

ABSTRACT

Power and Passion ***Reimagining Transgression in Pride and Prejudice***

This thesis examines changing literary representations of Lydia Bennet's transgression in contemporary retellings of *Pride and Prejudice*.

In Austen's novel, Elizabeth's burgeoning hopes of happiness and security for her family are jeopardised when her sister Lydia runs away, unmarried, with the scoundrel Wickham. To update Lydia's transgression for contemporary retellings—or *reimaginings*—of Austen's novel, authors must engage with the question: what do we consider transgressive for women now? To find out, I compared the depiction of Lydia's transgression across 30 reimaginings, and wrote my own: *Power and Passion*, a queer reimagining of *Pride and Prejudice* set on Australia's Sunshine Coast in the 1980s. Certain social and technological characteristics of that decade eased some of the narrative challenges encountered when adapting and reimagining Austen's story for contemporary audiences.

The first half of my exegesis explores these challenges in depth. Cultural standards of marriage, female agency, and sexual transgression have changed significantly in the two centuries since the publication of *Pride and Prejudice*. Faithful adaptations must translate certain cultural elements for audiences no longer contemporaneous with the text, who may not instinctively grasp, for example, why Lydia's relationship is so problematic. This issue is compounded for 'unfaithful' reimaginings, which transpose the story into a modern setting. Austen's plot hinges on characters obeying—or transgressing—the restrictive social mores of her time. In a modern culture lacking many of those restrictions, certain elements of the story cease to function, and unless these elements are replaced with an effective and believable modern equivalent, the story unravels.

Is Lydia really so vital? The second half of this exegesis outlines the importance of her transgression to Austen's plot, characters, and theme, and outline the major challenges of reimagining her character for modern audiences. I explore the pitfalls authors face when deciding how to modernise Lydia's transgression, and how to approach the contentious issues associated with it, including age, consent, victim-blaming, slut-shaming, and agency. Exploring the major solutions used in modernising Lydia's transgression across the 30 reimaginings in my study, I delve into examples of what works and what doesn't, and reflect upon how these findings shaped my own approach to reimagining Lydia Bennet.