

The Parody of *Austenland*

Alexandra Groapa

**That all Jane Austen adaptations must begin with
It is a truth universally acknowledged**

*This video essay by Alexandra Groapa examines how *Austenland* (2013) parodies Jane Austen adaptations. Watch the video essay here: <https://flowcasts.uni-bannover.de/nodes/KWGam>*

Creator's Statement

As a Gen-Z whose childhood was spent half outside and half on the internet, I grew up on the edge of the internet. Obsession with the internet comes at a price: bullying, insecurity, and isolation go hand-in-hand with having vast information at fingertips, being able to discover other cultures, and making friends halfway across the world.

The internet has provided many fascinating features, but none has scratched the itch in my brain like the video essay. I, alongside many other people, consume hours upon hours of video content that delves into why *Shrek* is the perfect anti-*Disney* film or offers sociological perspectives on the *Real Housewives* series. When researching a film to analyze in a video essay project, I instantly thought about *Austenland* (Jerusha Hess, 2013). It was a film I had watched before and that (shamefully) represented my own life. Of course, I was not as obsessed with Jane Austen as the main character, Jane Hayes (played by Keri Russell), but I was close.

Austenland tells the story of Jane, a 30-something-year-old, who spends her life savings on a two-week vacation at a regency-style resort called *Austenland*, hoping to find the love of her life. Except for the fact that everyone at *Austenland* is an 'actor' and that the romance is fabricated. Until it is not. The 'meta' aspect of *Austenland* is fascinating, as both Jane and the audience share a blurred perspective on what is real and what is not. The confusing muddle of authenticity versus



parody makes *Austenland* a more interesting watch than just simply watching an obsessive Janeite scurry around Buckinghamshire.

Thus, my video essay is concerned with answering the question: Does *Austenland* successfully parody Jane Austen or does it fall into its own parodical trap? The answer is ... kind of a bit of both? The first part of my video essay is concerned with the similarities between Austen's texts and the film: these elements help move the plot along, creating a tension between the novels, the authenticity of *Austenland*, and the modernity of the film. *Austenland* is concerned with what constitutes an authentic adaptation, but never realizes that it falls within its own parodical trap. It uses similarities to Austen's texts as running gags and plot devices but also as a way of mocking the obsessive Janeites.

Another important element I wanted to focus on in my video essay was the location of *Austenland*, which strives for authenticity but is not historically accurate. It uses a modern color palette, is scattered with modern paraphernalia, and blurs the boundary between modernity and authenticity. Does the film criticize the 'authentic' location or is it supporting it? Again, the answer could be one or the other. Truthfully, there is no single answer to my question.

Instead, I believe that the answer depends on the viewer: A Janeite would view the film differently than someone just watching it for fun. The film's refusal to stick to one side is why my criticism of the film cannot have a properly formed answer either. Whether the film wants us to think it is in on the parodical joke is ultimately up to you.

Author Biography

Alexandra Groapa (she/her) is currently working as an English/Social Science teacher in Berlin. She is originally from Ireland, where she completed her Bachelor's degree in English Studies at Trinity College Dublin. She graduated from Leibniz Universität Hannover with a Master's degree in North American Studies. Her research interests include horror, popular literature, and postcolonialism.

Works Cited

Hess, Jerusha. *Austenland*. 2013. UK: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment.