

**Jane Austen Retellings Book Summaries**  
**JASNA Eastern Washington/Northern Idaho**

***All Stirred Up*** by **Brianne Moore (2020)**, reviewed by Cindy Bell.

*All Stirred Up* is based on *Persuasion*. It's set in modern Edinburgh where our Anne Elliot heroine, Susan Napier has finished college and is returning to town. She's newly charged with rescuing her family's failing restaurant empire. At baggage claim, she spies her Capt. Wentworth, former boyfriend Chris Baker. He's been away too, hosting a popular NYC cooking show, and we soon learn he will be opening a competing restaurant. As their paths cross and cross again, there are evocative descriptions of Edinburgh's environs, sights and festivals. We also get a close look into the kitchen where Susan is developing new pastry creations.

Her extended family retain many of their original characteristics: Susan's father is as vain as ever and leveraging all that modern dermatology can offer. Sister Julia is known for her extravagant interior decorating. Sister Meg still obsesses over many imagined illnesses. In this version, the three sisters are kinder toward each other. Their respective flaws are rooted in how they coped with losing their mother. We find Meg's in-laws fashionably involved in Scottish politics and soon their daughter Lauren is dating Chris. The Lady Russell character is Aunt Kay, here an acclaimed actress and still the person who persuaded young Susan to break things off with Chris.

The family gossip and speculation that advanced the plot in the original is now driven by social media and food industry bloggers. The storyline begins with a few familiar events, then innovates, building toward a big reveal about Chris and Susan's past. Their modern sensibilities are well crafted, but leave little doubt about the progression of their relationship and ultimate reconciliation. The plot swerves to take a page from *Pride & Prejudice* when Chris steps in to save Susan's family from public embarrassment. Overall, it's a satisfying romance between two likable main characters, but it lacks the sweet romantic yearning of Austen's version. p.s. A small demerit point must be given for having Susan run about in the rain like the 2007 adaptation.

***Ayesha at Last*** by **Uzma Jalaluddin (2018)** reviewed by Leslie Hawley.

*Ayesha at Last* is a *Pride and Prejudice* inspired retelling set in Toronto's South Asian Muslim community. Ayesha Shamsi [Elizabeth] is a strong, passionate woman who dreams of being a poet and struggles to find herself in her job as a substitute teacher. Ayesha lives in a supportive, multigenerational immigrant home with extended family nearby. Although her younger cousin Hafsa [inspired by Lydia] is obsessed with marriage, Ayesha prefers to focus on her career and rebuffs the idea of being pressured into a relationship. Khalid Mirza [Darcy] is a conservative young man who believes in

tradition and is content with his allowing his mother to arrange his marriage. Ayesha and Khalid are two different people brought together to plan a conference at their local mosque. Forced to work together, their judgmental remarks and prejudice give way to attraction as they get to know each other. Tensions rise when Khalid's mother, Farzana [inspired by Lady Catherine de Bourgh] arranges for Khalid to marry Hafsa, which leads both Ayesha and Khalid to grapple with their feelings for each other.

*Ayesha at Last* provides a different cultural perspective on *Pride & Prejudice* and will leave the reader to contemplate the issues of tradition, identity, class, belonging, and inclusion highlighted throughout the pages. The dual perspectives of Ayesha and Khalid highlight the interior lives of Muslim men and women by exemplifying the diversity within their lives and communities.

**Eligible** by **Curtis Sittenfeld (2016)**, reviewed by Cindy Bell.

*Eligible* is readily recognized as a modern *Pride & Prejudice*. One of the delights of this story is how well the characters have been fitted with modern identities that preserve Austen's characters. The Bennetts reside in Cincinnati and their prestigious country club membership defines their social circle. Cousin William Collins (clergyman) is now a long-winded Silicon Valley techie. Charlotte Lucas works for Procter & Gamble in HR and is rather overweight. Jane Bennett teaches yoga in NYC. She's now 37 and her biological clock is ticking loudly. She's in a relationship with an international financier who has a French family and a vasectomy. Is IVF the solution? Lizzy is also working in NYC and dating a married man, Jason Wick (Wickham).

The book's title, **Eligible**, refers to the Bachelor-like TV show where Chip Bingley has lately been Mr. Eligible. As the story begins, his TV season is behind him and he's starting a medical internship in a Cincinnati ER. His friend Darcy is also in town, a neurosurgeon intern at the hospital's stroke center. Mr. Lucas is an administrator at the hospital and his society picnic serves to introduce everyone.

Jane and Lizzy return to Cincinnati when Mr. Bennett has heart attack. Once home, they meet our eligible bachelors but also find additional problems that need attention: Mr. Bennett has no health insurance, their unemployed sisters are a drain on the dwindling family finances, the decaying family home already has two mortgages, Mrs. Bennett is addicted to QVC shopping, and everyone is curious about Mary's secret weekly rendezvous.

The modern situations are interesting parallels to the Regency constraints. There are still many ways a family name can be blemished. In relationships, timing still matters and modern communication tools can create misunderstandings. The story unfolds in a believable manner, with a few exceptions. First, it seems out of character for Lizzy and Darcy to form a sex-after-jogging habit when she still despises him. Second, after Lizzy and Charlotte have a nice weekend at the Darcy's California estate, Lizzy rushes home

to 'help' with Lydia's elopement with a trans-gender male. Why is Lizzy urgently needed at home in this situation? Finally, alleviating the Bennett's financial problems by televising Jane and Bingley's wedding on the Eligible show felt like a stretch. But in total, this retelling is a hoot to read, as I've done more than once!

***Jane Austen Takes the South* series by Mary Jane Hathaway (2014)**, reviewed by Jane Provinsal.

There are three books (hopefully she writes the other three, pretty please!) and I read book one ***Pride, Prejudice and Cheese Grits***, and book three ***Persuasion, Captain Wentworth and Cracklin' Cornbread*** the last two summers for our region's Jane Austen July. (Book two is ***Emma, Mr. Knightley and Chili-Slaw Dogs***). Hathaway did a beautiful job of taking the essence of Jane Austen's stories and setting them in the modern South. The plots feel completely new and still wonderfully familiar. I enjoyed connecting characters and scenes with Jane Austen's novels, but it didn't feel like someone just copied Jane Austen's words. Jane Austen's works and characters are timeless and these books show that so well without losing the charm! I LOVED that Hathaway included some recipes for dishes in the books and I can't wait to try them! These books are lovely, fun, and uplifting. [Editor's note: Hathaway does not include commas before the "and" in the book titles.]

***Jane of Austin: A Novel of Sweet Tea and Sensibility* by Hillary Lodge (2017)**, reviewed by Leslie Hawley.

*Jane of Austin* is a contemporary retelling of *Sense and Sensibility* set in Austin, Texas. After their father's business scandal turns their lives upside down, Jane [Marianne] and Celia [Elinor] Woodward start to find happiness in their tea shop on Valencia Street, only to be forced out of their space by high, San Francisco rent prices. An invitation from their cousin Ian [Sir John Middleton] to test out the Austin market for a tea salon leads Jane, Celia, and Margot [Margret] to pack up their lives and Jane's tea plants for Texas. At their new home, the sisters meet the dashing, Sean Willis [Willoughby], an up-and-coming musician, and retired Marine Captain Callum Beckett [Colonel Brandon] who recently lost his leg in Afghanistan. Jane and Celia experience heartbreak and growth as they work to reestablish their lives, sisterly bond, and business in Texas.

This charming reworking of Austen's story will appeal to Janeites, foodies, and homesick Texans. Readers will delight in the recipes found throughout the book and enjoy experiencing this classic romance told from the perspectives of Jane and Callum.

***Pride, Prejudice, and Other Flavors* by Sonali Dev (2019)**, reviewed by Kirk Companion.

Synopsis: This is *P&P* set in contemporary San Francisco. It is a "gender" swap, which I enjoyed. Our Darcy is Dr Trisha Raje. Top notch neurosurgeon....only member of her family who lacks social grace. Her older brother is running for Gov. for California,

which has been a family goal since basically birth (the family patriarch reminds me of Joseph P Kennedy). Elizabeth is DJ (Darcy James--yes he is in fact named in part for Fitzwilliam Darcy) Caine. He is a fantastic chef. His beloved sister is a patient of....Dr. Trisha Raje.

What I love about the book: The gender swap and that we are inside both their heads. In one heartbreaking scene...we know why "Darcy" is in a certain location and "Elizabeth" does not.

There are many elements in P&P that are not in this book, by design. For mature audiences...Julia Wickham's crimes are many.

***Recipe for Persuasion* by Sonali Dev (2020)**, reviewed by Rosemary.

*Recipe for Persuasion* is a modern Indian-American retelling of *Persuasion*, of course. It follows *Pride, Prejudice, and Other Flavors* by the same author. One of the Raje cousins, Ashne, has been running her father's restaurant and is operating under the delusion that she has put Rico, her love of 10 years ago, into her past. Rico still remembers her rejection and her father's words that Rico has no prospects and is not of a good enough social class for someone related to Indian royalty. Rico has made it as a famous football (soccer) player in England. Things begin to get hot when Ashna as chef is paired up with Rico as the celebrity on a competitive T.V. cooking show. As can be predicted, Rico gets friendly with another contestant who knows all his soccer statistics, and her family seems to assume marriage may be in the future. This retelling gets into a particular family story and less into a faithful retelling of *Persuasion*. An emphasis is put on misunderstanding, miscommunication, and assumptions. However, Ashna's father is vain and spoiled just as in *Persuasion*. Most important of all, we find that true love withstands years and obstacles when it's given a chance again.

**The *Awesomely Austen* collection** various authors (2019-2020) by **Hachette Children's Group**, reviewed by Débora Cristina Marini.

The *Awesomely Austen* collection is a group of retellings of the six major works of Austen for children's audience (aged 8-12), published by Hachette Children's Group in the UK. Each novel is retold by a different author, who is known among the children's literature field. The collection surely has an appeal for young readers: the colors, the fabric-textured hardcover, the illustrations by Églantine Ceulemans. In the interior, each book contains information after the text of the novel regarding Austen, including a short biography of her, and how people lived in Regency England. The stories maintain the original plot, but each author entangles their own style in the narrative, and they tell how they felt working in the adaptation and how they feel towards Austen. *Awesomely Austen* proves that Austen is not only timeless, but also for all ages. In linguistic terms, for new readers getting directly to the original may be a bit difficult (especially if they are not used to reading), but since the authors already are writers for children, they

have a touch that serves the purpose of introducing Austen to this audience. The books got me captivated and curious, so I decided to make them the object of my research.

***The Other Bennet Sister* by Janice Hadlow (2020)**, reviewed by Kirk Companion.

Synopsis: Mary Bennet is featured pre-*P&P*, during *P&P*, and most importantly post *P&P*. 480 kindle pages!!

What I love about the book: I'm a big fan of Mary Bennet fan fiction. This certainly is a long, thoughtful treatment of Mary. Tis not "light, bright, and sparkling". Mary has two major champions. One is expected and highly effective. The other is unexpected and alas unable to be effective. But the support provided is moving. I was made to feel sympathy for another *P&P* character I never, no never expected to feel any sympathy for that character.

What I wasn't too fond of (phrase from Meredith of Austenesque reviews) ....\*spoiler alert\* The verbal abuse from Mrs Bennet was way toooo much. 1995 *P&P* Mrs Bennet \* 5 (I'm only half joking)...good grief!!!! Another character I feel sympathy for in *P&P* turns less and less sympathetic in this book. Not a gracious winner. Disappointing. This book might be considered the fruitcake of Mary Bennet fan fiction...quite dense.

***Unmarriageable* by Soniah Kamal (2019)**, reviewed by Michele Larrow.

*Unmarriageable* is a reworking of *Pride and Prejudice* centered on a Muslim family in Dilipabad, Pakistan over the course of a year (2000-2001). Alysba/Alys Binat is single and in her early 30s; she teaches at a private girls school. Valentine/Val Darsee meets her at the wedding festivities of friends, and he has connections to the school she works at. Darsee and Alys have great discussions about post-colonial identity, the role of language in personal identity and literature, and the role of women in Pakistani society. Showing the timelessness of *P&P*, Alys asks her students to apply its themes and questions to their lives, such as whether unmarried women can have independence, the role of family in our lives, the role money plays in marriage choices, and how challenging it can be to get to know people. Sherry Loocus gets a bit of a redemption in this telling, having a marriage to Dr. Farhat Kaleen that seems fulfilling for her. Through Qitty, Kamal explores body acceptance and oppressive standards of beauty. The food descriptions are very appealing, and I have dreams of the rose-flavored rose garden cake that Nona Gardenaar makes for Darsee's sister Juju. I have re-read this book several times with great pleasure!