Jane Austen, The Humourist

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Jane Austen has long been known for her comedies of manners and even her mastery of irony is often pointed out by scholars, but most of the time, these are not the concerns that are under discussion and almost any other issue is treated as more important than the questions of humour and comedy in the case of her writings. What is more, surprisingly her humour is rarely addressed as a primary concern or the main target of research while, in my opinion, this was her major asset, and it was exactly her use of humour that made her stories outstanding, everlasting, and universal. Although the idea that she was first and foremost a humourist might sound odd, this is exactly what I aim to argue for. It was/is her humour that made/makes a difference and keeps her stories relevant and alive even today, even if, as we know, timeless comedies are hard (almost impossible) to create,[1] but she excelled in the genre and she created timeless comedies. She was born to be a humourist, unfortunately for her, at a time, when this label did not even exist in the sense we use it today on the one hand, while on the other, to use it for a woman was/would have been a double curse. So, she had to be very careful with her wit, irony, and comic talents, yet these could not be suppressed.

In this paper, I intend to focus on Austen as a humourist or a comedian, which would have been inconceivable during her lifetime since it was generally believed that women did not have a sense of humour and they were not able to produce "real humour", while in the conduct books, women were especially discouragedfrom producing humour, often even from laughing itself. Still, Austen was a comic genius who evidently opted for comedy and the comic mode of expression as opposed to tragedy or serious drama as her witty comment in "her version of" *The History of England* also attests: "[o]ne of Edward's Mistresses was Jane Shore, who has had a play written about her, but it is a tragedy and therefore not worth reading."[2]It is an obvious witty attack on those who denigrate comedies as insignificant and unworthy of attention as opposed to the "real art" of tragedy as "serious work." Hence, Austen was absolutely rebellious and subversive with her wit and humorous maneuverings. In addition, Austen's satire bites, she ridicules many aspects of her

[1] Barbara Gold, "Comedy in Ancient Greece and Rome," in Peter Dickinson et al., eds., *Women and Comedy: History, Theory, Practice* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2013), 20.

[2] Jane Austen, "The History of England," in *Love and Freindship* [sic!] *and Other Writings,* selected by Janet Todd (London: Poenix, Orion Books Ltd., 1998), 123.

society mercilessly and expresses criticism especially concerning women's possibilities and the rules regulating their behaviour. It is contradictory that while, officially, women's humour and laughter were to be suppressed, it was probably the key to her everlasting appeal. She was a masterful humourist, who while appearing to be inconspicuous with her "mild entertainment" and (supposedly only) romantic comedies, in fact, initiated real changes in attitudes and conceptions about women, their capabilities, and roles.

Audrey Bilger discusses, in detail, the rules and regulations about women's humour use and laughter during the decades and centuries when Austen lived, although not only her humour is discussed in this book. The basic argument is that humour and laughter were heavily restricted or even banned because they were viewed as dangerous and disruptive. This idea is in agreement with Barbara Gold's statement that "comedy is nothing if not threatening [... as it] thrives on confusion and the disturbance of social order."[3] Thus if a woman, who is not considered to be a person of privilege, is doing the comedy, then, she becomes doubly threatening because it means that she wants to change the social order and switch the power positions. Yet, at the same time, comedies are tricky and double-dealing because while they subvert and question the social order, the rules, the regulations, and the norms, eventually, they usually restore all these after the temporary disturbance and revelry.[4]

The bias against women and comedy, the denial of women's capacity for humour as well as curbing their possibilities for laughter were nothing new in the 18th and 19th centuries. Of course, the "tradition" was already laid during ancient Greece and Rome,[5] and it continued through medieval times.[6] Perfetti also highlights that women were not only excluded from educational possibilities, were denied access to knowledge/information and various forms of public expression but they were also the butt of jokes as there was "the tradition of clerical university training that literally makes fun of women."[7] She also suggests that the "control over writing and knowledge" was conjoined with "the power to laugh."[8] Additionally, women were especially discouraged from joking and even laughing if they wanted to appear decent and proper, the incarnation of "reserved, unlaughing

[3] Gold, "Comedy in Ancient Greece and Rome," 22–3.

[4] Ibid., 22.

[5] Gold, "Comedy in Ancient Greece and Rome," 15–23.

[6] Lisa Perfetti, "Feminist Humor Without Women," in Dickinson et al., *Women and Comedy,* 41–51.

[7] Ibid., 43.

[8] Ibid.

feminine virtue": consequently, "[m]edieval women were instructed that ladies do not laugh loudl yand they certainly should not tell ribald or aggressive jokes."[9]

What is even more astounding is that almost nothing changed in this respect during the hundreds of years that passed until we reach Jane Austen's time. According to Bilger, "conduct-book writers" of the era – who were mostly men but there were also a few women – made definitive efforts to "suppress women's laughter and humour" because these were considered to be dangerous as well as a "threat to the social order", and overall, they were "seen as a menace to society's very foundations"[10] – nothing less. It tells a lot about the power of women's laughter if it was seen as so threatening that it could basically "leave society in a shambles" if let loose. Bilger also adds that proper femininity was considered to be "antithetical to the critical spirit of comedy" as humour/comedy has always been against subordination and it was viewed as a sign of noncompliance as well as disruption on the part of women.[11] James Fordyce, as one of the most vocal and well-known/well-read among these moralizing writers of conduct books, stated clearly that a witty woman is not marriageable because men do not like to be criticized and cannot feel "safe" next to such a woman.[12] Again such words are used that highlight the dangerousness of women's laughter and humour, and it is highlighted that men are literally threatened by it: they cannot feel safe. In addition, the sexual aspects of women's laughter have long been discussed and it is still a mainstay in current conceptions as well, as Bilger also points it out: the laughter of the woman had "sexual connotations"; if a woman laughs/laughed, it signals/signalled that she knows/knew more than she should (have) as "laughter reveals an active understanding that belies innocence."[13] Hence, women's laughter was (still is) not only dangerous because of its critical capacity and how it could dismantle the social order but also because it involved control over their own sexuality and posited them as active sexual agents.

With all these assumptions about women's humour, Austen was quite much restricted in her possibilities of comic expression. It is no wonder that her family members, in the memoirs and publications about her, tried to erase all traces of her acerbic witticisms and bulldozered her letters to cover up her real wit and create an image of a docile and saint maiden aunt who knew her place and duties – but they had to work

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9 Ibid., 46.

10 Audrey Bilger, *Laughing Feminism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002), 16.

11 Ibid., 21.

12 Ibid., 22.

13 Ibid., 23.

hard. Nevertheless, the erasure of women's humour from public consciousness worked so well that by the end of the 19th century, it was a common-held belief that "women had no sense of humor at all."[14]Yet, the emergence of the novel proved to be an "unprecedented opportunity" for comic expression even for women writers during these decades, and the "sentimental, domesticated comedy" was a viable way to channel their comic wit.[15]This was the genre that was preferred around this time, so this was to be written if somebody wanted to succeed as an author, and any other type of humour was to be deeply hidden between the lines.

So, Austen also joined in the game because her humour could not be suppressed, however, it had to be done carefully. She had to practice her comic viles in rather covert ways, while she had to secure the happy endings as well as make sure that the domestic order is not threatened. Many people assume that Austen's main profile was writing romantic comedies and that the point of her novels is that the female protagonists get married. This is farthest from the truth, she treats these marriage resolutions with such sarcasm and patches them up within the last 1–2 pages with such a hurry and with so little regard that, evidently, she just wants to get rid of the compulsory ending that she is obliged to perform to be allowed to sell her books. Her ironic narratorial voice is there throughout the novels and it is witty, biting and conveys all of the messages that she is not allowed to tell out loud, in addition, she creates several side/minor characters that can deliver some acerbic lines slipping unnoticed. For example, comic criticism could be carried out in a way that she ridiculed Mrs. Bennett, or such ludicrous buffoons were brought forth as Mr. Collins, or she gave sarcastic comments into the mouth of Mr. Bennet etc. As Bilger also suggests: "if the writing of critical comedy involved elements of aggression and overt self-assertion, careful women writers learned to disguise such unfeminine behaviour with otherwise conventional characterizations and scenes"[16] – hence the happy endings and the apparently typical love stories. Bilger also adds that writers like Burney, Edgeworth or Austen are often overlooked as feminist comedians, still, there is feminist critical commentary in their realist comedies, yet the domestic aspects are usually promoted by the readers and the critics over their humour.[17]However, Sir Walter Scott, who was otherwise a supporter of Austen's work, "chastised" her for her gender politics as he sensed her radicalism, especially in *Emma,* and he evaluated "Austen's de-

[14] Ibid., 24.

[15] Ibid., 25.

[16] Ibid., 26.

[17] Ibid., 29.

parture from romantic values as a species of treason."[18] So, there were some keen-eyed readers of her work who caught her trickiness and commented on it. By the time we reached *Emma,* Austen had already been a well-established author and Scott himself praised this novel too, yet, when he sensed that Austen "might have gone too far" in her deviation from "decorum", she was criticized for it. Bilger cites D. W. Harding calling Austen (more than a 100 years later) "a delicate satirist", who managed to make fun of exactly the people who were to read her novels and entertain them while they did not even recognize that they were the butt of the joke.[19] So, while Harding got her satire and that she was doing more than writing romantic comedies, he did not see her feminism, he only pointed out the deeply "subversive tendencies" of her writing.[20] However, Bilger argues that Burney, Edgeworth and Austen all expressed "mature social criticism" with the help of their comic writing as well as channelled their anger and frustration through their "comic frame of mind."[21]

At the same time, we have to address the unavoidable presence of the love stories that Austen created, which even today reach mythopoetic dimensions; when a film adaptation or a TV series is made, the creators mostly still concentrate on the love stories and forget about the humour. There are hardly any visual remakes of Austen's stories that pay tribute to her irony and wit, yet there are a few exceptions, such as *Clueless* (1995) or *Emma* (2009), but one thing is very visible in such cases: that the writer is always a woman or a man/woman duo. Apparently, the male scriptwriters never get her humour. Undoubtedly, her stories also concern themselves with love and marriage, and in the majority of the (re)interpretations, the romance and the domestic themes absolutely overshadow the humorous critical potential of her works. According to Deborah Kaplan, the guidelines for aspiring writers of "the late twentieth-century mass-market romance" explicitly postulate Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* as the quintessential model for writing such stories,[22] which would probably make Austen cringe in horror, yet it appears that she managed to unleash the dream love story of all time, maybe, ironically against her own intentions. Kaplan also adds that Austen turned into "one of the mothers of the Harlequin or Silhouette novel" even if her novels are evidently "much more culturally and

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid., 31.

20 Ibid., 31–32.

21 Ibid., 61.

22 Deborah Kaplan, "Mass Marketing Jane Austen: Men, Women, and Courtship in Two Film Adaptations," in Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield, eds., *Jane Austen in Hollywood* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2001), 177.

linguistically complex" than these products, while "the popular representations" of her novels also follow this trend of "harlequinization."[23] Hence, the romance seems to be the most important feature that visual representations focus on. Claudia L. Johnson and Clara Tuite also comment that Austen was transformed into some kind of a "chick lit" ancestor, and most of the current Harlequin romances and chick lit output are originated from Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* – this being a piece of information that troubles most Austen readers and scholars, as they also add.[24] Johnson and Tuite, however, also warn us that Austen's original novels are not simple, transparent, and without ambiguity, as so many assume, but they are endowed with "playful difficulty."[25] They also add that Austen is often obscure, artful, while consciously inviting us to believe her at first sight. She wants to prove that she meant something different, usually exactly the opposite of what it seems to be the case at first.[26]What is more, "Austen's irony always falls heaviest on know-it-alls, on those who think they get things."[27] Johnson and Tuite also cite Reginald Farrer (1917) suggesting that Austen's stories are, in fact, not romantic stories, which is a relevant observation. Still, the authors also suggest, women often assume that Austen's novels are "romantic love stories" and that is why they cherish them.[28]

Tamar Jeffers McDonald, although primarily discussing filmic examples, argues that "[r]omantic comedy is, arguably, the lowest of the low",[29] which evidently implies that romantic comedies are supposedly the easiest and simplest kind of stories with not much cultural or artistic weight, achievement or value – none of which is true, however, as Jeffers McDonald also tries to prove. Yet, it is exactly because of this common belief that it is especially disturbing when Austen's novels are postulated as "only" romantic comedies, especially through filmic representations and (re)interpretations, because it is a value judgement, and not primarily pointing towards the positive pole. Jeffers McDonald also points out that romantic comedies are basically quest stories for love that are not uncomplicated, and they only appear to be obvious in every sense, while analysis might

[23] Kaplan, "Mass Marketing Jane Austen," 178.

[24] Claudia L. Johnson and Clara Tuite, *30 Great Myths about Jane Austen* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2020), 81.

[25] Ibid., 57.

[26] Ibid., 58–59.

[27] Ibid., 59.

[28] Ibid., 83.

[29] Tamar Jeffers McDonald, *Romantic Comedy: Boy Meets Girl Meets Genre* (London / New York: Wallflower, 2007), 7.

reveal surprises.[30] The author also points out a significant aspect of romantic comedies, namely, that they are very effective ideologically, since they seem to be so unassuming while they inculcate Western capitalist ideology into us, that is heavily reliant on heterosexual monogamy and procreation for its own maintenance.[31] That is why it is especially insulting to categorize Austen's stories as such, because Austen exactly wanted to undermine this ideology with her acerbic wit. However, Andrew Stott also highlights that the "traditional comic narrative" closes with a marriage as a rule, because that is "the cultural symbol of the harmonious symmetry and the resolution of the troubles."[32] In this sense, it could be interpreted as an imperative to close a comedy with marriage, because it is the tradition, it is the expectation, and Austen herself did not risk any alternative ending in order to secure being published.Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik claim even about filmic romantic comedies of the twentieth century that the "economic and social independence of women" is a danger "to the patriarchal order", and that is why the women's power is taken away at the end of the stories by forcing them into the typically middle-class heterosexual marriages where the man is the authority.[33] So, how could Austen have gone against all this more than a hundred/two hundred years earlier, when even in our days romantic comedies work with the same logic as described above.

Additionally, Neale and Krutnik also provide an interestinginsight into (primarily visual) romantic comedies. The same insight applies to Austen's original stories as well, thus it reveals a lot about the genre as a form of narrative itself: the female character's desire stands at the heart of the story, more precisely, there is a discrepancy between what she desires and what her duties are as a woman.[34] What is more, at the beginning of the story "the man and the woman are antagonistic towards each other", at the same time there is a "marked imbalance" between the power and the status of the desire of the male and the female characters, yet, the courtship is basically a string of negotiations of positions and terms as well as the transformation of their desires in order to form the union at the end.[35]The major obstruction to the final felicity is always the woman's desire, and that has to be changed primarily, according to the logic and aim of the romantic comedy, so that

30 Ibid., 10.

31 Ibid., 13.

32 Andrew Stott, *Comedy* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), 72.

33 Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik, *Popular Film and Television Comedy* (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), 154.

34 Neale and Krutnik, *Popular Film and Television Comedy,* 133.

35 Ibid., 142.

she would accept the "designated" man and would willingly enter the union with him.[36] All this evidently applies to Austen's stories in general, so undoubtedly, they also belong to the category of romantic comedies(even if she might have provided some variations and alterations on this theme) – but she wrote these love stories only because she also knew which side of her bread was buttered on, she knew the expectations of her public, and she wanted to sell her books, and even if she wanted to initiate change she was not on a kamikaze mission.

Nevertheless, despite the typical romantic focus on her novels, more and more scholars turn their attention to much more important questions, including her humour. Dominique Enright (re)published some of the most extraordinary pieces of biting wit that Austen produced in *The Wicked Wit of Jane Austen*. Enright claims that Austen's comedy is "as fresh today as when the novels were first published",[37] suggesting that they are timeless comedies, since they still speak to us, they are relevant, and they still make us laugh. The author also highlights that the book's aim is to put on display some of Austen's "sharpest, most profound and amusing observations [...] to inspire laughter, thought – and the odd wry grin of recognition."[38]Enright also emphasizes that Austen had such a dry wit that her irony was easy to be misunderstood, while she had "a keen eye for absurdity", yet it is exactly "this cool, dry irony that characterizes Jane Austen's mature writing. An unrestrained delight in the absurdities of human nature."[39]

Jillian Heydt-Stevenson sets her sights on an even more challenging project by researching and publishing about the sexual jokes and bawdy humour to be found in Austen's writing. She analyses all of the novels one by one, unearthing the bawdy humorous instances and sexual comic cues in Austen's stories. She associates Austen's comic output with "dissident comedy", while Heydt-Stevenson also argues that with her "erotic comedy", Austen provided us with explicitly "devastating critiques of courtship."[40]So, according to the author, Austen made fun of the courtship rituals, the rules about sexual decency, double standards and marriage at large, with her libidinal jokes that are abundant even if mostly covert. Heydt-Stevenson even suggests that Austen does all this on purpose to protest against the hypocrisy about sexual mores and "wakes

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36 Ibid.

37 Dominique Enright, *The Wicked Wit of Jane Austen* (London: Michael O'Mara Books Limited, 2007), 9.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid., 13.

40 Jillian Heydt-Stevenson, *Austen's Unbecoming Conjunctions. Subversive laughter, Embodied History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 2.

her readers up with some unwholesome humor."[41]The author also claims that female laughter and humour were much regulated and frowned upon during this time, exactly because of the (sexual) freedom and authority that is associated with them, that is why Austen was a revolutionary person with her jokes, while she actively took part in the most important debates of her time, even if previously it was considered that she did nothing like that.[42] It is also stated, based on Brian Southam, that Thomas Egerton, Austen's publisher, "would never have permitted such an outrageous joke" (it was about sodomy), "and it is unthinkable that it should appear in respectable fiction, let alone in a novel by a lady."[43]Yet, Austen wrote it into *Mansfield Park* in circuitous and covert ways; among all other versions of sexual plays, there are even jokes in connection with naval officers in this novel. It is evident that Austen had to work masterfully, carefully, and covertly with her jokes and humorous situations/utterances. Heydt-Stevenson claims that with her libidinal and bodily humour, Austen tore up the interstices that sutured women into the confines and shackles of society.[44]And while the author started out with the question whether Austen really meant all this, she assures us in the end that "[b]y laughing, and while laughing, she does after all really mean *that*."[45]

Austen is also often satirical, and her stories can be interpreted as satires as well. Lisa Colletta argues that as satire has always been connected to male aggressiveness because basically it is an attack, it is generally inconceivable to imagine a woman to write satire, since supposedly she did/does not even have a sense of humour, then, how could she even have the daring and ability to write/perform such negative and intellectual humour as satire.[46]Basically, the general conception is that it is a contradiction in terms to see a woman being capable of producing such sublimated aggression, yet, Austen was a master of that in her apparently 'only' comedies of manners and/or romantic comedies. However, it has to be added that comedies of manners are/were basically about making fun of the customs, habits and manners of specific social strata, most typically the upper classes; so, after all, these texts are not so innocent as they appear. In addition, Neale and Krutnik also comment that at the core of the comedy of manners lies a "deviation from

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41 Ibid., 3.

42 Ibid., 3–5.

43 Ibid., 23–24.

44 Ibid., 27.

45 Ibid., 209.

46 Lisa Colletta, "Postmodernity and the Gendered Uses of Political Satire," in *Women and Comedy. History, Theory, Practice,* edited by Peter Dickinson et al. (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2013), 209.

these rules", so the focus is the comic insult and the way in which "the rules of politeness and decorum" are violated and not followed.[47] So, even comedies of manners are about transgressions and the breaking of social taboos in order to lampoon a certain social circle, namely the upper classes. Austen was evidently making fun of her own social circle.

The point of satire is exactly to expose vices, weaknesses and follies, and through ridicule and scorn, it is hoped that everything will turn for the better, the situation will be amended, and the errors will be corrected. Yet, it is usually also mentioned that the ones who typically miss the mark are the targets of such satire. Colletta goes into detail about the issue of how women writers of satires were/are usually misunderstood appearing to be unfunny. Although she does not discuss Austen but postmodern instances of women's satire, still, it is as if she was writing precisely about Austen's case: "[w]omen writers have often used irony to expose abuses of patriarchal power and authority, but their satire was often missed – or misunderstood – precisely because the ironic context of their attack went unnoticed by male readers or critics, and for this reason women were often seen as just not funny."[48] Colletta also emphasizes that "irony has been a means to expose the space between what is real and what is appearance, or what is meant and what is said",[49] hence, the point is to highlight the discrepancy or the gap between how things are and how they should be. Yet, since irony works with double meanings, it is easy to misunderstand it or to miss the ambiguity. That is why Austen is sometimes dismissed by inattentive readers as a banal writer who wrote only romantic comedies that take place in tiny parlours of insignificance. If she had been only doing that, we would not still be reading her.

In effect, she was working on not only two but multiple planes of references and meanings, which multiplied her ironies and sharpened her satire too. Satire is sublimated anger and frustration turned into action for corrective purposes. Austen wanted to make the world a better place for women with the help of her irony and satirical take on all of the injustices that they had to face. That is why Colletta's claims, originally about postmodern satire by women, also applies to Austen, namely that such satire addresses an "epistemological or existential crisis", while at its best, it targets "mediated reality."[50] Austen addressed ontological and epistemological problems, as all instances of humour touch upon such issues, while she also reflected on the mediated nature of reality and how it

47 Neale and Krutnik, *Popular Film and Television Comedy,* 88.

48 Ibid.

49 Lisa Colletta, "Postmodernity and the Gendered Uses of Political Satire," 210.

50 Ibid., 212–213.

can be manipulated. Even if she did not live in the time of simulacra *per se,* she talks about related issues when the characters change perspectives and start to see how their viewing was mediated or manipulated, and they start to see more clearly and widen their understanding of existential reality. Colletta adds that satire can be so powerful that it really results in "an enormous cultural effect", such as changing presidential election results (here she is referring to how Tina Fey had an impact on the 2008 US elections with a satirical performance) because it helps people refocus.[51]Even if Austen did not harbor such aims as affecting presidential elections, yet, her aim was to initiate change in order to reach social justice.

Austen consciously chose comedy because, for her, any other mode of expression was out of the question, she was a born comic/comedian/humourist and she did not want to fight her fate: "I could not sit seriously down to write a serious romance under any other motive than to save my life; and if it were indispensable for me to keep it up and never relax into laughing at myself or other people, I am sure I would be hung before I had finished the first chapter."[52] It is no wonder that Austen opted for comedy as she was too intelligent, imaginative, rebellious, free and unconstrained for serious modes, and as Neale and Krutnik highlight it, comedy provides a "site for the *allowable* disruption of both cultural and fictional rules", as it allows for the transgressions while also cushions the impact of disruption with specific mechanisms of its own.[53] Austen wanted to say the truth but she could only get away with it if she served it in the form of comedies with the help of comic and humorous mechanisms, tactics and tools.

Emily Auerbach also sets outto search for "the real Jane Austen" and to catchher in her greatness, and while addressing various issues, she finds Austen's humour and comedy of central importance.The author clearly states that "Austen had the sense and the courage to use humor to attack pretense and penetrate the truth."[54] She uses an explicitly masculine, aggressive and active term like penetration to talk about what Austen was/is doing with her humour. Auerbach cites several critics commenting on how sharp Austen's irony is, and several of them liken her humour, and especially her irony, to a knife or a pair of scissors, hence the association is that she was fighting a war, and her weapon was her humour, and she actually killed with it while her opponents did not even have a chance. Regina Barreca also likens her comic words to swords: "she was [...] a scintil-

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[51] Ibid., 214, 218.

[52] Austen quoted in Bilger, *Laughing Feminism,* 35.

[53] Neale and Krutnik, *Popular Film and Television Comedy,* 149.

[54] Emily Auerbach, *Searching for Jane Austen* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 270–271.

lating, scathing, and delightful satirist so expert at her craft that those whose metaphoric throats were being slit hardly had time to see the knife."[55] Virginia Woolf is cited, saying that she would not want to be alone with Austen, because she would be too scared of her.Fey Weldon is also quoted saying: "[s]omething truly frightening rumbled there beneath the bubbling mirth."[56] Surprisingly (since the 1995 film adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility* is quite devoid of Austen's famous humour), Ang Lee also opined that Austen had a "dry, shrewd humor", which was cruel and cutting.[57]If he understood that, why did not he use it in the film? The film adaptations however, most often than not, fail in this respect, they typically miss out on the humour and the refined irony. Thus, in spite of all of these arguments and opinions showing Austen's comic power and wicked witticisms, Auerbach is right in declaring that "[t]he alcohol-free Jane Austen remains the dominant image in the twenty-first century."[58] She is also of the opinion that the Saint Jane image built up around her by her family still holds strong, and most people still do not see or do not want to see the real Jane Austen with all her cruel wit, and they do not see/accept/acknowledge her comic genius. Auerbach also opines that film adaptations usually leave the intellectuality, and most importantly, the indirect power of Austen's devastating irony, while they reduce her stories to "chick flicks" full of "[m]ale heartthrobs in frilly shirts and leggings."[59]Yet, no matter how she and her works is/are reinvented and rewritten and readapted again and again, her novels stay with us and entertain while instructing us in ways that no sequel, prequel, spin-off, adaptation etc. or whatever medium or genre they invent can. Her greatness lied/lies in her mastery over humour, she had a sense of humour that nobody can replicate, and she was a well-trained fighter in the intellectual wars of wit and repartee. That is how she managed to write some of the greatest comedies of all time that are so complex and layered that everybody can find their truth in it. And what is most important of all, she said the truth, and got away with it while chuckling to herself. She believed in the power of her comedy that it reveals something fundamental about human existence, and she was right, since we still read these stories and they speak to us in a timeless manner.

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[55] Regina Barreca, "Introduction." in *The Penguin Book of Women's Humor,* edited by Regina Barreca, 1–10. (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), 3.

[56] Ibid., 271–272.

[57] ibid., 273.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid., 280–81.