Reusing literature: Jane Austen's literature reimagined through TTRPG

Abstract

This paper will look into adaptations and retellings of Jane Austen and argue that tabletop role-playing games (TTRPG) reflect as well as reimagine Austen's work in a unique way, bringing out her writing style and some of her characteristic writing choices. By analysing Austen's book *Emma* and a tabletop role playing game show Dimension 20's season *A Court of Fey and Flowers*, this paper demonstrates how TTRPG helps to highlight Austen's specific style choices as well as show the limitations of using TTRPG to adapt Austen's writing.

Content

Introduction

Several of the world's longest fantasy book series, altogether with 242 novels, are the series inspired by the the tabletop role-playing game (TTRPG) Dungeons&Dragons (TSR Archive, 2023). Since literature is already such a huge part of Dungeons&Dragons, one of the biggest games in the TTRPG community, it is only natural that newer games and gamers are starting to include other types of literature.

Jane Austen's novels have had dozens of adaptations. In August 2022, subscription media service provider Dropout premiered with a new season in their TTRPG show Dimension 20, called *A Court of Fey and Flowers* (*ACOFAF*) (Hardin & Schaubach, 2022, August 3). What made *ACOFAF* so special, is that it was inspired by a game called *Good Society*[1], which is a role-playing game inspired by Jane Austen. Therefore, *Good Society* and *ACOFAF* opened a door between Austen's writing and TTRPG, bringing forth the question, how could these two different mediums work deeper with each other and what would that look like.

There are numerous of adaptations and retellings of Austen's books in many different forms. I want to argue that TTRPG can be a new way to adapt Austen's stories in a way that still keeps some of her unique style choices while also bringing in new aspects that are entertaining for both the player and the viewer. To support my point, I will look into TTRPG series *A Court of Fey and Flowers* (Hardin & Schaubach, 2022). I chose *ACOFAF* because it takes inspiration from a game system called *Good Society* which is a Jane Austen inspired role-playing game (Gordon, 2018, p. 3-4). I will look into how TTRPG can be used to reflect and reimagine Austen's writing, focusing especially on Austen's use of free indirect discourse, comedy of manners, and speech versus

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[1] *Good Society* is a Jane Austen role-playing game. The game focuses on the everyday Regency life, as portrayed in Austen's novels (Gordon, 2018). Since *Good Society*'s focus is mainly on the plot lines in Austen's stories rather than her writing style, it is not relevant for this paper. But as the main and first RPG game centralised on Jane Austen, it is still important to acknowledge *Good Society* when talking about Austen's influence on TTRPG.

descriptions. I will compare *ACOFAF* to Austen's novel *Emma* (Austen, 2007a). I chose *Emma* because it has a deep focus on all the aforementioned Austen's characteristic writing choices and it has a modern adaptation in the form of the film *Clueless* that is necessary for comparison in order to understand how Austen's writing works in different mediums. I am also using Robert P. Irvine's book *Jane Austen*, especially his comments and critiques on Jane Austen's adaptations, as well as the *Good Society* manual and *Role-Playing Game Studies* by Deterding and Zagal to get a better understanding of how literature and role-playing games work together (Irvine, 2006; Gordon, 2018; Deterding & Zagal, 2018).

Background Information

In order to understand the context and meaningfulness of the following paper, it is important to dive deeper into the background between TTRPG, literature and Jane Austen. Austen has had various adaptations made from her work, some of the most known ones being *Clueless* directed by Amy Heckerling and *Bridget Jones's diary* directed by Sharon Maguire (Heckerling, 1995; Maguire, 2001). Nevertheless, several literary critics argue that there is still a way to go before a true Austen adaptation is made. British scholar Robert Irvine writes in his book about Austen how many critics believe that since in film a lot of the attention goes towards the visuals, filmmakers have to cut down the source material, thus then losing a part of the characteristics making Austen distinguishable. Irvine also notes how different scholars believe that it is very difficult to find a cinematic equivalent to some of Austen's characteristic writing choices (Irvine, 2005, p.164).

This is why TTRPG should be taken into a consideration as a new medium for Austen's adaptations. Role-playing and reenactments have been around for decades and the world of tabletop role-play games is filled with adaptations (White et al., 2018, p. 63). The first role-playing game in its current form was Dungeons&Dragons (D&D), made in 1974 (Michaud, 2015). Since then role-

playing games, especially D&D, have become a globally known genre of tabletop gaming with hundreds of different games and systems. While direct adaptation can be tricky in TTRPG, there have been several retellings and games inspired by literature. D&D itself was inspired by two famous fantasy novels, *The Lord of The Rings* and *The Hobbit* by J.R.R. Tolkien (White et al., 2018, p. 63-64). Some other notable adaptations from literature are the games *Call of Cthulhu*, which is inspired by the story with the same name from H.P. Lovecraft and *Dark Harvest: Legacy of Frankenstein* which, as the name suggest, is inspired by *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley (Petersen, 1981; Lowson, 2011). It is clear that literature and role-playing often go hand in hand, with literature being a frequent source of inspiration in TTRPG. When the TTRPG show Dimension 20 came out with its new season *A Court of Fey and Flowers,* the world of role-playing was opened to a new wave of Austen's influence (Hardin & Schaubach, 2022, August 3). *ACOFAF* is a role-playing game mostly based on Dungeons&Dragons 5th edition rules, but what made it different was how the game master[2] Aabria Iyengar added several homebrew rules[3] and mechanics from a role-playing game *Good Society*, to make *ACOFAF* match the regency romance genre and its unique style. Since *Good Society* is inspired by Jane Austen's full bibliography, it is impossible to analyse *A Court of Fey and Flowers* without making connections to Austen (Gordon, 2018, p. 3-4).

Before moving further, it is important to explain how TTRPG and *ACOFAF* work, to understand the full context of this paper. Since Dungeons&Dragons 5e is the game system used in *ACOFAF*, it is the system explained here. D&D works as a collaborative storytelling with one player leading the main narrative (DM) and the others driving the story onwards via action. D&D is played with around 3 to 10 people. In the case of *ACOFAF*, the game was played with seven comedians that

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[2] Game master (also known as dungeon master or DM) is the person responsible for the whole game. It is the game master's responsibility to create the structure of the game as well as guide the players along the narrative.

[3] Homebrew rules is a term in TTRPG that indicates the alterations of official rules from the published rule books. It is common to change out one or several rules of the game, in order for the game to fit the players' expectations.

divided into six player characters (PCs) and one game master who is also playing all the non-player characters (NPCs). The player characters are only acting as one main character of the story and the 7th person, the game master, is responsible of playing all the secondary characters, as well as leading the overall narrative. In *A Court of Fey and Flowers*, the group sits around one table, with players on two sides and the DM on a separate side and everything is happening through the theatre of the mind (See appendix) (Crawford & Mearls, 2018; Hardin & Schaubach, 2022, August - October[4]). The show itself for the viewers is seeing the video of the people playing said game while also imagining things along with the players.

The reflection of Austen's writing in TTRPG

A significant part of Austen's writing is her use of free indirect discourse and her focus on speech and actions instead of descriptions. Free indirect discourse and speech instead of visuals are core parts of TTRPG, showing that TTRPG can reflect Austen's style while staying true to the game's form.

There are several characteristics that make Jane Austen's work unique and distinguishable. Although these characteristics are used by numerous authors across centuries, the combination of them is how readers continue to recognise Austen's writing even in present-day. Each of the characteristics have a separate relationship with TTRPG. Therefore in order to understand how Austen's style can work in role-playing games, it is essential to learn which parts of TTRPG work with Austen's style and which do not. At first it is important to recognise the aspects of TTRPG that reflect Austen's style. A significant writing choice from Austen is her use of free indirect discourse (FID). Professor Randall Stevenson states that ""Free Indirect Discourse" is the name usually given to the technique of presenting a character's voice partly mediated by the voice of the author;

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[4] The use of months August - October, instead of a specific date, indicates that said information appears throughout the whole show.

instances where, as Gerard Genette puts it, "the narrator takes on the speech of the character, or, if one prefers, the character speaks through the voice of the narrator, and the two instances are then merged""(Stevenson, 1992, p. 32). Thus, free indirect discourse is an instance where the author is writing something the character directly has said or is saying, but it is not written in direct speech. This means that FID is a third-person narration that uses first person direct speech. FID helps the reader relate to the character, as the reader can understand the story directly through the character. An example of this can be seen in Austen's novel *Emma*. *Emma* follows the titular character in her endeavour through her everyday life. The novel focuses on the society around the Woodhouse family, bringing attention to social manners and relationships of the time. Austen's usage of free indirect discourse is visible throughout the book. An example can be seen in the in the following paragraph: "but not all that either could say could prevent some renewal of alarm at the sight of the snow which had actually fallen, and the discovery of a much darker night than he had been prepared for. ´He was afraid they should have a very bad drive. He was afraid poor Isabella would not like it. And there would be poor Emma in the carriage behind. He did not know what they had best do. They must keep as much together as they could;´ and James was talked to, and given a charge to go very slow and wait for the other carriage" (Austen, 2007a, p. 103). This is a prime example of FID in *Emma*. The text is written in third person, but it is clearly Mr. Woodhouse's opinions, that he has voiced aloud to the group. The difference is that it is not lead by anything. Austen does not use for example "he said" or quotation marks to signalise typical direct speech. Instead, she uses free indirect discourse. Rather than reading direct speech between characters, the reader can feel like they are one of the characters in the room and therefore being told the story directly. This then connects the reader and the character as the use of FID makes the text more personal and immersive for the reader. Free indirect discourse can be found in all Austen's novels and it is an important aspect of what makes her work so distinct.

The use of FID in TTRPG is unavoidable and Genette's description of the character speaking

through the voice of the narrator is especially noticeable. In role-play, every thought the character has is being voiced through the narrator, as every player is the narrator for their character's actions, thoughts and words. All actions are acted out in front of everyone and the same happens with the character's internal and external thoughts. Ergo, free indirect discourse is an intrinsic part of TTRPG, making the medium suitable for Austen's works. The use of FID is constantly visible in *ACOFAF*. *ACOFAF* follows a group of archfey as they attend a fey celebrations called the Bloom. Similarly to *Emma*, the show focuses on the fey society, bringing attention to social manners, relationships and politics of the fey world. The use of FID can be seen constantly in every episode of the show. The players themselves are the narrators for their characters and therefore, in the words of Genette, the characters are often speaking through the narrators and the two instances are merged (Genette, 1980, p. 32; Hardin & Schaubach, 2022, August - October). Free indirect discourse is already built into role-playing and thus, when adapting Austen's story into TTRPG, her distinctive choice of using FID would not be lost. Furthermore, TTRPG maintains the personal connection with the viewer, keeping the story just as immersive as it is in its written form, by using FID to connect the viewer and the character. A similar usage of FID can be seen in Amy Herckerling's film *Clueless*. Scholar Irvine believes that *Clueless* is one of the only Austen adaptations that makes use of free indirect discourse by having a direct voice-over from the main character Cher and therefore letting the viewer see her misreadings of the world around her (Irvine, 2006, p. 164-165). However, since a large part of the film's focus moves to visuals, the effect of the voice-over might not be as strong as in Austen's original texts. Due to role-playing's improvised nature, in TTRPG the focus shifts back to the dialogue and actions instead of descriptions and visuals. This shows that TTRPG can connect to Austen's writing as well as make the players appreciate Austen and her writing. In order to understand what that means, it is important to look into Austen's approach towards dialogues and descriptions.

As mentioned before, Austen's novels have a heavy focus on dialogue and actions, instead of

long descriptions of the sceneries and details around the characters. In the first chapter of *Emma*, the reader is given two and a half pages of descriptions of Emma and her surroundings, which is then followed by close to five pages of dialogue (Austen, 2007a, p. 1-9). Instead of descriptions, Austen is setting up spoken word through characters as the main focus point already from the start. This is important for immersion to make the reader more engaged with the story. By having the main focus on monologues and dialogues, the reader can feel like they are part of the story rather than just reading it from an outsider's perspective. In his book about Jane Austen, scholar Robert Irvine states that "some literary critics approach film adaptations of Austen's work in a spirit of mourning for the violence necessarily done in reducing an intricate work of verbal art to source material for a visual entertainment" (Irvine, 2006, p. 164). Irvine shows how critics mean that since words and dialogues are such a vital part of Austen's style, giving room to visuals can diminish their value and take away from Austen's original intentions. Professor Emerita Jocelyn Harris in particular states that "it is very difficult to find a cinematic equivalent for the ironic narrative voice of the original texts." (Irvine, 2006, p. 164). From Harris, it can be understood that since a big part of Austen's charm is put on words and ideas that the reader cannot see, but rather feels, it is then difficult to translate them into visuals, as that has never been an important part of Austen's stories before. Even when the adaptation pays homage to Austen's use of FID, by using a voice-over like the film *Clueless*, a significant amount of attention still goes into visuals during the voice-over. This can make the story lose a part of its irony, as the visuals take up more space. Rather than following the words and the irony behind them the viewer can just follow the visuals, therefore missing out on the ironic narrative voice that is fundamental to Austen's writing. The viewer loses the type of connection to the story that the reader has. Instead of focusing on the narrative voice and the reason behind its irony, the viewer's attention is now arguably turned towards the visuals and the narration has a smaller part.

With TTRPG the narration style moves back closer to the book. Due to TTRPG's improvised

nature, it is impossible to create full visuals during the game. There are exceptions in the form of play sets and miniature figures or with editing for the audience after the real game. Nevertheless, the visuals in TTRPG only play a supporting role and are never the source of vital information, as the game is happening through theatre of the mind. In *A Court of Fey and Flowers* the visuals were clearly part of setting the atmosphere, but they were not influencing the storytelling. The set around the characters and the table in front of them was decorated according to the game and several scenes were playing around with the lighting and visuals in the background (Hardin & Schaubach, 2022, August-October). An example can be taken from the final event of the show that takes place in a theatre. When introducing the scene, the background behind the players turned into an imagine of a theatre and the lighting in the room changed to mimic theatre lighting. However, throughout the rest of the scene, neither the visuals nor the lighting are used to bring the story forward, showing that the visuals in *ACOFAF,* and in TTRPG in large, are not used as the main focus of the game, but are rather there to help the players get more immersed in the story (Hardin & Schaubach, 2022, September 28). The meaning behind the visuals is to add excitement for the players and the viewers as well as to help with the understanding of the setting. Since the storytelling in tabletop role-playing games is a collaborative effort, it is important that the players are in a similar understanding of the setting around them, especially in scenes where it can be relevant for game mechanics. But the game itself is still focusing on dialogues and actions instead of the graphics and art around it.

In conclusion, due to free indirect discourse TTRPG still has the personal connection towards the story that reading has, as the players are actively in the story and the viewers are still immersed in said story. And since it does not have a heavy focus on the visuals, the main spotlight is still on words and dialogues. In this way, TTRPG can help to reflect parts of Austen's work that make her writing unique. Since the game is mostly improvised, especially the dialogues, the players need to learn to understand the significance of words as everything they say in the story will matter and that

can make the players appreciate and understand Austen, her work around words, and her writing process better.

Reimagining Austen through TTRPG

Another important characteristic of Jane Austen's writing is her use of comedy of manners. Tabletop role-playing games can help to reimagine and strengthen Austen's use of comedy of manners, which then makes the game more enjoyable for the players and the viewers.

In addition to reflecting Austen's writing, TTRPG also reimagines Austen's work while continuing to bring out her unique characteristics. One of those elements is comedy of manners. According to The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, comedy of manners is a "witty, cerebral form of dramatic comedy that depicts and often satirizes the manners and affectations of a contemporary society. A comedy of manners is concerned with social usage and the question of whether or not characters meet certain social standards" (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2018, March 13). Meaning that comedy of manners is a narrative genre that focuses on the manners and social values in the society. The genre is mostly used in a slightly ridiculing tone and concentrates primarily on polite society (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2018, March 13). Austen is known for her use of comedy of manners (Greenberg, J. 2018, p. 171). Her novels focus heavily on the manners and social status of her characters. *Emma* is a great example of that. One of the most discernible signs of this is Austen's depiction of love. Emma is involved in three different love triangles throughout the novel, two of them being a direct result of Emma's interference, since Emma is often unaware of social cues and rules around social standards. For example, it is Emma's doing that Harriet starts to look for love from higher status men, since Emma is often oblivious to the social rules between classes of the time. Emma convinces Harriet to turn down the marriage proposal from Martin who, in terms of social hierarchy, is much more suitable

match for Harriet than Emma's choice, Mr. Elton (Austen, 2007a, p. 38-41; 47). The result of that creates several comedic moments where the truth is revealed and the characters themselves realise the strange ways in which they have misunderstood social standards and rules of the time (Austen, 2007a, p. 104-106). Austen is openly satirising the manners of affections in the British regency era and that works for the book's advantage since the misunderstandings are keeping the reader engaged, while the commentary on society makes the reader aware of the unreasonableness around social rules of the time, thus explaining the comedy in them. As shown in the example, comedy of manners in Austen's writing is often relying on secrets or characters' misunderstandings of certain situations. Neither the reader nor the characters have a full picture of the story, which is why Austen's comedic intentions are ordinarily understood at the reveal of said secrets and misunderstandings. It is then the characters understand the silliness of reading too much into certain situations and the reader understands the irony behind manners and affectations of a contemporary society and how Austen has satirised it.

With TTRPG things would work quite differently. The comedy of manners in Austen's writing often comes up through secrets and misunderstandings of private interactions. Albeit possible, private interactions are not very common during tabletop role-play. Even when the scene is happening between two characters only, the interaction happens openly around the table and the whole group can see it. An example can be taken from *ACOFAF* in a scene between two characters, the cousins Lady Chirp Featherfowl (played by Emily Axford) and Lord Squak Airavis (played by Lou Wilson). In the scene both cousins reveal personal secrets, which, if revealed to public, would affect their whole family and everyone in their court (Hardin & Schaubach, 2022, September 7). While in the story, the secrets are never fully revealed and the rest of the characters know a completely opposite story from the truth, out of character the whole cast now knows the truth. Thus, while Featherfowl and Airavis go on as normal and act like nothing has changed, Axford and Wilson are perfectly aware of who now knows their characters' secrets (Hardin & Schaubach, 2022,

August - October). This type of openness can then affect how the players approach the idea of comedy of manners. Due to role-playing, the players continue to enjoy the narrative and have a similar experience as with comedy of manners in writing, since the characters are still oblivious. But the players themselves are all aware of everything. Thus, if a character misunderstands something the player might still know the truth and that challenges the player to get more involved in the psychological state of their character. For instance, going further with the previous example, after hearing the secrets from Featherfowl and Airavis, the other players instinctively want to take advantage of that information to then create a scene where all is revealed. But since their characters were not present in the secret sharing scene, they need to find another way that could make their characters aware of said secrets. The players are required to focus deeper and be creative in the ways their characters advance in the story. This can be compared to acting, as the player needs to understand the character, specifically the character's mind, much like an actor needs to understand the character's mind in a role they are playing. Comedy of manners can therefore be used to enhance the player's enjoyment of the game. It is natural that the players would want to create a situation that is comedic or that helps to reveal the secret, but in order to connect to Austen and illustrate her usage of comedy of manners, the players have to get deep into role-playing and be actively involved in the story. Therefore, comedy of manners makes TTRPG even more immersive than it ordinarily would be, without Austen's influence. Since comedy of manners is not a standard part of TTRPG, adding it to the game can increase the value of the overall experience. Without it there is always a possibility to be involved in the psychological progress of the character, but there is not a significant need for it. The players can simply act impulsively in the moment based on what they believe their characters would do, having no urgent need to develop that further. But if the shared goal of the game is to be closer to Austen's tone and style, then understanding one's character is essential in order to create a story where the character can contribute to a narrative that satirises the manners and affectations of a contemporary society. Meaning that applying comedy of

manners into TTRPG urges the player to connect deeper with role-play, which then adds more enjoyment into the game.

In case of a streamed show like *ACOFAF*, this can then also build and add extra enjoyment to the viewer. Although the viewer does not have insight into the psychological progress the players go through when creating a character, the viewer still sees the thoughts and actions of both the players and their characters. The viewer is mainly in the spectator role. However, referring back to the first paragraph, due to free indirect discourse, the viewer is still immersed in the story. Having then the knowledge of both secrets and misunderstandings in previous scenes as well as seeing other characters work to reveal those secrets, they can appreciate and enjoy the use of comedy of manners significantly earlier than they could through reading the story. The viewer can experience the story through the characters who are oblivious, as well as see the players' side, who do know and, to a certain extent, control the story. This helps the viewer to understand the use of comedy of manners while simultaneously experiencing it in the moment. That way the viewer is aware of the irony and satirisation of manners and affectations earlier than they would have been otherwise, which can then lead to extra enjoyment when seeing that narrative unfold.

Thus, comedy of manners in TTRPG is not completely reflecting the use of comedy of manners in Austen's writing, but rather it reimagines it. Comedy of manners in Austen's writing is often relying on hidden secrets or misunderstandings, while in TTRPG it relies on secrets and misunderstandings being in the open for the players. The decided use of comedy of manners amplifies players' enjoyment of the game as well as the viewers'. Therefore, although TTRPG reimagines Austen's use of comedy of manners, it still paying homage to Austen's original style, while giving the game itself a new hook to make the role-play even more exciting.

TTRPG's movement away from Austen's writing

Lastly, some aspects of TTRPG diverge from Austen's writing style, the main ones being the randomness through dice and the unpredictability of improvisation. TTRPG disrupts Austen's writing by bringing in new, unavoidable elements from the game. Improvisation keeps TTRPG exciting and engaging for the players. So in order to keep the game appealing, TTRPG brings in a new approach to Austen, expanding Austen's work to new audiences.

While there are numerous features of TTRPG that reflect or reimagine Austen's writing, there are also parts completely moving away from Austen's style. One substantial difference in TTRPG is the randomness factor. In many tabletop role-playing games the randomness factor presents itself in the form of dice rolling, meaning that instead of the players having full control over their actions and surroundings, several actions and decisions are instead decided by the roll of the dice (Crawford & Mearls, 2018, p. 173-179). As a result of this, it becomes significantly harder to write and plan a complete story. To take an example from *Emma*, Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill were engaged before the reader meets them in the novel. But their engagement is a secret and having that secret is what spiralled a story of events leading up to the secret's reveal that eventually ties together all the loose plot lines and gives the story a conclusion (Austen, 2007a, p. 319-390). Austen decided to keep the engagement a secret, and it is not a subject that is going to change. The reader has no knowledge of the engagement prior to the reveal and the secret will be revealed exactly when and how Austen planned it. In TTRPG, that type of certainty disappears. Instead of just having a secret and revealing it when it works for the narrative, the player who is trying to hide something would have to roll for deception while other players in the scene roll for insight against them. If the insight roller then rolls higher than the deception roller, the secret comes out or a hint is given (Crawford & Mearls, 2018, p. 173-179). In *A Court of Fey and Flowers* a scene takes place between the characters Major K.P. Hob (played by Brennan Lee Mulligan) and Dellosso de la Rue (played by

Oscar Montoya). Mulligans's character Hob is trying to hide his feelings from Montoya's character, as Hob felt that his feelings were inappropriate based on the social hierarchy imbalance between the characters. Montoya then asks if he can roll insight so that Rue could see what Hob is feeling. Both players then roll for insight or deception comparatively and since Mulligan's role was lower than Montoya's, Rue gets an insight into Hob's feelings and knows that there is something there (Hardin & Schaubach, 2022, August 31). That kind of discovery immediately disrupts the story and changes what the players were planning on doing. To put it in the context of *Emma*, one such roll would have changed the whole novel. For example, when adapting *Emma* into a role-playing game, in a scene where Emma is scheming between Harriet and Frank Churchill in order to understand if Frank is really interested in Harriet, the person playing Emma (person A) would likely do an insight check. This leaves Frank's player (person B) no choice but to make a deception check against person A. If person B rolls higher than person A, then the outcome can be dictated by person B. In this case Frank's player would likely lean into the lie and pretend that Frank has feelings for Harriet or maybe even say that Frank has no feelings towards anyone. But if person A rolls higher than person B, then the truth must come out. How much of the truth is revealed depends on the differences between the rolls. Nevertheless, Emma's character would either find out that Frank is not interested in Harriet or that he is interested in someone else. On the highest roll, the truth about Frank's love towards Jane Fairfax would be revealed. This is important in order to understand how dice control the narrative and how it is moving away from Austen's originally intended plot lines. While the overall narrative is controlled by the players, the dice are still a significant part of the story. Dice can be recognised as an extra person at the table, who is responsible for several big decisions, and yet is completely unpredictable. As a result of that it is very difficult and ambitious for the DM to have a single storyline that the game will follow. Changeability is a crucial part of TTRPG and therefore a necessary step away from the traditional novel. The unpredictability is what keeps TTRPG exciting for the players and distinctive from other forms of adaptations. Therefore in

order to keep one of the game's core elements, TTRPG must move away from Austen's original plot lines.

Another part of tabletop role-playing games deviating from Austen, is the approach towards genres. TTRPG is mainly built on improvisation. Improvisation gives the players the freedom to be creative, thus making the game more appealing and engaging. Although there are rough lines in the story, created by the DM, the players and the DM improvise together in order to create the final vision that everyone is satisfied with. This means that even if the whole table starts the game with the same goal and everyone knows that the story is played in the regency romance subgenre, that might not stay true on the spur of the moment. For example in *ACOFAF*, the overall setting of the story is in the regency romance genre, with minor changes due to the story taking place in the fey realm (Hardin & Schaubach, 2022, August - October). When then role-playing an improvised scene, the player Axford accidentally brings up a comment about the New York Times, thus breaking away from the regency romance genre (Hardin & Schaubach, 2022, August 17). This demonstrates improvisation's unpredictability and how that might affect the genre. Role-playing games cannot promise to keep to a certain genre. Instead TTRPG is playing with the genre and reshaping it. While the overarching narrative is likely going to stay in one genre, it is to be expected that the game itself is going to be a combination of several, moving away from Austen's approach towards genres. Although most of Austen's works stay in the regency romance genre, her novels also consist of other genres, such as the use of the gothic genre in *Northanger Abbey* (Austen, 2007b). However, Austen was not using the gothic genre in its original form, but rather through the lens of a comic parody (Austen, 2007b, p. 113-117). It such manner, while mixing genres, Austen still had a clear vision and goal for how different genres should be presented in her novels. Through TTRPG it is impossible to promise that those genres and choices stay the same. If a player suddenly decides to add a serious gothic element to the story, that element becomes a permanent part of the game, therefore moving away from Austen's approach towards genres. Changing and mixing genres is not

directly a positive or a negative change, as it does not change anyone's immersion or enjoyment of the story. What is changes is how close the connection between TTRPG and Austen can get. Improvisation prevents TTRPG from fully reflecting Austen's writing by changing the game's approach towards genres.

Therefore, because of the randomness of the dice and the unpredictability of improvisation, it is difficult to create a story through TTRPG that stays entirely true to Austen's storylines and writing choices. Instead TTRPG adds a twist to Austen's plot lines by keeping the story open for change. Thus by keeping TTRPG's open and improvised nature, the game is still exciting for the existing players, while also bringing Austen to a new audience, who might have not had the chance to connect with her otherwise. Furthermore, TTRPG presents Austen's writing style through a unique angle, which can then invite in new players who are already familiar and fascinated with Austen's works.

Conclusion

Tabletop role-playing games and literature have inspired each other for decades (White et al., 2018, p. 63-64; Petersen, 1981). With games like *Good Society* gaining popularity in the TTRPG community, it is expected that Jane Austen's influence continues to grow and affect role-playing games further. There are various ways in which TTRPG is reflective of Austen's work while bringing out her characteristic writing choices, as well as there are aspects in Austen's writing that bring more enjoyment into TTRPG. TTRPG is able to reflect Austen's work by focusing and strengthening her use of free indirect discourse and her focus on speech and actions rather than descriptions. TTRPG demonstrates Austen's use of comedy of manners, albeit not completely in her original style. Rather, TTRPG reimagines Austen's style of comedy of manners through openness around the table, which then leads to a more enjoyable game for the players and the viewers. There

are also aspects of the game diverging from Austen. TTRPG takes a step away from Austen through the randomness factor of the dice and with improvisation's unpredictability towards genres.

In sum, it is clear that TTRPG can bring a lot to Jane Austen's work and vice versa. Interweaving gaming and Austen can bring Austen's writing in front of new audiences who might have otherwise never found their way to Austen or literature in general. *A Court of Fey and Flowers* can be seen as an example of how TTRPG and Austen's writing style can connect as well as used as inspiration for further development between them. TTRPG is a growing field with endless possibilities and a step towards literature is definitely a step towards the right direction.

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Appendix

(Hardin & Schaubach, 2022, September 7)

(Hardin & Schaubach, 2022, August 17)

(Hardin & Schaubach, 2022, October 5)