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Pride and Prejudice and the adaptation genre

ABSTRACT

*Following from the work of Thomas Leitch (2008) and Christine Geraghty (2009), adaptations that position themselves as adaptations are considered in relation to an evolving definition of an adaptation genre. In particular, *Pride and Prejudice* is regarded as a template for such a genre, a genre signified by a period setting; period music; a focus on intertitles, words, books and authors; the foregrounding of 'new' media; the inclusion of artwork in the sets or in the mise-en-scène; implicit or explicit tributes to the author; and an appeal to a female audience through the insertion of female-friendly episodes. The films *Pride and Prejudice* (1940), *Pride and Prejudice* (2005) and *Becoming Jane* (2007) are examined in relation to this concept of the genre 'adaptation'.*

KEYWORDS

adaptation
genre
Jane Austen
Pride and Prejudice
romantic comedy
biopic

George Bluestone devoted a chapter to *Pride and Prejudice* in the first full-length study on the relation of film and literature (Bluestone 1957: 117), noting that the novel provided a virtual template for a Hollywood romantic comedy.¹ This observation was continued by the author of the 1995 screenplay, Andrew Davies, who has commented in a published discussion that Austen was his favourite writer to adapt because she left no stone unturned, providing a gift to any screenwriter taking her work on (Davies 2007: 239–51).

Indeed when you think of the archetypal film adaptation, Austen, and invariably *Pride and Prejudice*, spring to mind. If there is such a thing as an adaptation genre, *Pride and Prejudice* is at the heart of it, and I suggest that it is the narrative itself that furnishes the genre with identifiable rhetorical devices or signifiers. While recent adaptation studies have moved away from

1 'To begin with, *Pride and Prejudice*, given the special attributes of its style, possesses the essential ingredients of a movie script'.

- 2 The later episodes of *Dallas* increasingly took literary titles, such as *Paradise Lost*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Decline and Fall*, *Fathers and Sons*, or variations on literary classics, such as *Phantom of the Oil Rig*. While it is difficult to draw narrative parallels to the texts referenced in the titles, the overall story of *Dallas* is not unlike that of *Pride and Prejudice*, ending with 'the second chance' offered to J.R. and Sue Ellen.

the so-called tyranny of literature in order to expand the field to popular forms such as video games and theme parks (Hutcheon 2006) or to champion non-literary influences, such as costume, sound, space and setting (Geraghty 2008), adaptations that explicitly position themselves as adaptations, as described by Thomas Leitch (Leitch 2008), demand something akin to a return to a concept of the literary, the features of which can be found in what is arguably the most adaptable of all novels: *Pride and Prejudice*.

There has been an overwhelming number of adaptations of Austen's novel since the advent of sound, fully endorsing Bluestone's observation in 1957. A select list throws open the overwhelming problem facing anyone in adaptation studies: where to stop. When does an adaptation cease to be an adaptation? Recently there have been adaptations, ranging from the allegedly respectful to the downright irreverent. Since the advent of sound, there has been at least one 'straight' *Pride and Prejudice* every decade:

- 1938 *Pride and Prejudice* (1938 TV)
- 1940 *Pride and Prejudice* (film)
- 1949 *Pride and Prejudice* (NBC)
- 1952 *Pride and Prejudice* (BBC mini series)
- 1958 *Pride and Prejudice* (BBC mini series)
- 1967 *Pride and Prejudice* (BBC mini series)
- 1979 *Pride and Prejudice* (BBC mini series)
- 1995 *Pride and Prejudice* (BBC mini series)
- 2003 *Pride and Prejudice: A Latter Day Comedy* (film)
- 2004 *Bride and Prejudice* (film)
- 2005 *Pride and Prejudice* (film).

Recently, there have been adaptations, ranging from explicit to implicit borrowings from the novel:

- *Lost in Austen*, 2008
- *Miss Austen Regrets*, 2008
- *Becoming Jane*, 2007
- *The Jane Austen Book Club*, 2007 (book: 2004)
- *Bridget Jones's Diary*, 2001 (book: 1996)
- *You've Got Mail* (1998)
- *Pretty Woman* (1990)
- *When Harry Met Sally* (1989)
- Episode of *Dallas* entitled *Pride and Prejudice* (July 7, 1989).²
- *Beauty and the Beast* (1987)

Pride and Prejudice, most readers' favourite Austen novel, also finds its way into other Austen adaptations, such as the recent Andrew Davies television adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility* (2008). While Pamela Church Gibson observes as many similarities to Emma Thompson's film adaptation as to Austen's novel (Gibson 2009), at a pivotal moment of Davies's adaptation, however, Marianne confesses to Elinor that she has agreed to marry Colonel Brandon, whereupon Elinor, echoing Elizabeth Bennet ('perhaps, if I have very good luck, I may meet with another Mr Collins in time' (359)) responds with the repost that perhaps, if she is extremely lucky, another Colonel would propose to her. The similarities do not end here. Marianne, post Willoughby, visits Colonel Brandon's house and is allowed to play on his shiny, state-of-the-art pianoforte.

Her silent admiration of the house and gardens and her softening looks to Brandon clearly echo Elizabeth's astonishment and transformation upon first viewing Pemberley. When I put this to Andrew Davies in a public conversation in Leicester, March 2009, his eyes lit up at his recollection of similarities between this sequence and his declared favourite scene in his own adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*: Elizabeth's playing of the pianoforte to an enthralled Darcy at Rosings. Davies exclaimed 'oh yes', Marianne begins to change once she sees his home for the first time and is allowed to let her fingers rove all over Brandon's impressive and very large instrument.

For me this is a quintessential adaptation moment, something we expect and look for in an adaptation that self-consciously positions itself as an adaptation. The pianoforte features in Austen's novels as a must-have object, an object of desire and a site of erotic attraction. (Witness, for instance, Frank Churchill's gift of the pianoforte to Jane Fairfax in *Emma* or Marianne's constant recourse to the pianoforte in *Sense and Sensibility*, to vent feelings she is unable to articulate in society.) In the novel and in the adaptations, the music speaks another, often forbidden, language, visually eroticized by the fingers caressing the instrument's keys.³

Rather than range across the many forms that an adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* can take, too many to mention here, I would like to think about adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* that define themselves as adaptations, in particular three major film adaptations of Austen's novel: Robert Z. Leonard's 1940 adaptation, Joe Wright's 2005 adaptation and Julian Jarrold's biopic adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice, Becoming Jane* (2007). Among others, one of the features identifying these films as adaptations is that pianoforte moment. Against the tide of criticism that seeks to extend the idea of adaptations to forms that conceal, forget or transform their literary origins,⁴ Thomas Leitch has noted generic features of an adaptation *per se* in an article, entitled 'Adaptation the Genre'. For Leitch (2008), an adaptation that conceives of itself as an adaptation interweaves the following features:

1. A period setting with a special emphasis on architecture.
2. Period music that serves to fetishize history.
3. An obsession with words, books and authors.
4. A preponderance of intertitles (collapsed with item 3 above as a single feature in my list).

Christine Geraghty, in an article responding to Leitch (Geraghty 2009), considers the quintessential essence of Joe Wright's film *Atonement* (2007) as an adaptation, and adds to the list of what constitutes the genre of adaptation, the foregrounding of media. Geraghty persuasively argues that media is made prominent via *Atonement's* intertextual references to other films, such as *Brief Encounter* (1945) and *The Third Man* (1949), and to the film's preoccupation with the typewriter which gives way to the television studio interview in the film's closing moments. In Austen adaptations, I argue, this foregrounding of media which serves to call attention to the film as an adaptation is most notable in references to other Austen adaptations as well as in the foregrounding of the new technologies of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, in particular, the pianoforte.

To this list I would add a sixth feature of the adaptation par excellence or quality of the genre: the use of pictures and other art forms throughout the films, including paintings, sculpture and architecture, appealing to the

3 This image becomes the subject, of course, of Jane Campion's *Piano*, a film dependent upon the traditions of the nineteenth-century novel, beginning with Austen's repressed heroines.

4 Following Linda Hutcheon (2006) in this tradition is Leitch (2007).

- 5 The setting, music, intertitles, books, referencing to the author and use of pictures operate as quotations from 'approved authorities'.
- 6 The appeal to the feminine, through female-friendly episodes, is a type of 'exuscitatio'. See Lanham (1969).
- 7 The foregrounding of media operates as analogy to the adaptation itself.

collective unconscious understanding that what we are watching is based on art. Adaptations have gone by a number of names in the popular press, one of the first being 'picturization', and pictures are undoubtedly a prominent feature in the adaptations of Austen's novels. This leads me to another prominent feature of the adaptation qua adaptation: the makeover of the author to screen. Austen, who is arguably the first to write the classic teenpic makeover in *Emma* which lent itself so beautifully to film in the teenpic, *Clueless* (1995), following from Bluestone's observation of her adaptability to film, provides us with an allegory for adaptation itself: the makeover, not just of the book, but of the author too, which needs to be re-represented on screen for a new audience. And in the case of *Pride and Prejudice*, it is increasingly the case that Jane Austen is made over as Elizabeth Bennet.

My final ingredient to throw into the cauldron of adaptation the genre is the appeal to female audiences – a feature of the genre, like historical fiction and 'chic lit', which, until recently, may have been partially responsible for its banishment from serious academic critical scrutiny. Adaptation the genre, or the screen makeover of a literary text, self-consciously appeals primarily to women, signalled by female-friendly narrative additions, such as the insertion of a bathing or semi-dressed man, a trip to the shops or an additional episode in which the female upstages the male in a normally male-centred activity. Significantly, almost all these features can be traced back to *Pride and Prejudice*.

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE* AND THE ADAPTATION GENRE

- A period setting and obsession with grand architecture (reflected in the houses of *Pride and Prejudice*, culminating in Pemberley).
- The foregrounding of media (as instanced in the playing of the pianoforte in *Pride and Prejudice*).
- The use of pictures – paintings, sculpture and architecture – either in the background or recreated through *mise-en-scène* (in *Pride and Prejudice* this is evident in the gallery in Pemberley and the portraits of Darcy).
- Implicit or explicit tributes to the author (in *Pride and Prejudice* this takes the form of the omniscient narrator often sharing Elizabeth's perceptions).
- Appeal to a feminine audience (reflected in Austen's writing self-consciously for 'ladies').

These features operate like rhetorical devices, 'apomnemynosis' (quotations from approved authorities),⁵ 'analogy' (offering parallel examples)⁶ and 'exuscitatio' (emotional utterances that move the viewer to a like feeling).⁷ It seems to me that these features become increasingly prominent in adaptations that explicitly position themselves as adaptations.

The pressbook for Robert Z. Leonard's *Pride and Prejudice* identifies the film as a 'picturization of Jane Austen's widely read novel' (pressbook 1940), and the 1940 film starring Greer Garson and Laurence Olivier (based on the theatrical adaptation by Helen Jerome) is at a far remove from the adaptations that followed. Nonetheless, the cover of the 1940 pressbook references all seven of these features, including:

- Period music and the foregrounding of media are figured in the orchestra and conductor pictured at the bottom of the cover.
- Jane Austen's book, *Pride and Prejudice* and the author's name are both prominently featured on the left-hand side of the central couple.

- The emphasis on pictures and 'period' detail in the elaborate nineteenth-century costumes are encapsulated by the drawing of Elizabeth and Darcy in a dramatic dance embrace, an unmistakable intertextual reference to *Gone with the Wind*.
- The guarantee that the film is female friendly is explicitly made in the slogan 'Five love hungry beauties in search of HUSBANDS!'.

It is tempting to read the adaptation as a nostalgic tribute to the Edenic England worth fighting for during the war years, as Ellen Belton argues in her contribution to Macdonald and Macdonald's collection, *Jane Austen on Screen* (Belton 2003). The changes made to the narrative in the film – in particular, Mr Collins's transfer of profession from clergyman to opportunistic librarian (to placate the film's censors), the excision of the visit to Pemberley and Lady Catherine's test of Elizabeth's worthiness, to ensure that Elizabeth is marrying Darcy for love not money – are worth unpacking. While the reason given for the transformation of Lady Catherine from a vulgar snob to a sweet old lady is that the actress playing her, Edna May Oliver, refused to play a villain, this rewriting of the story about the need to marry out of love not money may have been inserted to soften the perception of Britain for a US audience, in anticipation of an American alliance with Britain in World War II (Brosh 2008: 22). Significant for its omission is the visit to Pemberley. In 1940, the cost of the set is obviously a factor in its omission, but so is the need to paint a *positive* picture of the British for Americans on the verge of joining forces in the War. Censoring any mention of Elizabeth's potential materialism ('to be mistress of Pemberley might be something!') re-creates her unequivocally as an idealist rather than realist, bent on love rather than money. The film rewrites the novel to expose the hypocrisy of the British class system, democratizing Darcy in his gradual conversion by Elizabeth to accepting a more equal society. The film focuses on the breakdown of class barriers, and the consumerism and advancement of the middle classes. Significantly, it opens with the girls shopping, a possible clue to their upward mobility (Brosh 2008: 21). Typical of films of the 1930s and 1940s, during a period in which materials are scarce, the movie asks us to look at the costumes rather than through them (Bruzzi 1997). This blatant appeal to a feminine audience is further underlined in the interpolation of the archery contest at Netherfield in which Elizabeth upstages Darcy at archery, indicating that, of the two, she is the more capable one of achieving a 'bull's-eye'.

However, the film is marketed as a comedy at the expense of the women, with the famous opening line of the novel translated in the adverts as 'Bachelors Beware' and 'FIVE LOVE HUNGRY BEAUTIES IN SEARCH OF **HUSBANDS**' (Pressbook 1940). The women are visually ridiculous in their parodic *Gone with the Wind* style costumes, especially when the Bennet females fill a room to capacity, resembling a flock of squawking birds. At a time when the young male population was at risk, the women are seen to be threatening in their domination, appropriating the role of the male suitor in their outspoken quest for a partner. Peculiarly, the pressbook expresses considerable pride in the accuracy of the costumes; the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Research Department consulted *Ackermann's Repository of Art and Fashion*, 40 volumes outlining English fashion, furnishing and architecture from 1809 to 1829. Claims to accuracy are undermined by the sweeping statements about the novel in the pressbook, erroneously referring to Elizabeth as the eldest of the five sisters. Elizabeth is distinguished from the others in that she appears more knowing than her siblings, often seen gazing out of a window, a reflection of both her objectification by the camera (framing her as in a painting) and her transitional status

- 8 For a discussion of the use of the window in relation to the 'picturesque' in Leonard's film, see H. Elisabeth Ellington (1998).



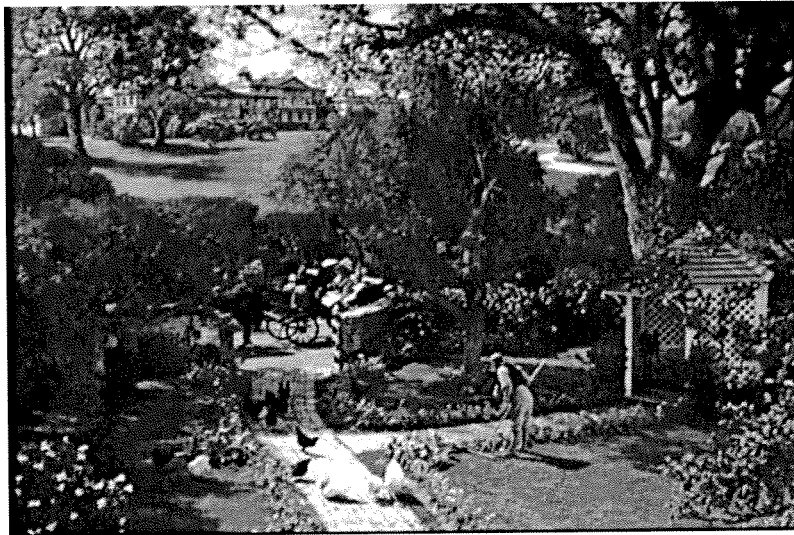
Figure 1: Screengrab from Robert Z. Leonard, *Pride and Prejudice*, 1940.

between inside her parental home and outside in the marriage market, between being a daughter and being a wife.⁸

As the film commences with us looking at Elizabeth, as if she is a figure in a painting, by the end of the movie, she is pictured from behind looking out of the window, like Rapunzel waiting for her knight in shining armour to rescue her from her prison house. The film subtly moves from picturing the women as dominant and confident to solitary and vulnerable, as the film implies that these women – like the country they inhabit – are not really capable of coping on their own. Similarly, given the period in which it was produced, the



Figure 2: Screengrab from Robert Z. Leonard, *Pride and Prejudice*, 1940.



9 I am grateful to Natalie Hayton for drawing my attention to the *mise-en-scène* in this sequence.

Figure 3: Screenshot from Robert Z. Leonard, *Pride and Prejudice*, 1940.

representation of the English landscape would touch a chord. Lady Catherine's Rosings, for instance, has all the hallmarks of a nineteenth-century painting, in particular, the famous Constable country houses, such as Admiral House (1820–25).⁹

Importantly, we gaze at the house through the eyes of Elizabeth. The *mise-en-scène* draws our eye on a diagonal axis, from the poultry at the bottom of the frame to the servant, to the carriage of the aristocracy, climaxing in the great house on the top of the hill. The past is painted for us, like a nineteenth-century painting with a visual layering of classes working together in perfect harmony. The screenplay was co-written by novelist Aldous Huxley, best known for the novel *Brave New World* (1932), and his name signifies quality in line with the marketing of the film as 'authentic' Austen. The focus in this adaptation is on the women who dominate virtually every frame and indeed are 'pictured' by the camera as objects to look at.

Surprisingly another 'straight' mainstream film does not come along for 65 years, perhaps due to the dominance and popularity of television adaptations. Rather than positioning the women to be looked at, this time, we look through them, or more particularly through the point of view of Elizabeth Bennet. Joe Wright's recent film, typical of postmodern adaptations, is as much dependent upon previous television versions of *Pride and Prejudice* as it is on Austen's novel. Darcy, played by Matthew MacFadyen, takes a secondary position to Keira Knightley whose star status arguably reduces the character of Elizabeth to a star vehicle.

Screenwriter Deborah Moggach has admitted that her screenplay was doomed to be overshadowed by Andrew Davies's 1995 version and responded to this pressure by setting the film in the earlier period, the late eighteenth century, at the time in which the novel was first drafted (opposed to the time of its publication in the early nineteenth century). Referring to her screenplay as 'the muddy hem version', Moggach wanted to emphasize the Bennets' poverty and the real sense of destitution and dependence haunting all the sisters (Moggach 2008). The film is written entirely from Elizabeth's point of view, made apparent

in the opening sequence in which a steadicam shot literally follows Elizabeth into and through Longbourn. In contrast to Leonard's Elizabeth who is frequently pictured looking out of a window, this Elizabeth is initially seen looking in from the outside, culminating in her, towards the end, looking disdainfully at the newly married Wickham and Lydia from inside, gazing out.

Even when she's not present, we see from her point of view, as in the scene in which Netherfield is being closed down through the sequence in which



Figure 4: Screengrab from Joe Wright, *Pride and Prejudice*, 2005.



Figure 5: Screengrab from Joe Wright, *Pride and Prejudice*, 2005.

the wiggled servants drape white sheets over all the furniture, symbolizing the shrouding of the place and the death knell to the hopes of the young girls, so dependent upon the life of that great house for their happiness. Particularly striking in this adaptation is Mr Collins's proposal. As Moggach has noted, Elizabeth is deserted, one by one by her family, like a lamb to its slaughter. Her father is the last to, knowingly, turn his back on Elizabeth, and the sense of abandonment is keenly expressed in the horror on Elizabeth's face. After the refusal is announced to mother and sisters, the camera fleetingly pauses on Mary's wistful expression, to suggest that she, unhesitatingly, would have issued a 'yes' in Elizabeth's place. On hearing the news of Elizabeth's refusal, Donald Sutherland's Mr. Bennet soberly delivers the line 'I will never see you again if you do' [marry Collins]. The close-up on Sutherland, with his back to the women, shows a face momentarily full of despair, as if the final opportunity of saving his family has been sacrificed for the love of his daughter. In this way, Wright, almost imperceptibly, inserts back stories for the other characters in the film, so that we avoid accepting them at face value alone.

The emotion of the characters is clearly more apparent than in the 1940 adaptation and the costumes, unlike in the 1940 film, function to be looked through rather than to be looked at. In addition to the lovers' reunion at dawn, with Darcy in an open shirt reminiscent of Colin Firth's 1995 dripping Darcy, Elizabeth's costumes function to reveal rather than conceal the shape of the actress, most obviously in the first proposal sequence, set in a folly outside Rosings in the pouring rain.

Elizabeth's unacknowledged attraction to Darcy is clear when he first helps her into the carriage outside Netherfield; he holds onto her hand for slightly longer than absolutely necessary, and this first touch clearly registers on Elizabeth's face. During their dance at Netherfield, the shot of the crowded dance floor glides into a shot of Darcy and Elizabeth, all of a sudden dancing alone in the room. Similarly, during the visit to Pemberley, Elizabeth's aunt and uncle seem to vanish, leaving Elizabeth alone to confront Darcy and to make her own way back to Lambton. Wright pours on the romantic with both lower and upper case 'r's. Prior to the trip to Derbyshire, Mary utters the romantic aphorism, 'What are men compared to rocks and mountains', echoed by Mr Gardiner just before the tourists arrive at Pemberley. The external shots

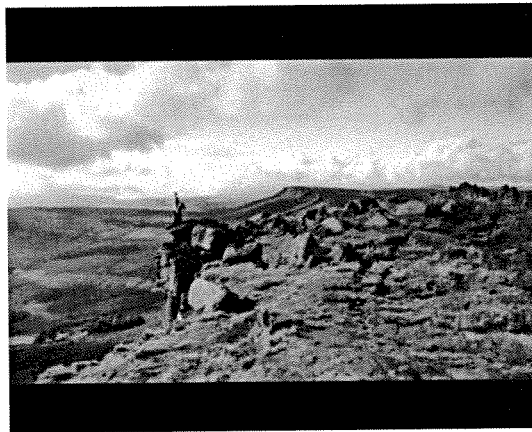


Figure 6: Screenshot from Joe Wright, *Pride and Prejudice*, 2005.

of Derbyshire, in particular Elizabeth positioned precariously on a craggy rock, wind blowing her garments, invite comparison with a score of Romantic paintings

The film oscillates between these Romantic exteriors, Hogarthian interiors, especially the Bennets', complete with dog, hunched over their heaped breakfast table, to increasingly mouth-watering country houses: Basildon Park, Berkshire (Netherfield), Burghley House, Stamford (Rosings) and Chatsworth House (Pemberley), the latter often thought to be the inspiration for Darcy's estate. In this version, instead of looking at a portrait of Darcy, Elizabeth finds Darcy's bust in the midst of a sculpture gallery, which simultaneously evokes erotic awakening, through the sexual posturing of the figures, and mourning; the place, as Deborah Moggach has observed, resembles a mausoleum. Elizabeth is caught by Darcy unintentionally eavesdropping on Georgiana, and their awkward meeting is kept brief, possibly so as not to enter into competition with the famous 1995 rendition of this chapter. The inevitable intertextual reference to the 1995 meeting of Darcy in a wet diaphanous shirt, as mentioned previously, is postponed until the climax of the 2005 version, with Darcy and Elizabeth meeting at dawn, both restless after the visitation of Lady Catherine, and with Darcy in an open shirt and flowing overcoat as mentioned above, a clear nod to Firth's Darcy's famous state of undress.

Like the 1940 film, this production claims authenticity while breaking the illusion at the same time; while the fabrics and the interiors seem very much 'true' to the late eighteenth century, it is unlikely that a woman of this period could wander around so freely without a hat, or meet a suitor at dawn wearing a dressing gown. It is also unlikely that Mr Bennet would have Donald Sutherland's perfect teeth. Although we can forgive these inevitable anachronisms, the film's final impression is marred by the 'alternative ending' in which a post-coital Elizabeth and Darcy discuss what Darcy should call Elizabeth, now that they are married: 'You may only call me Mrs Darcy when you are completely, perfectly, and incandescently happy'. While American audiences would be reaching for the sick bowl, British viewers, undoubtedly, found this a very satisfying film adaptation, with Keira Knightley, with her unusual features and believable youthfulness, a very convincing Elizabeth. In keeping with the attributes of the genre, pictures play a key role in anchoring the film within the genre, in addition to referencing the 1940 film.

Jane Austen's own 'picturization' (to borrow the term for adaptation used so prominently in the 1940 pressbook) of her art is famously 'the little bit (two inches wide) of ivory' and intriguingly within *Pride and Prejudice* is the miniature of Darcy that captures Elizabeth's attention at Pemberley; Elizabeth never replies to Mrs Gardiner's question 'But, Lizzy, you can tell us whether it is like or not' (269) which we could rephrase in adaptation terms to be: 'how faithful is the adaptation to the original?' A qualitative assessment of the miniature is tantalizingly withheld from the reader, and this picture is replaced in the narrative for a larger version which Elizabeth initially glances at, then returns to with an intensified regard. In the novel, the return to the picture mirrors Elizabeth's own change of mind about Darcy, and reflects the significance attached to second impressions in the novel as a whole. The novel, initially entitled *First Impressions*, is essentially concerned with second impressions, a revision, or even, adaptation, of an original impression. Austen literally asks us to look at the larger picture, a complicated, perhaps impossible task for the reader of a declared miniaturist. Both film adaptations reflect upon themselves as pictures, both self-consciously framing their subject through the device of the window and offering the viewer pictures inspired by famous paintings of the nineteenth

century and, possibly, inspired by the pictures in the novel itself. Famously, Davies's adaptation literally exchanges the scene in which Elizabeth gazes at the picture to the picture of Darcy himself, replacing the copy with the real and superior figure, fresh from his dip in the pond.¹⁰

Both the 1940 and the 2005 films contain the seven signifiers of what I have identified as an 'adaptation par excellence': a period setting; 'historical' music; an obsession with books and words; the foregrounding of new media, through the pianoforte and quotations to other adaptations; the use of pictures; implicit references to the author; and finally, the unashamed appeal to a female audience. The final two can be made manifest through a comparison with the most recent mainstream adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*: the Austen biopic *Becoming Jane* (2007).

Like Shakespeare, given the very little we know about Austen, it is revealing how so many readers and screenwriters have attempted to join the numbers and fill in the colours of Austen's life. Since the very first adaptation, there has been a desire to read her novels as a means of finding out something about the author, a taboo up until recently in English studies, but a practice which is undernably present in adaptations of Austen's work.

As mentioned previously, at the beginning of Leonard's 1940 adaptation, Elizabeth is positioned looking out of the window framed by a wreath of lush flowers. The *mise-en-scène* serves to objectify her, framing her as a piece of art, positioning her for us to look at. In the latter half of the film, Elizabeth is frequently positioned looking out of the window, metaphorically being inside wishing to be out, with the spectator now looking with her rather than at her. Almost imperceptibly, the focus has changed, and the viewer is now looking through Elizabeth's eyes, as if she has undertaken the position of omniscient narrator. Joe Wright's 2005 film begins, in contrast, with Elizabeth looking inside the window, set apart from her family, in the position of an outsider looking in. However, by the end of the film, she is on the inside looking out. The film begins with a steadicam shot following Elizabeth up the garden path to Longbourn, enabling Elizabeth to lead us into her life, as if it is our own. She introduces the film by reading a novel, closing the book as she draws near her home, with a sigh of satisfaction, having just reached its conclusion. Close inspection reveals the book to be *Pride and Prejudice*, a witty acknowledgement of the film's source and status as an adaptation by subtly employing the

10 As a postscript to the analysis of the portrait, the painting used as a prop in the 1995 adaptation sold for an unanticipated £12,000 at Bonham's years after the series was released. ('Darcy Portrait' 2009).



Figure 7: Screengrab from Joe Wright, *Pride and Prejudice*, 2005.

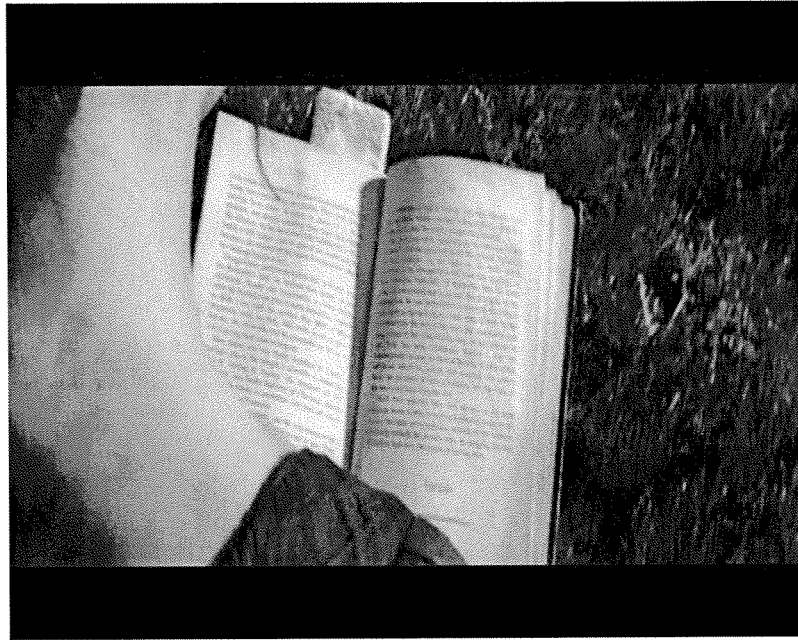


Figure 8: Screengrab from Joe Wright, *Pride and Prejudice*, 2005.

device of the book opening into the film and a sly intimation that Elizabeth, like Austen, is in command of her own story.

Both film adaptations invite connections to be drawn between Jane Austen and her central character, implicitly 'reading' the novel autobiographically. While the famous first line is absent from Joe Wright's 2005 film, we are told on the special feature of the DVD that Elizabeth and Jane's relationship clearly echoes that of Jane and her sister Cassandra. Whether this be true, the film does encourage us to replace Jane Austen's narrative voice, with Elizabeth's eyes, and the film is dominated by half face shots of Keira Knightley's eyes, referencing Darcy's attraction to Elizabeth's 'fine eyes' while allowing the viewer to see things through these same eyes.

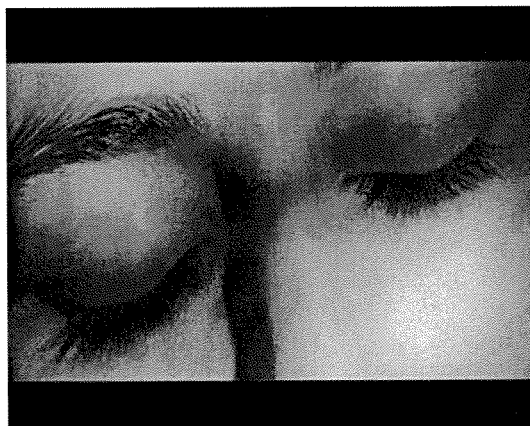


Figure 9: Screengrab from Joe Wright, *Pride and Prejudice*, 2005.

The TV adaptations, likewise, invite such a comparison with both the 1980 and 1995 adaptations, with both giving versions of Jane Austen's famous opening line to Elizabeth. In 1980, the line is divided between Charlotte Lucas and Elizabeth, while in 1995 Elizabeth speaks it in response to her mother's premature scheming to marry Mr Bingley to one of her daughters. Elizabeth speaks the line, a line that could be attributed to Mrs Bennet, sharing the ironic perception of Austen's narrator in mockery of Mrs Bennet's ambitions.

The collapse of the author with the heroine reaches its ultimate cinematic representation in *Becoming Jane* (interestingly followed by a less flattering portrait of the author in the television adaptation *Miss Austen Regrets* (2008)). *Becoming Jane* is every inch an adaptation, and almost provides a cinematic textbook for the genre as identified here. Following from the success of *Shakespeare in Love* (1995), Jane Austen, like Shakespeare, has now received the movie star makeover.¹¹ Hollywood's need for an 'author' will be viewed in relation to the previous adaptations of the novel which often collapse the voice of the omniscient narrator into the character of Elizabeth Bennet.

The film 'rewrites' Jane as both Lizzie (in her initial repugnance to the man she eventually loves) and Lydia (in her decision to run away with Tom). Typical of an adaptation qua adaptation, the film pays tribute to its own genre: the men stripping off and jumping into the lake references both *A Room with a View* (1985) and, of course, the 1995 BBC *Pride and Prejudice*. Jane's triumph at cricket echoes Greer Garson's Elizabeth's and Gwyneth Paltrow's Emma's victories at archery (*Emma*, 2006), providing the obligatory female-friendly interpolation. The farm animals recall the 'rustic' scenes in the Joe Wright adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* (2005), while there is a striking resemblance between Jane's cousin Eliza De Feuillide, played by Lucy Cohu, and Jennifer Ehle's Elizabeth of 1995 – in fact Cohu looks like Ehle 10 years on. As well as an adaptation of Austen's novel, the film is also an adaptation of Jon Spence's biography of the author, *Becoming Jane Austen*, in which Spence contends that *Pride and Prejudice* was inspired by the novelist's relationship with Tom Lefroy, the Irish nephew of Jane Austen's friend and neighbour. But while Jane is the reserved and proud Darcy figure, Lefroy, we are told, is more like Lizzie: he had five sisters to look after (and therefore could not afford an unconnected wife), his mother's maiden name was Gardiner and, rather tenuously, the name 'Bennet' comes from Tom's favourite novel, *Tom Jones* (Spence 2003). For Spence, *Pride and Prejudice* is on one level a type of lovers' game, playfully littered with references to Tom and his family. According to Spence 'Tom Lefroy did not dwindle into insignificance: he found his natural place in her imagination, and remained there for the rest of her life' (Spence 2003: 116).

Biopics of authors are generally structured like a *Bildungsroman*, a portrait of the artist as a young person, concentrating on the events leading up to success and ending with the price that success brings. The emphasis is on the dawning of authorship, the 'becoming' the person we know as the author. The Romantic notion that art is inspired by love is also central to films depicting the life of an author. As Steve Neale explains, other common features include a conflict with a given community and prevalence of montage and flashback sequences, trial scenes and/or a performance in public (Neale 2000: 60). *Becoming Jane* fits neatly into this template. The adaptation

11 The parallels between *Becoming Jane* and *Shakespeare in Love* extend to the DVD covers: both feature the lovers dominating the top of the picture with the tiny figures of the authors positioned at the bottom.

- 12 For a discussion of the intertitles, see Burt (2008).



Figure 10: Screengrab from Julian Jarrold, *Becoming Jane*, 2007.



Figure 11: Screengrab from Julian Jarrold, *Becoming Jane*, 2007.

formula is even more prevalent in this film: the emphasis on the period setting and music; an obsession with words, and intertitles (from the outset with Jane's own writing introducing the film);¹² the foregrounding of other adaptations and the pianoforte (the opening shot with Jane's banging on the piano keys enacting both sexual and artistic frustration); the reading of the novel as autobiographical; the ultimate appeal to the feminine; and the references to pictures.

Notable is the way that the *mise-en-scène* frames Jane and her family members in the corroding mirror in her bedroom, reminiscent of ageing portraits

of female writers, such as the famously cracked pictures of the Brontës. Tom LeFroy (James McAvoy) is also framed in the style of Romantic portraiture and as an object of the female gaze. The last we see of him as Jane's lover is a forlorn figure, framed by the carriage window, becoming smaller and increasingly insignificant as the carriage draws away.

George Bluestone in his analysis of the 1940 film of *Pride and Prejudice* dwells on the cinematic techniques of the novel (rather than the film), commenting,



Figure 12: Screenshot from Julian Jarrold, *Becoming Jane*, 2007.

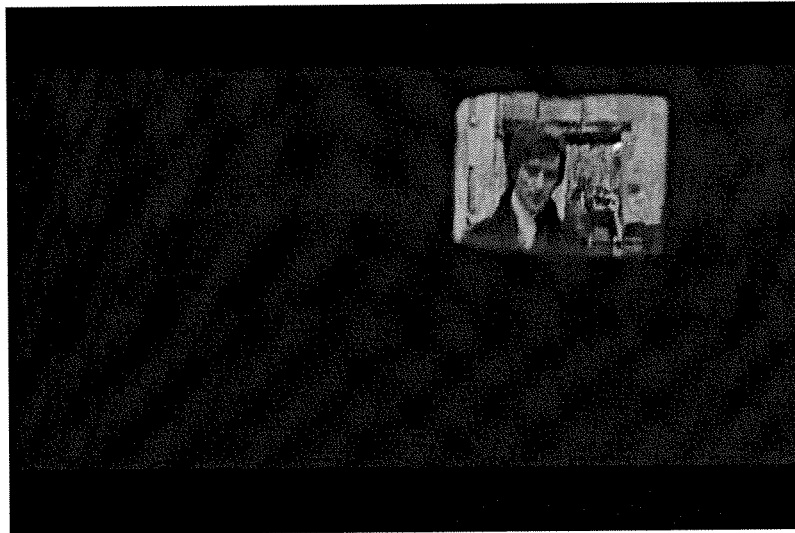


Figure 13: Screenshot from Julian Jarrold, *Becoming Jane*, 2007.

The world of *Pride and Prejudice* meets the requirements of Hollywood's stock conventions and, at the same time, allows a troubling grain of reality to enter by the side door. It depicts a love story which essentially follows the shopworn formula of boy meets girl; boy loses girl; boy gets girl. It presents rich people in elegant surroundings. It seems to allow for social mobility. Instead of the shop girl marrying the boss's son, a daughter of the gentry marries an aristocrat. It offers an individual solution to general problems. Good looks and luck are the touchstones which make it possible for Elizabeth and Jane both to marry for love and improve their station. If wickedness is not punished, virtue at least is rewarded. Neither the upper-class nor the middle-class worlds are all white or all black. Darcy is just as ashamed of Lady Catherine as Lizzy is of her mother. Above all, the story has a happy ending.

(Bluestone 1957: 114)

Bluestone's chapter on the film of *Pride and Prejudice* calls attention to the adaptability of Austen's novel in much the same way as I have tried to uncover key signifiers of the adaptation genre: for Bluestone, the features include the general observation of events through Elizabeth's eyes (Bluestone 1957: 122), the invitation by the author to 'paint' what is not there (124) and the overall structure, which Bluestone observes 'resembles a shooting-script' (121). If there is such a genre as 'adaptation', then it seems to me that Austen's novel is a foundation from which it springs, providing the genre with what have become instantly identifiable signifiers, signifiers that constantly point to the artistic and/or literary origins of the work. If we are to think of adaptations that self-consciously signal themselves as adaptations, then *Pride and Prejudice* provides a textbook for that genre, ultimately bringing back something akin to a return to the literary in this area of adaptation studies.

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