stated that they did not understand the joke. Moreover, two respondents stated that they understood the joke, but did not elaborate on their answers. The majority did understand the joke made in the example provided.

Question 12 asked respondents what they believe Wilde’s nationality is. 3 of the respondents answered that they did not know (13,6%). 8 respondents (36,3%) answered that they believe Wilde is British (this includes responses given that he was English). Exactly half of the respondents (11) gave the correct answer and knew Wilde’s nationality, stating that he is Irish (50%).

To move on, the following paragraphs will focus on the answers given by the respondents to question 13, which asked them what their opinion of Wilde was (specifically of him as a person). The paragraphs will try to divide some of the answers into general themes, so as to give a general view of what the respondents' perception of Wilde is and will elaborate within these themes on the answers given. For all the answers given by respondents in response to question 13, turn to appendix B.

First and foremost, the respondents' perception of Wilde boils down to the idea that he was a wit, a clever man, which was reflected in his writing. The reason why it is added that this is reflected in his writing is because many of the respondents who made comments about Wilde's wit, did so in relation to his writing. One respondent called Wilde a "literary genius", and another stated they thought of Wilde as a "talented playwright". Yet another respondent summed up their opinion of Wilde in one word: "brilliant". Two of the respondents claimed that Wilde was "ahead of his time". A few of the respondents pointed out that they think Wilde was an intelligent and funny person, someone who was perhaps a bit too opinionated at times "even when it might get him in trouble" – as one respondent suggested. Linked to this idea of Wilde being a wit comes the fact that some of the respondents thought of Wilde as being an outspoken person, who would share his wit with all who would listen. Wilde is seen, then, as a wit, an outspoken person, which was reflected in his writing.

Secondly, respondents mentioned that they think of Wilde's sexuality when they think of him. Some just stated that they think of Wilde as a gay man, others were more elaborate than that. Quite a few pointed out that Wilde was – as one respondent phrased it – "condemned for his sexuality", while another stated that "because of his sexuality a lot of people loathed him". A hint of Wilde the Gay Martyr slips through in these responses, as yet another respondent stated that "he was prosecuted for being gay, which I believe is so

fundamentally wrong and very sad”. Moreover, another respondent pointed out that when they think of Wilde they think of “the inherent injustice of late Victorian society”, by which they might be referring to Wilde’s prosecution. The respondent did not elaborate on this further, so this is one possible interpretation of their perception. However, Wilde as the Gay Icon also shines through in the responses to this question, as one respondent simply said that they thought Wilde was a “gay legend”. For one of the respondents Wilde’s sexuality was all they know about Wilde as person, as they stated: “I know he was a gay man, but that’s about everything I know about him”. In general, most of the respondents perceive Wilde as a gay man.

Furthermore, some respondents mentioned that they perceive Wilde as having been this dandy, flamboyant flaneur. One respondent summed up their thoughts on Wilde in the following sentence: “he was a free thinking sexually liberated fabulous dandy and he had a good fashion sense”. Flamboyant is a word used by several of the respondents to describe Wilde. Another respondent called Wilde “fabulous, flamboyant ... he was truly the ultimate flaneur”. Perhaps linked to this is the fact that one respondent thinks of Aestheticism when they think of Wilde. Aestheticism is a movement which put an emphasis on the aesthetic values of the arts, and Wilde’s flamboyancy could be seen as an extension of his Aestheticism in writing. This all is another way in which Wilde is perceived as by the respondents of this questionnaire.

To move on, the following paragraphs will look at the responses given to the final question, which asked the respondents what their opinion of Wilde’s works are. Three main opinions have been identified based on the responses given, which will be elaborated upon here. For all the responses given by respondents for this question, turn to appendix B.

One thing most respondents agree on is that Wilde was a great writer. Many exclaimed their love for Wilde’s works in their responses, stating that some of the works they

have read by Wilde are amongst their favourites. One of the respondents stated that *The Importance of Being Earnest* is one of their favourite plays, whilst another claimed that *Dorian Gray* “remains one of my favourite novels ever”. Yet another respondent elaborated, saying that Wilde’s work is “brilliant, quick, witty, and exciting to read”, which is something other respondents also valued in Wilde’s work. Moreover, a respondent pointed out that Wilde “is great because he saw through contemporary society and captured the essence of human existence”. However, some of the respondents also found that despite his brilliance in writing, there are aspects to his work that they do not agree with. For example, one respondent stated: “there is an undeniable charm to his works and definite merit in his writing, yet I ultimately find myself unable to connect with his character enough to form a connection with the texts themselves”. Another respondent commented on the fact that *Dorian Gray* contained irrelevant elements that they thought did not fit the theme of the novel. Yet, the majority of the respondents were positive about Wilde’s writing and think he was a good writer.

What can be seen as an extension of Wilde’s brilliance as a writer, respondents commented that they think his work was revolutionary, or trendsetting. One respondent stated just that one word – “revolutionary” – as their opinion on Wilde’s works. Another commented on the fact that Wilde “set the trend for so many classic trends in literary styles”, although they do not elaborate on this more. Both of these respondents, however, express the sentiment that they believe Wilde was a trendsetter in his work.

Wilde’s brilliance as a writer, with his quick wit, and the fact that he wrote revolutionary work are the two main ways his work is valued based on the responses received. There were, however, some other interesting opinions given. For example, one respondent noted that Wilde’s works “are a good opportunity for the reader to reflect on

themselves and their lifestyle/situation”. This opinion is unique, as none of the other respondents stated anything similar to this.

Summary of results

In short, the average respondent to this questionnaire was a female, aged between 16-25, a native speaker of English, in possession of a twitter account, and have read at least one or more works by Oscar Wilde. Moreover, although most had a twitter account, the average respondent did not follow accounts that tweet about Wilde nor do they follow the SparkNotes twitter account.

When it comes to the opinions given about Wilde, a few things stood out. The main perception of Wilde was related to his work, i.e. most thought of Wilde as a great writer and perceived him as such, which does not speak for what they think of Wilde as a person outside of his work. Furthermore, Wilde is perceived in terms of his sexuality. In varying degrees, he is seen as a gay man, a gay icon, and a gay martyr. Quite a few of the respondents also commented on the fact that Wilde was a flamboyant man.

Lastly, when it comes to Wilde’s work, most of the respondents stated that they think Wilde is a great writer (which makes sense considering they responded as such, too, in their opinions on Wilde as a person). The respondents value Wilde’s wit in writing and consider him a revolutionary writer, who set trends for generations to come.

What the results of both questionnaires mean in relation to the subject matter of this thesis will be discussed in the conclusion to this thesis.

CONCLUSION – WHAT DOES IT ALL MEME?

This thesis has examined the way people who use the internet perceive Jane Austen and Oscar Wilde, in order to explore whether the perception of the general public of these authors is influenced by the internet. In order to establish the perception the public has on Austen and Wilde, two questionnaires were carried out in which respondents were asked numerous questions about their engagement with the authors' works and with tweets and memes about the authors. The common debates among academics about these authors were taken as the status quo, against which the results of the questionnaires were measured. This thesis, then, explored several types of afterlives of Austen and Wilde. First of all, in chapter one the academic debates about these two authors were discussed, exploring what common themes were within academic debates for both authors. Second of all, in the second chapter memes and tweets were explored in order to see if there were any common topics to be found in those, which is part of the afterlives of both authors. Lastly, in chapter three the questionnaires created for this thesis were discussed as these asked respondents on their opinions on both authors, which is part of their afterlives too. However, drawing conclusions on the overall relationship between the respondents' perceptions of the authors, the analysis of memes and tweets, and the common academic debates, has to be done very carefully. This will be elaborated upon in the following paragraphs. The paragraphs will give a short overview of the conclusions of each chapter before coming to an overall conclusion.

Chapter one explored the most common academic debates surrounding both Austen and Wilde. For Austen, the most recent academic debates were focussed on her – possible – feminism. Academics such as Johnson and Kirkham have published feminist readings of Austen's novels, although there are also academics who disagree with the position that Austen was a feminist. Another recent academic debate surrounding Austen came with the

rise of postcolonial criticism. Especially Austen's stance on slavery – was she for amelioration or a pro-abolitionist? – is often debated. Moreover, Austen is sometimes argued to be the mother of chicklit. For Wilde, the main debate is about his sexuality. He is often read within the context of his sexuality, where questions arise such as: is his sexuality reflected in his work? Was his sexuality an important factor to how his life turned out? Was he a victim of his own sexuality and society's views on it? An academic debate that is relatively new is that academics debate Wilde's Irish nationality and the importance of it to him. Discussing Wilde's work in relation to his nationality is a new development within academic debates, and there is disagreement about whether Wilde was a victim of colonisation or a collaborator with the colonisers. These are the main debates surrounding both Austen and Wilde. These perceptions created by academics about Austen and Wilde are used as the status quo.

Chapter two provided an analysis of tweets and memes about Austen and Wilde. This analysis was provided, so that common themes could be identified and then measured against the common themes of the status quo. For Austen, the main thing to be taken away from the analysis of memes and tweets is that they are created to highlight the comedic aspect of Austen's works. Furthermore, memes and tweets about Austen also show that her work is still relevant to modern-day audiences. Some memes also point out the feminism in Austen's work. Very few memes and tweets created about Austen are about Austen herself, they almost always relate to her work. When it comes to memes and tweets about Wilde, most of them have the same purpose as those created for Austen: to highlight comedic aspects of the work. In contrast to memes and tweets about Austen, for Wilde there can be ones found about him as a person. Most of the memes and tweets about Wilde as a person focus on his sexuality and portray him as the Gay Icon. This version of Wilde is seen as an ideal, which is often romanticised by the creators of the memes and tweets. Furthermore, for both authors

there is only one common theme in the memes and tweets which is also present in academic debates about them. With regards to Austen, most of the academics and creators of memes and tweets read Austen's work as feminist. For Wilde, there is a similarity in the fact that both academics and creators of memes and tweets read him within the constraints of his sexuality. However, for both Austen and Wilde there is a difference in the level of criticism and nuance given in these statements about their feminism or sexuality by academics or internet creators. Academics will argue for or against such viewpoints, provide evidence, and often conclude their work in nuanced ways. For internet creators, the comments made in their memes and tweets are much more superficial. This is partially due to the purpose of memes and tweets, which is to be funny (and possibly make sure that the creator of them gains more followers on their Twitter or Tumblr accounts). So, although internet creators do make memes and tweets about Austen's feminism, or Wilde's sexuality, there is very little depth to be found in them, they are often just simple statements, proposed truisms that the audience must accept.

The third and final chapter of this thesis examined the results of the two questionnaires which were circulated for this thesis. Their purpose was to research the respondents' engagement with Austen's and Wilde's written work, their engagement with memes and tweets about the authors, and to ask the respondents about their opinions on Austen and Wilde both as people and as writers. Based on the results of both questionnaires, the average respondent owned a twitter account, and of those who have a twitter account approximately half of them follow accounts that tweet about the authors (this percentage is higher for Austen than for Wilde). The average respondent was also relatively young, as the majority fell within the 18-25 years of age group. For both authors, the average respondent has also read at least one or more works by the author. When it comes to respondents' opinions on Austen as a person and a writer, they valued her wit – whether it is in her own

character or in her writing is unclear based on answers given. Furthermore, Austen is seen as a feminist in writing and in person. What is interesting about these results is that the opinions on Austen as a person are formed in relation to her work. Those who said they appreciate Austen's wit or her feminism, all elaborated on this in relation to her writing. This is in contrast to the answers given in the questionnaire which focused on Wilde. The answers respondents gave when asked what they thought of Wilde as a person and Wilde as a writer had less overlap than those given on Austen. Although Wilde was considered a great writer by the respondents, he was also widely perceived in terms of his sexuality. Respondents often stated that they think of Wilde's sexuality when they form opinions of him, and in varying degrees he is seen as a gay man, a gay icon, or a gay martyr. When it comes to Wilde's writing, it was his wit found in his works that the respondents valued most. The results from the questionnaires already show that there is overlap between the common themes in memes and tweets and respondents' perceptions of the authors. Memes and tweets about Austen and the respondents' perceptions all highlight Austen's feminism. Likewise, both memes and tweets about Wilde and the respondents' perception of Wilde emphasise his sexuality.

However, this does not necessarily mean that there is a link between the content of memes and tweets and the respondents' perceptions of these two authors. Before an analysis can be provided on what all these chapters and their information mean in relation to each other, a few things must be considered. First of all, it is, based on the results of the questionnaires, impossible to tell whether the respondents were influenced by memes and tweets in forming their opinions on the authors and their works. It is very likely that the questionnaires mostly attracted respondents who were familiar with the author and therefore willing to answer questions about them. Especially as the questionnaires were distributed on the very platforms it researches, the result that most of the respondents had a twitter account is not surprising. This can skew the results given and can mean that the results are not

completely representative. Secondly, it is entirely possible that those who have read the authors' works have also read articles about the authors – whether they were academic ones or from news outlets – which could have influenced the respondents' perceptions of Austen and Wilde.

Considering the aforementioned factors, there are a few points which can be made concerning the information provided in this thesis. First of all, it is clear that there is overlap between academic debates, the themes present in memes and tweets, and respondents' perceptions of the authors. For Austen, academics with their debates, memes and tweets, and respondents all consider her a feminist writer. It is, however, impossible to decide whether the creators of memes and tweets have been influenced by academic debates which read Austen as a feminist, or whether respondents were influenced by memes and tweets which portray Austen as a feminist. Information is widely available on the internet, and it is possible that internet creators and respondents have interacted with academic materials which discuss Austen's feminism. Moreover, the internet creators and respondents may also engage with books on Austen, academic articles or papers on Austen, or biopics. These factors make it more difficult to discern whether the respondents were influenced in their perceptions of Austen by memes and tweets or not. Similarly, for Wilde there are academic debates, memes and tweets, and respondents who all read him within the context of his sexuality. Likewise, despite the fact that all three of these elements have read Wilde as a gay person, it is impossible to say whether internet creators and the respondents were influenced in their thought by another factor.

However, that is not to say that there is no valuable insight found here. Most of all, it is interesting to see how all three factors, i.e. the academic debates, the content of memes and tweets, and the respondents' perceptions of the authors have something in common. All three of these groups see Austen as a feminist, and Wilde as a gay man. This shows that there is a

collective cultural perception of these two authors, and it is possible that the content of academic debates influences the creator of memes and tweets, and respondents separately. It is also possible that the memes and tweets influenced respondents' perceptions, but that the creators were influenced by the content of academic debates. There were a few respondents who gave more nuanced answers, which could mean that they have engaged with academic materials on the authors and formed their perceptions that way. For those respondents it would be plausible to say that they have formed opinions which were influenced by academic debates as they had more nuanced perceptions, as memes and tweets do not allow for nuance. For other respondents who gave shorter answers which were not as detailed, it is possible that they were influenced by memes and tweets in forming their opinions, although it will be difficult to prove this completely. Too many factors are left unknown. How do the creators of memes and tweets get the idea to comment on Austen's feminism or Wilde's sexuality? Do the respondents of the questionnaires think of Austen and Wilde in such a way based on their readings of the authors' works? Or have the respondents formed such ideas because of further reading they have done on the authors' works and lives, or because of memes and tweets they saw on the internet? How are the constructions of Austen the feminist and Wilde the Gay Icon further created and perpetuated by academic debates, but also by other types of media, such as movie adaptations and biopics? These are all questions raised by the conclusion of this thesis, which cannot be answered on the basis of the information found in this thesis alone.

In conclusion, this thesis has shown that although there is no strong evidence that memes and tweets influence the audiences' perceptions of authors, there is an apparent culturally accepted way of reading Austen and Wilde. The academic debates, memes and tweets, and respondents' perceptions of Austen and Wilde all have had something in common with each other, showing that there is a likeness to be found here even if it is impossible to

tell how this likeness came to be. Granted, within academic debates the discussions are much more nuanced and some of these perceptions have been disputed by academics. However, evidently this does not matter to the creators of memes and tweets, as the format of memes and tweets does not allow for nuance the debates are – perhaps – taken at face value. This thesis has further contributed to the research surrounding this authors, because although for both authors there has been a long tradition of critical reception and heritage discussions, none of the previous works have examined the possible influence of the internet on the perception of these authors. By examining the critical reception surrounding Austen and Wilde, memes and tweets about the authors, and respondents' perceptions of the authors, this thesis has shown that there is a common cultural perception of both Austen and Wilde.

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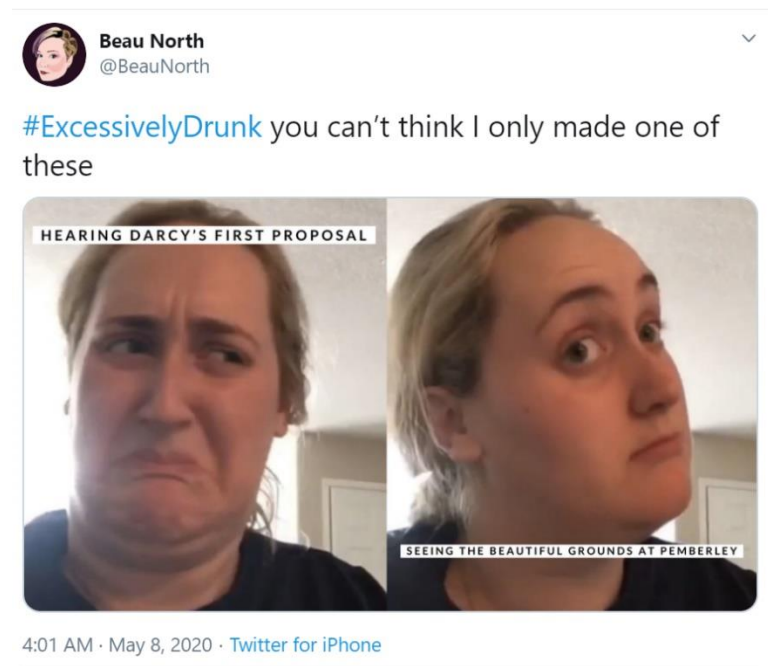
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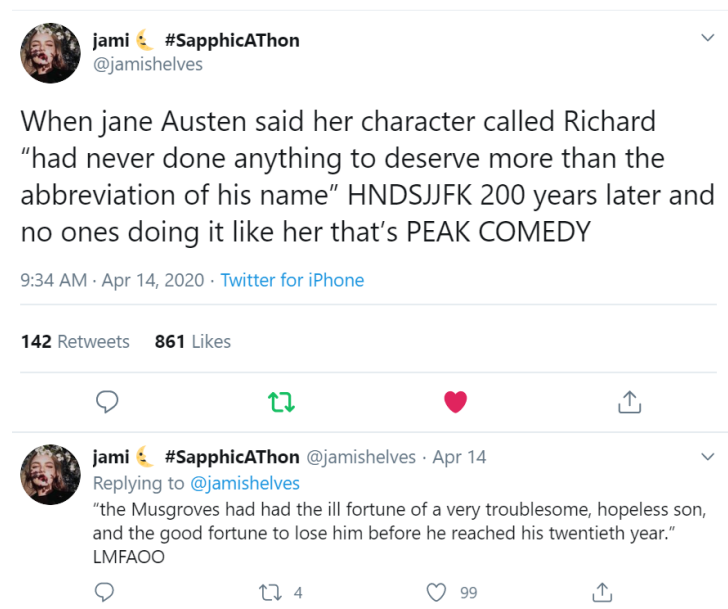
July 2020.

APPENDIX A – A COLLECTION OF MEMES AND TWEETS

Austen



<https://twitter.com/BeauNorth/status/1258577643240214528?s=20>



<https://twitter.com/jamishelves/status/1249964126144622593?s=20>



chloe wang yibo hell hours
@chlosephine_

jane austen understood that nothing is sexier than standing seven feet away from someone, making brief eye contact, and then going home

7:45 PM · Apr 5, 2020 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)

27K Retweets 124.6K Likes

https://twitter.com/chlosephine_/status/1246856592286498816?s=20



SparkNotes
@SparkNotes

Give your crush what she really wants for Valentine's Day: an abrupt proposal in which you point out her inferior social standing and admit that you ruined her sister's happiness on purpose.

5:06 PM · Feb 13, 2020 · [Twitter Web App](#)

7.3K Retweets 30.7K Likes

<https://twitter.com/SparkNotes/status/1227987541099524096?s=20>



SparkNotes
@SparkNotes

Lady Catherine de Bourgh to Elizabeth



5:40 PM · Feb 11, 2020 · [Twitter Web App](#)

<https://twitter.com/SparkNotes/status/1227271111181774851?s=20>



Elizabeth when Darcy shows up at his own house



6:09 PM · Feb 7, 2020 · Twitter Web App

<https://twitter.com/SparkNotes/status/1225829063698284544?s=20>



Cute date idea: I show up at your house unannounced. You give me a tour. I soon learn that my youngest sister has run off with a militiaman of ill repute, and I regretfully take my leave.

6:11 PM · Jan 20, 2020 · Twitter Web App

3.6K Retweets 21.1K Likes

<https://twitter.com/SparkNotes/status/1219306440285810689?s=20>



Darcy, proposing marriage: Your family is a disgrace.

Elizabeth:

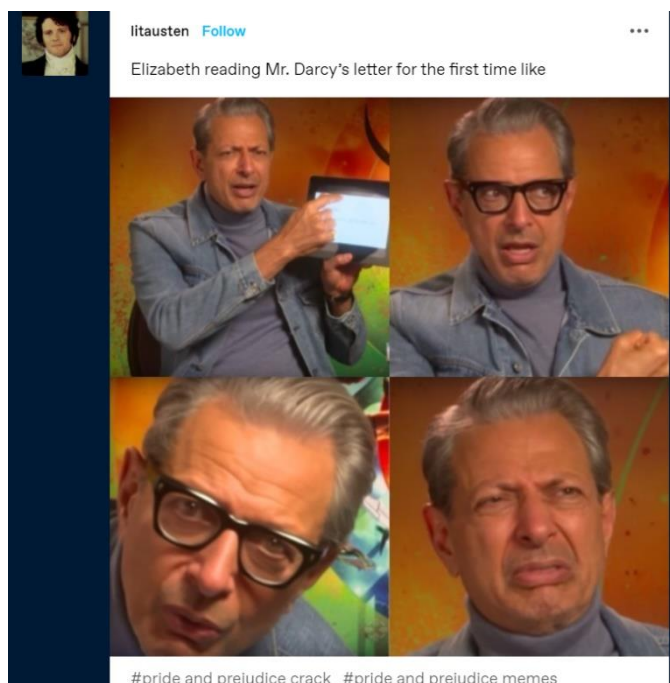


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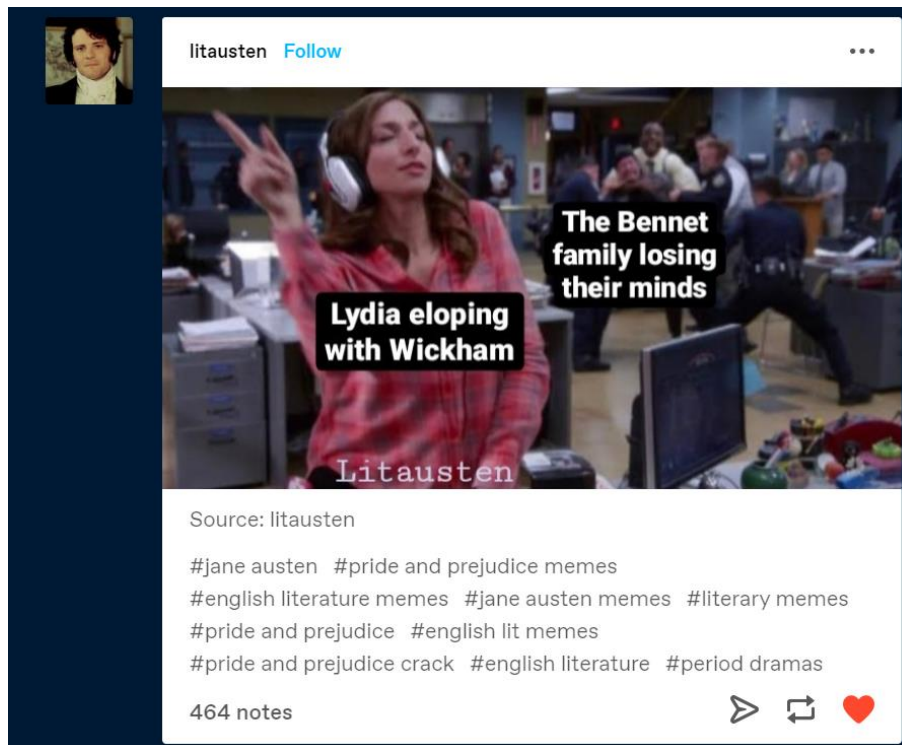
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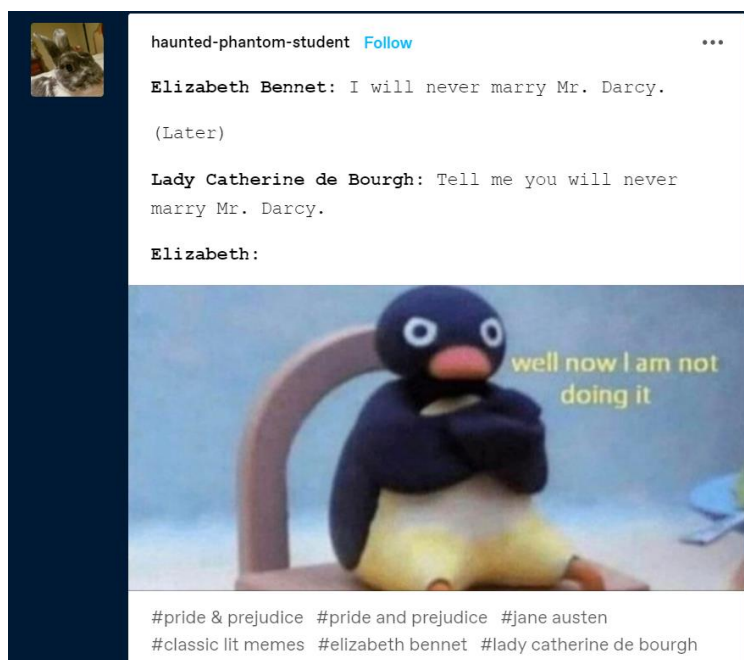
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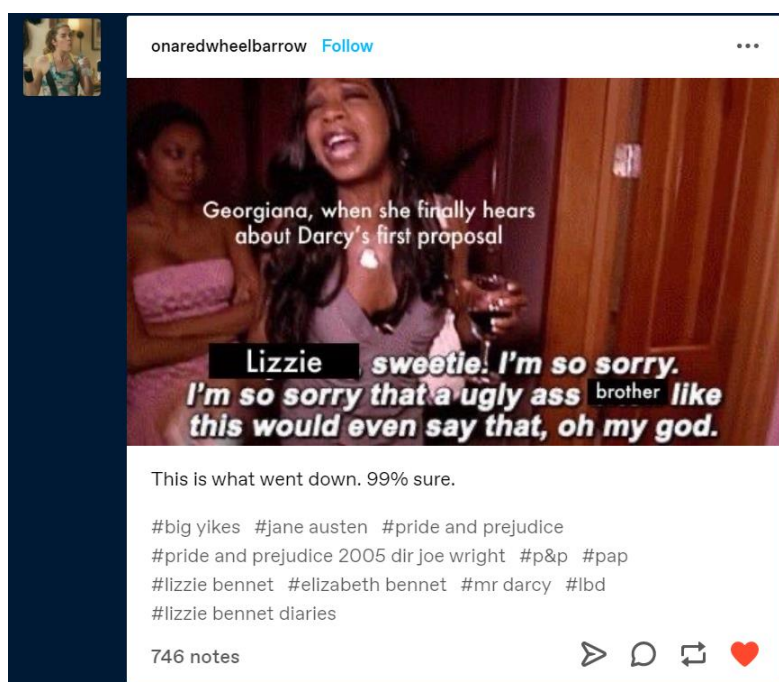
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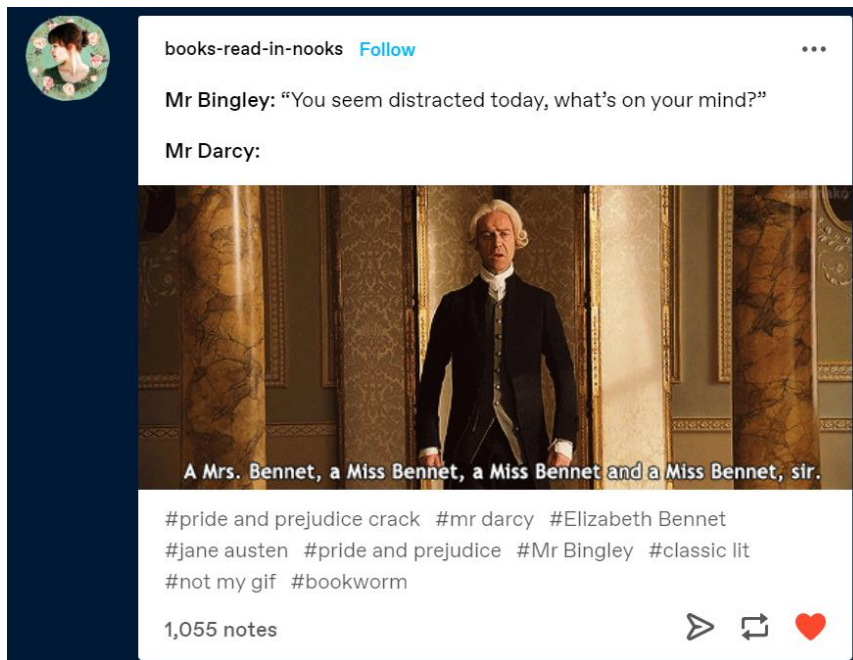
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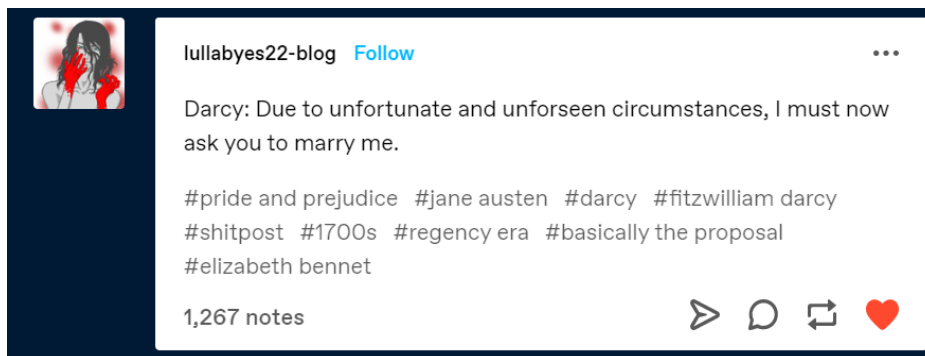
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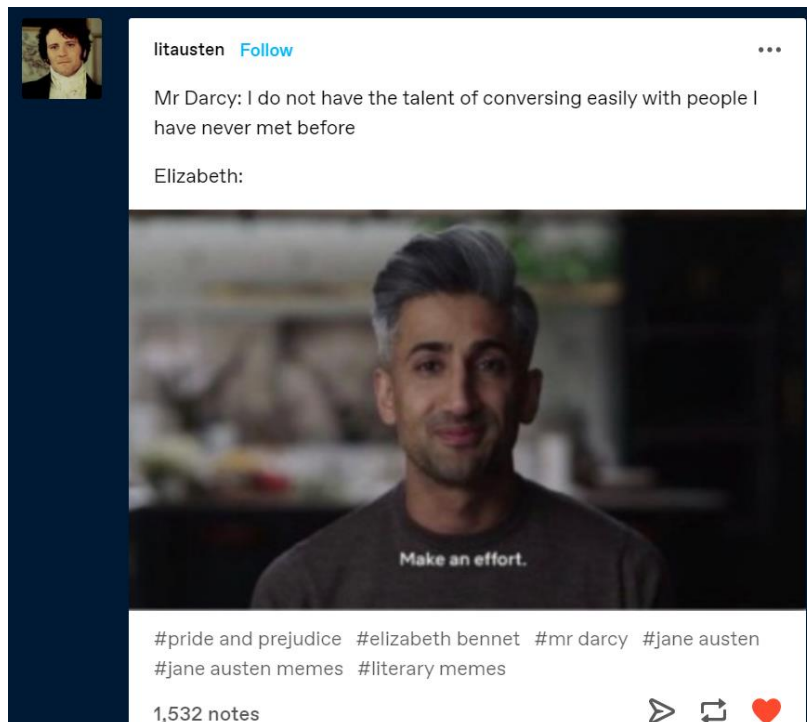
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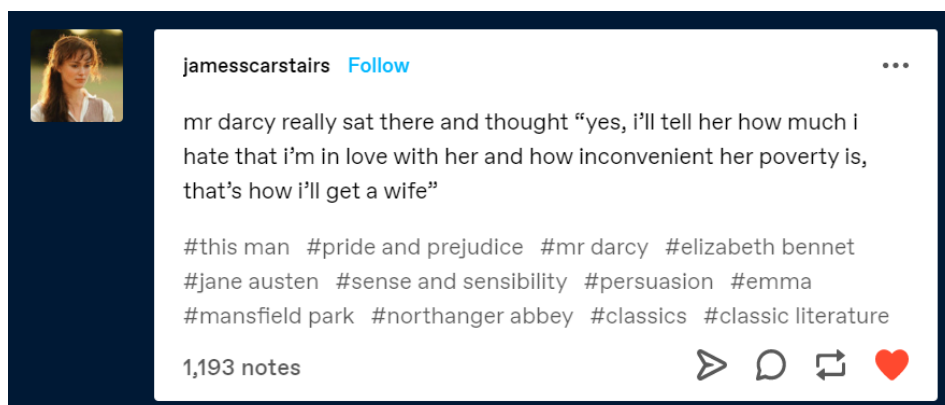
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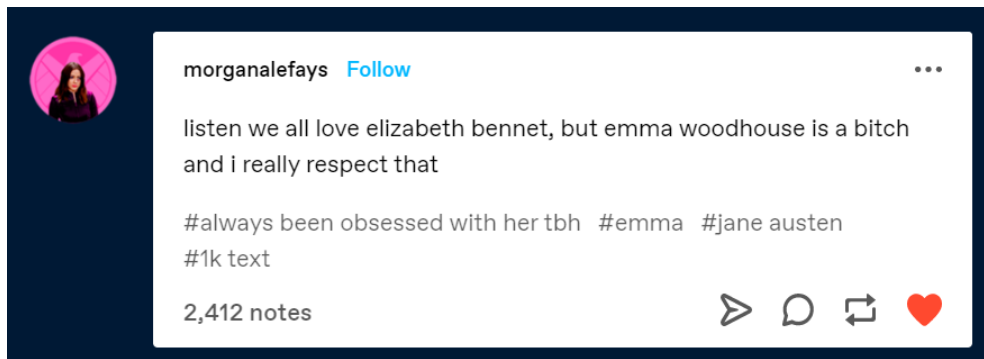
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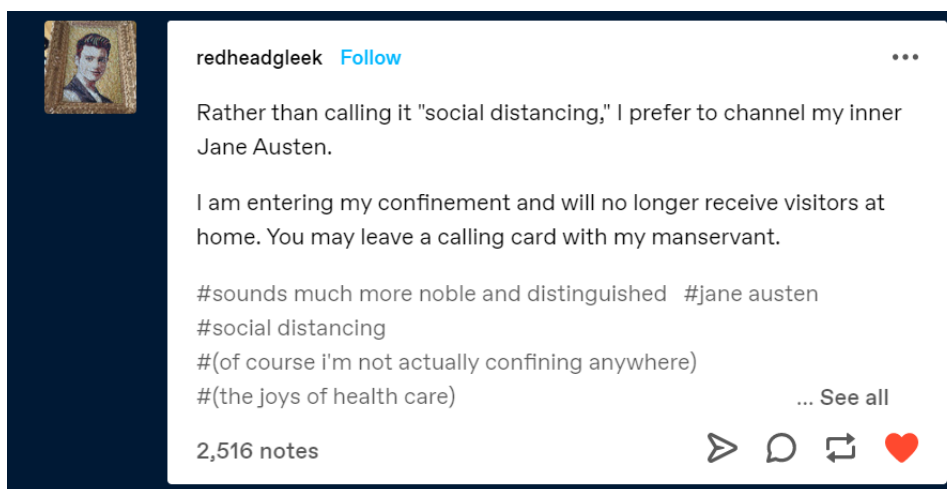
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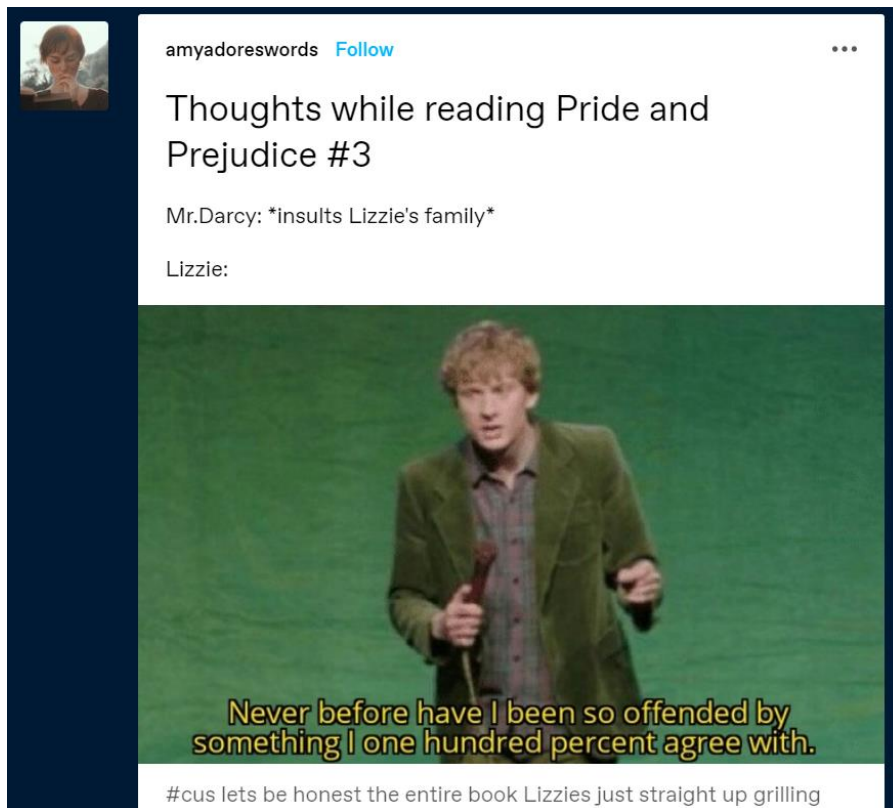
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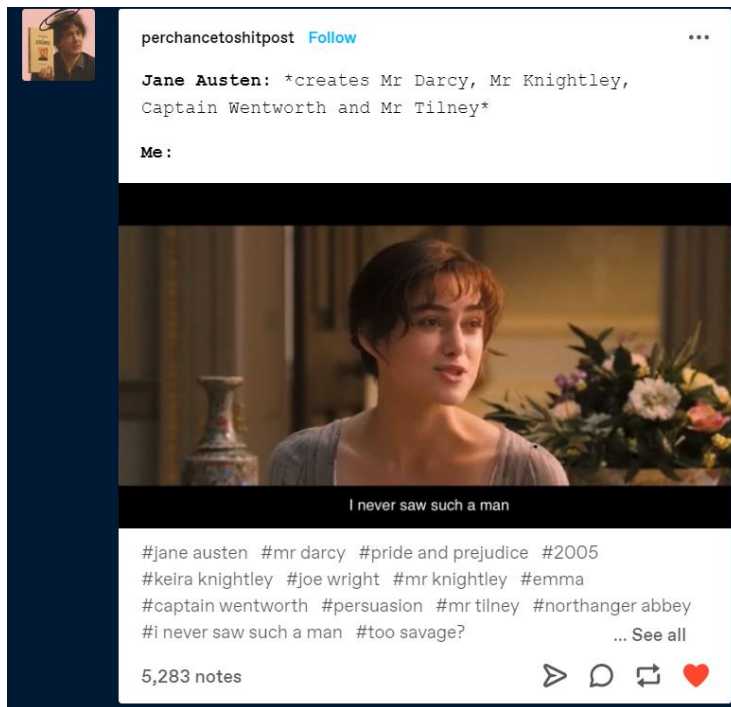
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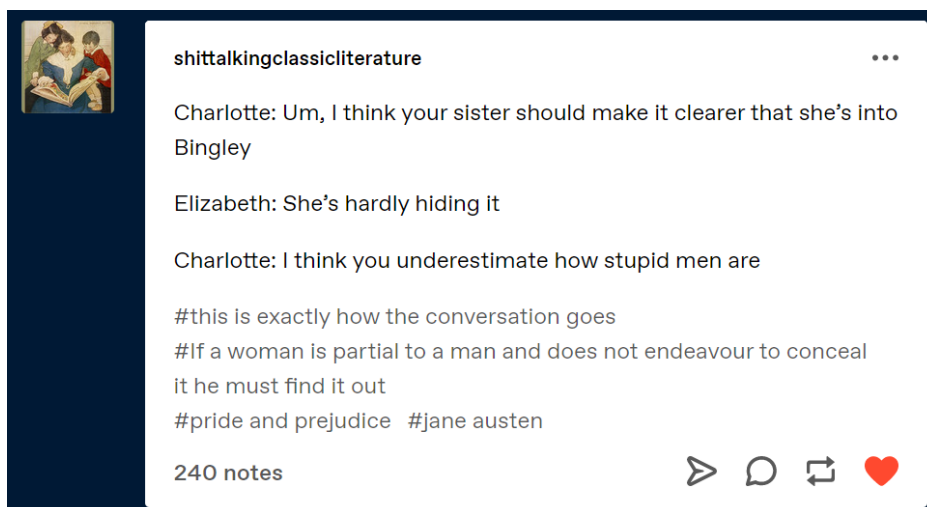
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Wilde



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<https://doriangraysuggests.tumblr.com/post/176730599559/dorian-gray-textposts-3>



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Self-care means stashing away the portrait that bears the evidence of your corrupted soul, then embarking on a downward spiral of murder and debauchery

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On all levels except physical, I am a Victorian dandy flinging myself dramatically onto the divan

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3.6K Retweets **9.7K** Likes

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APPENDIX B – EXTRA RESULTS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRES

Austen

Question 12: What is your opinion of Jane Austen's work. All the answers given by respondents:

Strong voiced

I don't know a lot about her as a person but I love how she was a successful female writer writing romances and how she really popularised common tropes we see in romance narratives today

One of the greatest writers to have come from the Georgian period. We stan a legend.

I have no opinion

A brilliant satirist who was able to expose the ridiculous things that were commonly accepted in her space.

I don't know much about her as a person but I think she's quite witty

Clever, bit old fashioned, funny

An independent female author who needed no man in her life.

Ahead of her time

Idk

Don't know here

Legend

I honestly don't know a lot as we never studied any of her works in school or college. I do just think of Pride and Prejudice though.

I have no idea about her as a person

I think of her as a romantic

I think she is an amazing storyteller whose humour and wit hasn't really aged - though it's hard to say much else about her personally, as I'm more interested in her time period than her specifically.

Fascinating woman and arguably a protofeminist whose literary legacy will live on for ages to come. She is witty and skilled in her craft; couldn't love her any more.

A sensible woman with a large fantasy

I admire the fact that she did not marry for convenience, but refused a proposal because she did not love the man. Even if it was expected of women to accept any respectable proposal at the time. However I do feel sad that she felt the need to cover up and hide her writing and I resent the fact that she was only able to be a full-time author because she inherited money from a rich aunt. Yet, I see these last points more as a sign of the times than a true reflection of her character.

Fantastic writer

I think of a romantic person, someone who sees the funny things in awkward or difficult situations

I mainly think of her work, rather than of her life in general.

Feminist queen

Question 13: What is your opinion of Jane Austen's work. All the answers given by respondents:

No real opinion

I really enjoy it; although I haven't read all of her works, I do plan to

Her novels were always sharp witted and gave an excellent commentary on societal values

As above

I love (most) of what I've read. I enjoy her prose and characterization. I do think her wit and mockery of her era are far too often missed today, and people sometimes love her work as surface-level glamorization of her time period. Which kinda misses the point.

I love her novels, specifically her characters and the way she comments on society

I think they have funny moments in them but overall are a bit dull

Very witty, fun to read.

Sadly have not read any

Boring

-

Pretty great tbh

I haven't read them but I know a lot of people enjoy them. I do own them but haven't read them yet (yet being the key word here). I definitely plan to read P&P within the next 6-8 months.

it's classic and has to do with a certain time period and certain social classes, but the personal stories can relate in some ways to any person

I like them!

I don't really like the writing style of the novels - however, I do like them in adaptation, as I do think the stories are fundamentally very good.

Austen's works are timeless in their depiction of both the human mind and behavior. She encapsulates the essence of what it means to navigate the world as a young woman wonderfully and writes such endearing works of fiction that readers are meant to become addicted to her stories.

I think they are well written

I admire that she wrote about strong, female characters who are not afraid to defend their opinions and take own decisions. Moreover, I enjoy her writing style and find her overall plotlines enjoying. Yet, her main characters still all got married and complied to the strict societal standards and those who don't (such as Lydia in Pride and Prejudice) get shamed into compliance, which I don't agree with. Thus, I have some conflicting feelings about her writing.

I enjoy some of them but I think I prefer the miniseries and film adaptations of them

As I have experience with just one of her works, I like the idea, the story a lot. It is however for this time difficult to read, and thus to grasp the meaning behind certain situations or uses

I think she wrote incredibly clever and witty books, which also have a lot of heart.

FEMINISM

Wilde

Question 13: what is your opinion of Oscar Wilde? All the answers given by respondents:

Keen, intuitive about people and their motivations

He's a literary genius, and was born before his time.

I tend to associate Wilde with how he was treated as a gay individual tbh because he was so talented but because of his sexuality a lot of people loathed him

Nothing

I don't know him, so a neutral opinion

I respect the stories he has written, though I don't read many classics and will probably not be in a rush to pick up his works

When I think of Oscar Wilde I think of Aestheticism, a life marred by scandal and prejudice, his exile and Dorian Gray. He was a man that wrote great things, driving the aesthetic movement and was condemned for his sexuality.

Wild - but I think that's only because of his name. I don't know anything about him

Brilliant

I think interesting writer and think of that he was condemned for being gay

He was a free thinking sexually liberated fabulous dandy and he had a good fashion sense.

Flamboyance, brilliance, and the inherent injustice of late Victorian society

I think of someone very witty, opinionated and flamboyant, perhaps even when it might get him in trouble. I also think he comes across as very egotistical but doggedly likeable.

I don't think of anything

Talented playwright

He had some bants, gay legend

I don't have many strong opinions on him as a person. I know he was prosecuted for being gay, which I believe is so fundamentally wrong and very sad. No-one should be blamed for whom they love. But I don't know enough about his personal life to truly form an opinion on him.

I seem to enjoy his personal antics more than I do his work to be quite honest. Fabulous, flamboyant and willing to share his witty remarks with all who would listen, he truly was the ultimate flaneur.

i dont really ahave an opion

Outspoken and an advocate

I think Oscar Wilde was an intelligent and funny person well ahead of his time.

I know he was a gay man, but that's about everything I know about him.

Question 14: What is your opinion of Oscar Wilde's work? All of the respondents answers:

Piercing. Witty. If a bit harsh and at times maybe a tad reductive. However, his humor is mine and I love his works.

The ones I've read are great - Important of being Earnest is one of my favourite plays.

I love his prose and themes

I don't know

I don't know his works, so a neutral opinion

They are a good opportunity for the reader to reflect on themselves and their lifestyle/situation

Amazing! Many once believed his books to be "immoral" but they're merely realistic (at least to modern eyes).

Never read them. Don't know much about them

Revolutionary

I liked Dorian Gray but didnt love it

I know it only via adaptation (film). The core of the story appeals to me as I've received it via second hand source. I can't say anything about his writing style.

Brilliant, quick, witty, and exciting to read. He set the trend for so many classic trends in literary styles. He is great because he saw through contemporary society and captured the essence of human existence.

I think his humour and brevity is breathtaking, and Dorian Gray remains one of my favourite novels ever. I've read the more famous works, but I want to read even more.

Don't really care. Just an excuse for people to think they're better than others because they've "read the classics" ☺

Fine. Not super interested in them

I've only read the importance of being earnest but i lived for the drama

I have only read The Picture of Dorian Gray, but I really loved it. I loved the symbolism in the book and the way in which Dorian's personality deteriorated with his picture, while his appearance stayed the same. I also read some excerpts from his opinion piece about beauty and the aesthetic movement, and agree that the artist should not try to please anyone but themselves. However, I agree with his statement that art does not concern itself with social, moral or political issues. Nothing exists in a vacuum, and art is always inspired by something in society, some moral, or can even be a political statement.

There is an undeniable charm to his works and definite merit in his writing, yet I ultimately find myself unable to connect with his character enough to form a connection with the texts themselves

again, no opinion i havent read any

I haven't read any sadly

I am not a huge fan. I feel his work was disappointing for me, because I expected more (given his reputation). For instance, the picture of dorian gray is about a man's descent into madness and I feel that a lot of time in the story was spent on elements that to me did not feel relevant to the theme.

I really liked Dorian Gray, but have yet to read any of his other works.