

Jane Austen: Rot or Not?

The famous novelist dishes about love, life, and ... the dead.

By Bryon Cahill



CARRIN ACKERMAN/WEEKLY READER (2)

Bryon Cahill: I am sitting here with the renowned novelist and pioneer of the Romantic Age, Jane Austen. Ms. Austen, I think the first thing I should ask you is the most pressing question on all our readers' minds. Are you now or have you ever been a zombie?

Jane Austen: I beg your pardon?

Cahill: Ahem. You died nearly 200 years ago. Are you fresh from the ground now? Tell me, do you have any desire to eat brains?

Austen: What is this? A joke?

Cahill: No, ma'am. I just wanted to be sure. Had to be sure, you know. Well then, why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself?

Austen: I was born into a very well-off family in Hampshire, England, in 1775. Shall we start there? I had six brothers and one sister ...

Cahill: Wow. I'll bet it wasn't easy getting in to the bathroom!

Austen: No, you imbecile. We lived in a beautiful home, and that was not ever a problem. More important, after a brief stint at boarding school at a young age, I returned to my home and was

educated there by my many brothers, my good, reverend father, and a great library of books. I wrote stories, poems, and plays that entertained my beloved family. Those were happy times indeed. My sister, Cassandra, and I were each other's darlings, inseparable!

Cahill: And ... when did you first become a reanimated corpse?

Austen: *I am not a zombie!* I'm going to pretend you asked me a normal question and answer by telling you that I wrote my first novel at 14. It was called *Love and Friendship*, and it was an epistolary novel.

Cahill: Oh yes, that's a book composed of a series of documents, usually letters. Actually, in February, *READ* is doing an issue on epistolary writing.

Austen: That must be wonderful for you. Now, back to me. I am a great romantic at heart, and it comes through in all my writings. In my novel *Sense and Sensibility*, two sisters experience a tragedy with the loss of their father, and they inevitably learn lessons about love. In my novel *Pride and Prejudice*, a group of sisters must, through a series of dramatic occurrences, learn to love. For, you see, I have always found that a lady's imagination is very rapid—it jumps from admiration to love and from love to matrimony in a moment. I just love love. Don't you?

Cahill: Sure, love's the best, whatever. So what do you do in your free time? I mean ... when you aren't being a hopeless romantic?

Austen: Oh, I love long walks and the countryside. I pity those who have not been given a taste for nature early in life. I also love to listen and laugh at gentlemen's witty remarks, and if certain gentlemen are so inclined, I have never been known to pass up a dance with a dashing fellow! To be fond of dancing is a certain step toward falling in love.

Cahill: *(stares at her and says nothing)*

Austen: Oh, you think I am some sort of silly girl, do you?

Cahill: "Where an opinion is general, it is usually correct."

Austen: That's my line. I said that. Don't use my words against me! I demand you stop this nonsense and give me a proper interview!

Cahill: All right, calm down. No need to get your blood boiled. You aren't thinking about eating my brains *now*, are you?

Austen: *(sighs)* What is all this zombie nonsense anyway?

Cahill: Oh, well, the play in this issue is titled *Pride and Prejudice ...*

Austen: Marvelous.

Cahill: ... *and Zombies.*

Austen: Come again?

Cahill: Ha, yeah. Well, you see, the thing of it is that this very funny writer named Seth Grahame-Smith has taken your novel *Pride and Prejudice* and injected a lot of blood and guts and old-fashioned zombie action.

Austen: Oh, good heavens!

Cahill: Yeah, it's pretty cool.

Austen: I ... why, I ... in all my time as a lady, I never ... arr ... my apologies. My sore throats are always worse than anyone's. Arrrrr ...

Cahill: Arr?

Austen: Arrhhh! Brainzzzz! Arrrrhh!

Editors' Note: We apologize, but we seem to be having some sort of technical difficulty. Please tune in to www.readandwriting.com on November 6, to find out what actually transpired here.

