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Media Pride and Prejudices of Transmedial Traffic: Enacting Jane Austen with Zombies

Abstract: The present paper uses theories of inter- and transmediality to repurpose the traditional relationship between classic books and their cinematic adaptations. It asserts the need for literary scholarship to go beyond the traditional protectionism of the literary medium, here dubbed “media pride”, and to tap into the interest that feeds consumption of mash-ups and parodies of the great books for alternative media. Instead of a competitive relationship between related objects (the book, the movie, the graphic novel, the game, etc.), the paper proposes a remedial approach, where the same objects can coexist and actively contribute to each other’s reception. The case study is an analysis of Jane Austen’s novel *Pride and Prejudice*, Seth Grahame-Smith’s mash-up novel *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* and Burr Steer’s adaptation for screen of the latter.

Keywords: Transmediality; Remediation; Jane Austen; Seth Grahame-Smith; Burr Steer; Zombie Mania; Media Studies.

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Adaptations of books to film, the best known forms of transmediations of literary fiction, bring important challenges to both readers and moviegoers. Within the intermedial frame, the specific experiences of reading or watching movies reveal their limits. Furthermore, as a result of this, they submit their reception patterns to be altered in different ways and at different levels. Seemingly, reading and movie watching are neither separate practices, nor that different from each other, although frequent receptive reactions say otherwise. Commonly shared impressions that “seeing the movie is not reading the book” or that “the worst person with whom you can see a movie is the one who has read the book” point to a segregation in the reception of interconnected books and movies. Most receivers adopt a biased position in relation to their favourite medium of representation and manifest a preference for a single semiotic format¹ in each of the two reactions mentioned above. The result is the assignation of an undefined “truth” value or “authenticity” to only one object (either the book, or the film) in this intermedial relationship.

The reader bias favors, as expected, the literary fiction as source-object, and considers the commitment to reading as the authentic receptive experience. In this view, any type of transmediation to cinema corrupts the understanding of the literary text. This is a frequent stance in the debate on adaptation of books to movies, also implying accusations of “cultural debasement”². The moviegoer bias, on the other hand, stresses the creative value of film transmediations and refuses to comply with the restrictions of a source-target dynamics, or at times (in the cases of books “made after” movies) it even reverses it³.

The aim of this paper is twofold. First, the article investigates these biases as forms of “media pride” and proposes the alternative of transmediality-informed reception. On the other hand, it shows that, by relinquishing media pride and by integrating literary studies as media studies - as I have proposed elsewhere⁴ - the literary scholar can shed new light on how literature contributes to other media and vice-versa. The competition for “truth” between books and their adaptations to cinema and to other media has a long history. The present article shows how transmedial frames in media studies create room for the coexistence of related objects. Instead of dismissing transmediations on grounds of media pride and exclusiveness, the present paper focuses on remediation, which allows related objects to coexist inside the same storyworld system, in different media, and to traffic their power to influence audiences. Simply put, transmediations of the great books to other media can reignite interest for the books themselves. This secondary purpose favours literary semiotics in the context of the so-called “crisis of reading”, lamented

both in public discourse and in the discourse of teaching literature. This attempt is motivated by the resistance among literary scholars to the idea that adaptations, remakes and other cultural objects or conceptual spaces emerging from classic literary texts could be used in literary research and teaching as formative forces. The case study of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* is developed inside a transmedial system of objects with interconnected storyworlds. It focuses on the alterations that make transmedial traffic possible, as well as on their cultural meaning and on the positive consequence of transmediations for the reading of classic works of literature.

In spite of the above mentioned resistance against presumed “attacks” from other media,

traditional cultural figureheads in the Austen reception - scholars, screenwriters and directors /.../ are losing the battle over the “legitimacy” of Austen readings. Austen adaptations and appropriations both threaten and re-enforce to varying degrees the clearly demarcated habitus, re-defining the genres in question⁵.

This double sense of intermedially “trafficking” the classic pieces of literature has most creative implications. The simultaneous deconstruction and reconstruction of these well-known, canonical pieces through various media create a cultural energy and interest that inform their reception beyond media specificity. Transmedial movement of a given object between fiction, film, graphic media, gaming, actually draws attention upon it and - by frequent decompositions and recompositions of its

storyworld – turns it into a cult-object. According to Umberto Eco, the very condition of a cult-object is its availability to breaking, dislocating, deconstructing, “so that one can remember only parts of it, irrespective of their original relationship to the whole⁶”. Working on Eco’s apparently paradoxical ideas that cult-films need not be either coherent, or self-conscious, Henry Jenkins insists upon the postmodern condition of *epistemophilia* and maintains that there is no innocent reception of cult-objects, but rather a dive into “layers upon layers of references⁷”.

The complications of the debate around loyalty to the source-object, around faithfulness of the film to the book transfer into fruitless complications of the issue of ownership: “academic readers, working-class readers, female readers, American readers, non-English readers, chick-lit readers may be seen as battling over ‘ownership’ via reading, very much as one may debate ownership of furniture⁸.” While it has always been clear who “owns” *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen, it will always be problematic what this ownership means in terms of creativity. In the traditional paradigm of literary reception, adaptations are afflicted by an unspoken duty to faithfully represent the fictional world into the cinematographic world.

I contend that, instead of adopting the reader bias, comparatist scholars could profit more from the opening of the literary text to other media. In fact, big data show reading surges for books that are made into films immediately after they premiere. For instance, the next month after *The Hunger Games* film was released, Suzanne Collins’ book (2008) went from being read by around 70,000 US students before the

release of the film (February 2012), to being read by 180,000 US students immediately after (April 2012), while *The Hobbit or There and Back Again*, the 1937 book by J.R.R. Tolkien, went from 5,500 US student readers in November 2012 to almost 14,000 in January 2013 (the first month after the movie release)⁹. Reading across media, Jenkins maintains, “sustains a depth of experience that motivates more consumption¹⁰”, and storytelling across media has strong economic motivations. What if some of this consumerist approach to literary tradition and the literary canon can be repurposed to make this tradition, the literary heritage, attractive again? In other words, what if, instead of opposing presumed inadequacy, unfaithfulness or inappropriateness of the adaptations of Austen for the big screen, literary scholars can make intermediality work for the benefit of literary reading?

Using *Inter-* and *Trans-*concepts

Part of a well-established category of *inter-* concepts (*intertextuality*, *intersubjectivity*, *interdisciplinarity*, *interconnectivity*, *intercommunicability*, etc.), intermediality brings together different creative practices in a way that makes them methodologically comparable and analytically manageable. In a very particular way, literary fiction already is transmediality-oriented¹¹, by means of a lot of transmedial features such as narrative, fiction, description, cinematics, musicality, and so on. Furthermore, an intermedial approach to “the great books” is particularly useful to gain new insights and new ways of reading and interpretation. The wide dissemination of these books, their inclusion in school

curricula, canonical lists, literary histories, turn them into narratives whose prestige comes close to that of cultural myths. This prestige does not only mean that they are widely known, both in scholarly and mass culture, but also that they are overcommented. Virtually every aspect of their constitution has been used and sometimes abused in at least several interpretations, so that they are more prone to overinterpretation or even to hermeneutical exhaustion.

To Umberto Eco, these cult-artifacts share some very important qualities, mainly the fact that they present themselves as loosely aggregated, “a disconnected series of images, of peaks, of visual icebergs¹²⁴” and this organization makes them memorable, quotable and familiar. He speaks of a *déjà-vu* sensation, but more could be said on the matter: the seeming familiarity of the public with a cult-book or a cult-film does not necessarily come from a deep knowledge of that object. In fact, audiences turn books and films into cult-artifacts by means of quoting, referencing, remixing and recreating bits and pieces of the original object. A thorough and complete reading or reception of the cult-artifact is secondary or even indifferent to its consumption and quotation. Due to the widespread information and commentary about these books and films, both in popular and high culture, their storyworlds become iconic and are most likely to cross the boundaries of the written medium towards more visual ones.

A *storyworld* is defined by Ryan as “a broader concept than fictional world because it covers both factual and fictional stories, meaning stories told as true of the real world and stories that create their own imaginary world respectively¹³⁶”. This

contradicts basic principles of the fictional worlds theory, mainly the one stating that fictional worlds are incomplete¹⁴. To Ryan, storyworlds follow a principle of minimal departure from referentiality to complete what the fictional worlds leave unknown or to decide what is left undecided, by making inferences about their referential worlds. Throughout this transmedial traffic, which is neither linear, nor unique, these storyworlds often form *intermedia*, that is objects manifesting a *synthetic intermediality* (Schröter’s term¹⁵), actual melting pots for several media into an *intermedium* (more than the sum of their parts, i.e. “graphic novel”).

While it goes without saying that, in understanding and analyzing the relationship between these objects, the researcher would employ more than mere close reading, the description of the proper analytical tools has to include attention to intermediality. In literary analysis, there is already motion and circulation between several fields (history of ideas, ideology, mythology, sociology, literary history, text analysis, narratology, etc.) if not a proper and conscious use of transmedial devices. Yet, the compulsory shifts between semiotic fields in cases of analyzing literary adaptations to film or music imply awareness to the manifestations of transmedial features such as those mentioned above: *fictionality*, *narrativity*, *description*, etc. (see Wolf¹⁶, for a selective list of “transmedial features” or Schröter’s understanding of “formal or transmedial intermediality¹⁷⁴”). That would encourage us to claim an aprioric intermedial nature (Schröter’s primeval or “ontological intermediality”) to the study of world literature, but a further set of problems arises with regard to intermediality in the case of objects that are born solely as

comments or reinterpretations of a given text.

A useful conceptual frame for my contention here is the one designed by Bolter and Grusin¹⁸ as “remediation”. In their argument, the term refers to the relationship between ‘old’ and ‘new’ media and to their movement to different places within a system of disciplines. An extension of meaning is possible. The remediation frame allows the coexistence of objects that seemingly exclude each other. We can replicate it for multiple-objects systems of storyworlds, where the book, the movie, the mash-up, the graphic novel, the game, etc. remediate each other instead of fighting to exclude each other, as they do in the “media pride” frame. In cases such as these, occurrences of intertextuality or interdisciplinarity are in fact former manifestations of intermedial junctures. Transmediality acts as a reorganizer inside the system of objects of the same storyworld, and allows the object-knots of the system to infer meaning upon one another, thus making their coexistence not only possible, but also necessary.

On-Screen Austenmania

Widely adapted to the screen, Austen’s novels are one of the most relevant examples serving my contention. Casting Laurence Olivier and Greer Garson in the main roles, the 1940 *Pride and Prejudice*, re-scripted by Aldous Huxley, stood out among the Austen adaptations until 1995, when more than one Austen text was adapted and released in the UK and in the US in multiple forms: *Persuasion*, *Sense and Sensibility*, a BBC miniseries of *Pride and Prejudice*, *Clueless* (a remake of *Emma*), to be followed the next year by

the film *Emma*, and the miniseries on the same novel for ITV network. Searching for a possible clue as to why the mid-nineties were so interested in Austen, Andrew Higson quotes from the reactions of those days. At the time, Austen is either considered “the hottest writer in showbusiness” (Laura Jacobs in *Vanity Fair*, January 1996, 74)¹⁹, or “the Quentin Tarantino of the middle classes” (Jack Kroll in *Newsweek*, 18 December 1995, 67-68)²⁰. Of course, one may see Austenmania as “a response to the loss of genuine social values, /.../ to the collapse of a caring, ordered society, a search for an ethical stance in an increasingly unethical world²¹”. But the fact of the matter remains that a new, upsurging interest for Austen’s novels, biography and literary impact was brought about, in the literary culture of the nineties to the present day, by their transmedial representations, especial to visual, cinematic or interactive, digital media.

Pride and Prejudice (1813) is regarded as Jane Austen’s most popular novel worldwide, and, as such, it has been the most adapted. Apart from its translations into thirty-five languages, its fourteen-hundred and eighty editions, and twenty million copies sold by 2014, *Pride and Prejudice* elicited rewrites, pastiches and parodies in more than one form. In the original, formerly entitled *First impressions*, the author creates a fictional plea for realism and proper measure in character judgment, presenting a mix of social critique, comedy of morals, and romance. In 2009, author Seth Grahame-Smith publishes *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies: The Classic Regency Romance – Now with Ultraviolet Zombie Mayhem*, a parody and the first novel to be called a *mash-up* (a term only used in music industry until then). Grafting elements

from the zombie-genre onto the original story, Grahame-Smith claims co-authorship with Austen herself. Apparently suggested by his editor, who was targeting the wide public by devising a gothic pulp approach to the classics of literature, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* is a best-seller. Grahame-Smith's novel is then adapted for screen by Burr Steer (2016), following in a line of transmediations of the same text as a graphic novel (2010), a video game (2010), and an interactive e-book version (2011). All of the above mentioned productions, either literary or visual, are but pieces of the same *Pride and Prejudice* semantic system. They form a network of objects whose source and aggregator is Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. Yet, the fixity of the system is as elusive as the stability of its source. Depending on the context of reception, cultural weight shifts from one knot to another, permanently displacing and disrupting the system. The instability of transmedial systems is also the reason why they can be accessed through any point of insertion (the book, the graphic parody, etc.). How is the literary scholar to organize this system, or to connect to the network? Can she divert some of the energy in the strongest knots back to the said source-object? In other words, can the reception of literary culture be enriched by this networking? The following analysis of the intermedial *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* intends to circumnavigate some valid answers to these questions.

Just Add Zombies

When Grahame-Smith added zombies to Austen's most popular novel, he might have wanted to develop his

editor's idea, but also to give his readers a best-seller. One of the first aims of the literary "zombie mania"²² is to reach the widest audiences. Also called "zombie renaissance"²³, this mania has been interpreted as a "reaction to the collapse of modernism in the aftermath of Hiroshima and the rise of the post-nuclear age in the second half of the twentieth century"²⁴. In the case of the classics of literature, Austen included, this project unpurposefully targets a certain literary exclusivism. Mainly associated with modernism, the idea that mass culture should be met with suspicion and even hostility²⁵ was quite common a century ago, when "the intellectuals could not, of course, actually prevent the masses from attaining literacy. But they could prevent them reading literature by making it too difficult for them to understand - and this is what they did. The early twentieth century saw a determined effort, on the part of the European intelligentsia, to exclude the masses from culture"²⁶. Adaptations of the classics of literature to the zombie genre result in a reversal of this modernist prejudice against mass culture. Even more than that, they add to the above quoted statistics of readers turned to literature after seeing the transmediation to film or the adaptation of the novel to screen.

In the analysis of how Austen's novel relates to Grahame-Smith's novel and then to Steer's adaptation of the latter, at least two levels of intermedial attention are relevant. At the first level (the literary one), traffic between the two above mentioned objects engages intertextuality, where parody, caricature and their dark, gothic, comically gory component appear. At the second one, analysis leaps intersemiotically between literature and film, and assumes

intermedial features. On the other hand, they tell a transmedial story because – even though one can read *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* without having read Austen first, the parodical character of the plot, characters and story are more likely to urge the completion of a storyworld with the added reference of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. The inherent redundancy of any parody encourages the intention to discover the source-object as much as contribute to the deepening of some of the meanings²⁷. In his analysis of the *Matrix* franchise, Henry Jenkins describes a transmedia story as

unfolding across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole. In the ideal form of transmedia storytelling, each medium does what it does best – so that a story might be introduced in a film, expanded through television, novels, and comics; its world might be explored through game play or experienced as an amusement park attraction²⁸.

Although his model is devised for modern-day franchises, it can be loosely adapted to the quite traditional system we analyze in this paper: in spite of its clear dependence on a source-object, our system also displays the possibility of access through any point of insertion.

The Intertextual Movement Austen – Grahame-Smith

From the very beginning, Grahame-Smith's novel kept a large part of Austen's text. The plot, main scenes and lines, just as character design and their

relations are followed in their main details. The storyworld in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* rests on the main elements of the one in *Pride and Prejudice*: the protagonists and their families, the five Bennet girls, their estates, fortunes and relationships. The deviation of *Pride and Prejudice's* storyworld towards brains eating, flesh consumption and the entire gothic imagery results in the accentuation of the comic and in the prominent featuring of the hybrid grotesque. Nothing stays subtle or nuanced. The subtle, ironical Austen humour transfers into gross gags and explicit criticism.

For instance, Austen's Mr. Bennet, a highly intellectual and sociophobic head of the family is replaced by a firm hand Mr. Bennet in the zombie-parody. He raises his girls to be not only zombie slayers, but also to be well versed in all the secrets of the Shaolin templars, which they know firsthand from their education in the Henan province of China.

Let us take a closer look to the starting lines of the two novels:

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife. However little known the feelings or view of such a man may be on his first entering a neighborhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered as the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters. 'My dear Mr. Bennet', said his lady to him one day, 'have you heard that Netherfield Park is let at last?' Mr. Bennet replied that he had not. 'But it is', returned she; 'for Mrs. Long has

just been here and told me all about it.' Mr. Bennet made no answer. 'Do you not want to know who has taken it?' cried his wife impatiently. 'You want to tell me and I have no objection to hearing it.' This was invitation enough²⁹.

To this, the zombiefied text of *Graham-Smith* responds as follows:

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a zombie in possession of brains must be in want of more brains. Never was this truth more plain than during the recent attacks at Netherfield Park, in which a household of eighteen was slaughtered and consumed by a horde of the living dead. 'My dear Mr. Bennet', said his lady to him one day, 'have you heard that Netherfield Park is occupied again?' Mr. Bennet replied that he had not and went about his morning business of dagger sharpening and musket polishing - for attacks by the unmentionables had grown alarmingly frequent in recent weeks. 'But it is', returned she. Mr. Bennet made no answer. 'Do you not want to know who has taken it?' cried his wife impatiently. 'Woman, I am attending to my musket. Prattle on if you must, but leave me to the defence of my estate!' This was invitation enough³⁰.

The immediately spottable difference is the comic displacement of "wife" and "fortune" by "brains" and "more brains" in the first sentence, which sets the zombie tone. The reinforcement of this tone takes place by means of a textbook reference to zombie attacks in Netherfield Park and to

the necessity of defending one's estate. A second level of differences, less conspicuous, but just as generalizable in the mash-up, is the shift from a rich and subtly ironic rhetoric, hardly suggesting affective positions and always dressing emotions in social rituals ("you want to tell me and I have no objection to hearing it") to a straightforward, even brutal address ("Woman, /.../ prattle on if you must, but leave me to the defence of my estate!"). There is more about this alteration than meets the eye: it marks the diversion from the Austen mode to a different agenda. The canonical trace of Austen's work in the popular mindset, even in the absence of a thorough reading of it, is that of a "literature in which something is lacking, in which there is some kind of embarrassing absence³¹." It is mainly this level of ambiguity and absence which is tackled and "filled" in *Graham-Smith's* story.

While the addition of zombies might have been interpreted as a trivial one, made for entertainment purposes only, the militant, fighting mode has a more serious agenda. It should be said that one should not evaluate this radicalization too hastily, for it creates room for the statement of *atypicality* of the Bennet sisters and for the introduction of a *contrastive value* to confront the one socially set by marriage and fortune. In Austen's novel, the Bennet sisters stand out in their world, either by the ill-breeding of the younger sisters, or by the charming non-conformity of the older ones. In the zombie fiction, they show exceptional fighting skills. Also, the original Lizzie pleads against convenience marriage and in favor of a rich inner life, while the zombie version one is against sheltered life and in favor of military action.

A similar conversion happens in the Bingley parlor scene, which is iconic to the overall positioning of characters towards one another in both texts. In the scene, an amused Lizzie, who came to the Bingley mansion to watch over her unwell sister Jane, witnesses the shallowness of Miss Bingley, who tries to turn the conversation to her advantage. A playful and intricate rhetoric ritualizes the interaction of the two young women in Austen's book. The same rhetoric conceals and reveals at the same time a first passionate confrontation between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy. However, this ritualization of direct address and these polite strategies allowing honest opinions to be formulated among false, boastful statements are abandoned in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*. When asked about her curious preference for books instead of cards, the *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* Lizzie dives right into the aggressive-mood: "I prefer a great many things to cards /.../, not the least of which is the sensation of a newly sharpened blade as it punctures the round belly of a man." A feminist touch is added then to the discussion about "accomplished women" according to Mr. Darcy's exigencies. In both novels, this is a point where Elizabeth - with the help of the good-natured Mr. Bingley - exposes the social hypocrisy that asks of women to be eternally in search of a husband, on the one hand, and just as engaged in the training of their creative and artistic virtues, on the other. But in Austen's urtext, the latter are related to playing musical instruments, speaking foreign languages and enriching one's mind, while in the Grahame-Smith's reply, they are resumed as "the deadly arts" ("the fighting styles of the Kyoto masters and the modern tactics and weaponry in

Europe"), and the former are called "the female arts" ("music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages"). However, the main alteration is most striking when Elizabeth mentions her father's guidance *away* from "books and music" and towards "protecting ourselves from the sorry stricken". So far, the defamiliarization with the *Pride and Prejudice* storyworld has been implicit, but this is the point where it becomes explicit. The gothic nature of gory zombie tales is ludicrous and conventional, while the deprecation of one of the main values in *Pride and Prejudice* - namely the reading of books - strikes a deeper level of alteration. "The uncanny" of zombie appearance - canonically embedded in the requirements of the genre - is not as striking to Austen readers as the uncanny denial of "books and music", which were so embedded in the storyworld of *Pride and Prejudice*.

In reviving the world of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Grahame-Smith does indeed replace passivity and aesthetic refinement with action and straightforwardness, just as he replaces reading with zombie-slaying. As a result, the comedy of morals turns zombie apocalypse with a Regency twist. This transformation is viral in itself. More than that, the virus of a different genre attacks "the dead body" of a classic novel. As a result, the text "raises from the dead" only with the appearance of life, representing in fact a textual zombification. The result is as disruptive as it is self-destructive in terms of faithfulness to the source-text, but it is this very zombified disruption that re-stirs the interest for reading Austen's novel.

The interplay of the two related novels points to the fact that the linguistic, formal

aspect of classic novels, which is crucial in literary scholarship and teaching, is in fact pushed to the background. Instead, the intertextual, parodical relationship between them focuses on a traffic of cliché-lines, characters and main elements of the storyworld, but also on finding equivalent values. The zombified *Pride and Prejudice* has a counterfactual agenda, whose resonance for contemporary life imitates the one of Jane Austen's message to the Regency world.

The Transmedial Life of Zombie-Austen

Armed confrontation in the place of highly intelligent mockery is not the only result of the zombification of *Pride and Prejudice*. Schematism of characters and motivation, plus the seriality of zombie slaying are in tune with the entire radicalization of plot positions. The zombie-plague threatens not only the city and its surrounding, but the entire world, which gradually shrinks around the characters. One should note that Austen is no stranger to the gothic scene. She creates a memorable, critical gothic pastiche in *Northanger Abbey* (1817), where "she also criticizes the hollow reassurances of the whole gothic genre, which even in its most frightening, suspenseful moments reminds its readers that 'it is only a novel', and therefore nothing to be afraid of³²." The same happens in turn with the zombie parodies of her mash-ups, whose nature is so gratuitous that it indicates artificiality first of all, as well as a comical hybridization of the horror genre itself.

The limitation of geography is – in Austen's world – both an expression of the

ties that bind women lives, and a guarantee of safety and shelter. In Grahame-Smith's, it becomes a material sign of the menace that hovers over human freedom and life. The Bennet girls bring an important contribution to their people's fight against the plague. New alterations appear at different microlevels, for instance in the transformation of Lady Catherine de Bourgh into a quite young and sensual fighter. The meanness of two-faced Wickham, as well as his dark secret of him being the zombie leader are exposed here as well. Lizzie and Jane, while developing in accordance to the Austen's script towards happiness, marriage and existential fulfillment, distinguish themselves as heroic zombie slayers.

Observing the elements of the zombie genre, the initial threat of the city turns into a full-fledged apocalypse, so the storyworld can stay open while apparently collapsing onto itself. This is the most difficult crisis of fictional representation to be solved by Steer in the adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* for cinema. On the one hand, he has to follow the rules of the zombie genre, that request zombies to "appear in alarming numbers, they are slow, have very limited mental capacities, are infectious and hard to kill and their primary instinct is to eat flesh (or the brains) of the living³³", plus an open ending in the form of an apocalyptic conclusion.

On the other, he has to translate for film the typical Austen happy ending, which still resonates in Grahame-Smith's ending, though gothically coded: "And the sisters Bennet – servants of His Majesty, protectors of Hertfordshire, beholders of the secrets of Shaolin, and brides of death – were now, three of them, brides of man, their swords quieted by that only force

more powerful than any warrior.” When transmediating to film, Steer is forced to rethink this genre double-bind in terms of screen possibilities: the film ends with the double wedding of Jane to Mr. Bingley and Lizzie to Mr. Darcy. But, after the credits roll for a while, a second step of the ending is taken towards the gory, zombie genre ending and the happy couples are filmed with their eyes widening in the horror of seeing the zombie army attack, with a renewed Wickham in their command.

This creative mingling of what has been called “the anticlimactic Austen ending³⁴” and the apocalyptic destruction ending of all zombie dystopias is achieved by cinematographic means. This replacement of the happy-ending with the ongoing menace, canonical and paradigmatic to zombie productions, is the mark of transmediality. It represents more than a mixture of genres, a simple hybridization in the absence of an organizing principle. Namely it states the rule of engulfment and it expands zombification from content to textual generation: the *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* productions have not only introduced a virus in the *Pride and Prejudice* host text, but also taken over and metabolized the latter in a transmedial fashion. The transparent shallowness of the characters who no longer show signs of inner life as much as a mechanical will to fight the monsters and protect one’s own is the result of network traffic as well. The literary reference is far from obsolete and it is rendered necessary when the reader wants to deepen her knowledge of the inner workings of the subjective agents of the narrative.

According to the media pride frame, Austen’s urtext and Burr Steer’s movie

deny each other’s authenticity. This mutual denial is supported by striking differences in their genres, both crystallized in their own canon and audience. However, when adopting the angle of remediation within the same system of related objects, a “collision aesthetics³⁵” becomes possible, mixing up audiences and canons. The Austen canon and the zombie canon rather coexist, than merge in the alternative universe built in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* objects.

The apparent gratuity of zombie addition is – after all – the most visible feature of this type of production, acting as an exaggeration of medial features, and a thorn in the side of media pride. To make this gratuity clear, the zombie appears in his modern aspect: it has no roots, and it stands for “the ultimate materialist monster³⁶”. Dark humor is inserted in the classical narrative by means of this absurd raising of zombies. According to zombie scholarship, the turn of the horror genre (zombie subgenre included) to comedy or satire is a sign of genre exhaustion. This hybridization gives new life to the horror genre, and the comedy “reveals the centrality of humor to the zombie narrative, and the ways in which the shuffling undead can be depicted as ridiculous and objects of fun³⁷.” The threatening quality of zombie presence is deconstructed by the blatant incongruity of narratives: the Austenian romance and the zombie apocalypse. Like in most cases of material hybridization, both genres gain new life and vitality at a time when both are threatened by exhaustion. Not only the crisis of reading the classics of literature is addressed this way, but also the redundant, repetitive forms of the horror genre. Jane Austen is not the only one who needs help from zombies in

order to repurpose her fictions for contemporary audiences, but also zombies need help from humor, irony and the apparent settledness of Austen's world to repurpose their old ways of accessing public interest and popular entertainment.

It is my contention that, at a theoretical level, in this specific type of occurrences, where modern zombies act as a dark-comical addition to a very well-known storyworld, they serve the most important purpose of the deconstruction of categorical borders. A virality of homogeneity is generalized by means of mixing human with the non-human, historical places with the non-place of dystopian fictions, the dead and the non-dead. This is how zombies become indicative of transmediality, and how they show that something is being commented on and that a mode is being exposed or a media representation is being framed. Some scholars point to the fact that zombies act as "semiotic cadavers"³⁸ in the fictional worlds where they appear: "zombies are object of meaning, bodies of significance without signification, which can be filled with any message, no matter how ludicrous or absurd"³⁹. The direct consequence is that remixing "the great books" with zombies becomes one of the most efficient tools of interrogation of the object-system in a thick description that is bound to make mediality visible and transmediality creative.

To resume, my proposition argues against a certain protectionism within literary studies. References to what I have called "other objects from the same storyworld system" are traditionally discarded in literary studies as debasing to the literary work or to its authentic meaning. I have called this protectionism "media pride" and

I have explored, in the storyworld system of *Pride and Prejudice* the possible relations of Austen's book to its transmediations in a very strict genre, that of zombie fiction. The relevance of this exploration goes beyond a collection of close-reading notes in a neo-gothic tone, because its model can be replicated for other similar systems, especially for those elicited by screen adaptations and mash-ups of "the great books".

Traditional frames are not excluded, but integrated in a remedial approach where literature and film are re-inscribed in the field of media theory. This is an attempt to reproduce in analysis and interpretation the same primeval transmediality common to most literary and filmic objects, as well as to fight the idea that only a certain medium has exclusive explanatory and interpretive rights over a form of truth or authenticity that it alone can provide or that it can provide best of all possible media. My conclusion points to the unexpected way of reviving interest for classic texts and authors by means of mass culture transmediations. In order to make this phenomenon methodologically approachable, literary studies should tap into the strategies of media studies. It is there where "dead texts" live their afterlives by offering new grounds for more or less exhausted genres to hybridize and create new practices of culture consumption in more than one medium.

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NOTES

1. Another example of this preferencing of medium bound aesthetics in the case of Romanian culture in Mihaela Ursa, "Is Romanian Culture Ready for the Digital Turn?", in *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory*, 1.1 (2015), 80-97, passim.
2. Andrew Higson, "English Heritage, English Literature, English Cinema: Selling Jane Austen to Movie Audiences in the 90ies", in Eckart Voigts-Virchow (ed.), *Janespotting and Beyond: British Heritage Retrovisions Since the Mid-1990s*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 2004, p. 36.
3. See Higson commenting on the possible advertising of the movie *Emma* (after Jane Austen) as "based on the story that inspired the hit movie *Clueless!*". *Ibidem*, 35.
4. See a detailed argument in favor of literary studies as media studies in Mihaela Ursa, "Literature 2.0-Hybrid Cultural Objects in Intermedial Practice: The Case of Romania", in Lopez Asuncion-Varela Azcarate and Ananta Charan Sukla (eds.), *The Ekphrastic Turn: Inter-Art Dialogues*, New Directions in the Humanities Book Imprint, Common Ground Publishing, 2015, p. 345-361.
5. Eckart Voigts-Virchow, "Pride and Promiscuity and Zombies, or: Miss Austen Mashed Up in Affinity Spaces of Participatory Culture", in Pascal Niklas and Oliver Lindner (eds.), *Adaptation and Cultural Appropriation. Literature, Film and the Arts*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2012, p. 39.
6. Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality*, New York, Harcourt Brace, 1986, p. 198.
7. Henry Jenkins, *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*, New York and London, NYU Press, 2006, p. 98.
8. Eckart Voigts-Virchow, *Pride and Promiscuity and Zombies*, p. 40.
9. Data gathered from <https://public.tableau.com/profile/asbeckler3156#!/vizhome/Booksmadeintomovies/Dashboard1>, accessed May 2018, by Accelerated Reader software used by Renaissance Learning to monitor about a third of the schools in the US, precisely 30,000 schools and about 10 million students, on the issue of reading preferences.
10. Henry Jenkins, *Convergence culture*, p. 90.
11. I have developed the definition of this level of intermediality in Mihaela Ursa, *Literature 2.0*, mainly p. 346.
12. Umberto Eco, *Travels*, p. 200.
13. Mary-Laure Ryan, "Story/Worlds/Media: Tuning the Instruments of a Media Conscious Narratology", in Mary-Laure Ryan and Jan Noël-Thon (eds.), *Storyworlds across Media. Toward a Media Conscious Narratology*, Lincoln and London, University of Nebraska Press, 2014, p. 33.
14. Thomas Pavel is the most important promoter of the idea that fictional worlds are always incomplete, for reasons he develops in his *Fictional Worlds*, Harvard, Harvard U Press, 1986, mainly in p. 61-74.
15. Jens Schröter, "Discourses and Models of Intermediality", in Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek (ed.), *Digital Humanities and the Study of Intermediality in Comparative Cultural Studies*, Purdue, Purdue U Press, 2013, p. 32-42.
16. Werner Wolf, "(Inter)mediality and the Study of Literature", in Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek (ed.), *Digital Humanities*, p. 22-23.
17. Jens Schröter, *Discourses and Models*, *ibid.*
18. Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding new media*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1999.
19. Apud Andrew Higson, *English Heritage*, p. 37.
20. Apud *Ibidem*.

21. *Ibidem*, p. 38.
22. Laura Hubner, Marcus Leaning and Paul Manning, "Introduction", in Laura Hubner, Marcus Leaning and Paul Manning (eds.), *The Zombie Renaissance in Popular Culture*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, p. 3.
23. *Ibidem*.
24. Kevin Boon, "The Zombie as Other: Mortality and the Monstrous in the Post- Nuclear Age", in D. Christie and J. Lauro (eds.), *Better Off Dead: The Evolution of the Zombie as Post-Human*, New York, Fordham University Press, DOI:10.5422/fordham/9780823234462.003.0005, p. 55.
25. John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia 1880-1939*, Faber & Faber, 2012, ebook.
26. *Ibidem*.
27. "For people who see only the movie, the sources of the information remain unclear, but someone who has a transmedia experience will have played an active role in delivering the letter and may have traced its trajectory across three different media." (Henry Jenkins, *Convergence culture*, 102)
28. Henry Jenkins, *Convergence culture*, p. 90-91.
29. Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, The Cambridge Edition of the Works, edited by Pat Rogers, Cambridge, Cambridge U Press, 2006, p. 1.
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31. Olivia Murphy, *Jane Austen the Reader. The Artist as Critic*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 49.
32. *Ibidem*, p. 52.
33. Eckart Voigts-Virchow, *Pride and Promiscuity and Zombies*, p. 48-49.
34. Renée L. Nogales, "Pride and Prejudice", in John C. Tibbetts, James M. Welsh, *The Encyclopedia of Novels into Films*, second edition, Checkmark Books, 2015, p. 360.
35. Eckart Voigts-Virchow, *Pride and Promiscuity and Zombies*, p. 48.
36. Toby Venables, "Zombies, a Lost Literary Heritage and the Return of the Repressed", in Laura Hubner, Marcus Leaning and Paul Manning (eds.), *The Zombie Renaissance in Popular Culture*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, p. 208.
37. Ian Conrich, "An Infected Population: Zombie Culture and the Modern Monstrous", in Laura Hubner, Marcus Leaning and Paul Manning (eds.), *The Zombie Renaissance in Popular Culture*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, p. 17.
38. Doru Pop, "The Desecration of Bodies. Re-animating Undead Mythologies in Cinema", in Ekprasis. Images, Cinema, Theories, Media. Bodies in Between, 2/ 2014, p. 114.
39. *Ibidem*.