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“TILL THIS MOMENT I NEVER KNEW MYSELF”: ADAPTING *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*

Abstract

Adaptations are always a matter of hard choices: the scriptwriter and the director have their interpretations of what an adaptation should be, very much like every reader has his/her own vision of the characters and the plot, and very rarely do the two visions coincide. This paper was inspired by the on-going debate amongst Jane Austen fans on Internet forums as to which adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* is more faithful to the 1813 novel. The main two contenders appear to be the 1995 BBC mini-series starring Jennifer Ehle and Colin Firth, and Joe Wright's 2005 film with Keira Knightley and Matthew Macfadyen in the lead roles. This paper will attempt to identify the cardinal points of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* to illustrate that both the 1995 and 2005 adaptations are faithful to the original. Furthermore, it shall look at the strengths and weaknesses of the mini-series and the feature film as genres, before analysing the respective strengths and weaknesses of the adaptations themselves. The paper will suggest that Wright's film fully captures “the spirit” of Austen's novel through its masterful use of point of view and symbolism in less than half the time the 1995 mini-series does.

Keywords: Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, adaptation fidelity, BBC, Joe Wright, symbolism

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a great novel must be in want of an adaptation, or several in the case of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. According to the Jane Austen Society of North America, from the inception of cinema to the present, the novel has been adapted nine times, beginning with the 1940 film starring Laurence Olivier and ending with 2016's *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (JASNA). In her study, *Screen Adaptations: Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice": The Relationship between Text and Film*, Deborah Cartmell adds an earlier BBC adaption from 1938 to the list. This adaptation appears not to have been archived, and thus did not "make a long-lasting impact" (6). Austen's novel has also been appropriated or loosely adapted by several films and television series over the same period, rendering a complete listing of these appropriations a matter of critical debate, and not the subject of this paper.

What becomes clear from fan comments on various forums on the Internet¹ is that Austen fans would ideally prefer a word-for-word translation from the novel to the screen, an unabridged video edition, if one will,² starring a cast of their own choice. As their desired direct page-to-film translation is unfeasible in terms of visual dynamic, even in a mini-series format, they have a plethora of existing adaptations to compare against each other, sparking debates not only amongst fans on cyber forums but also amongst literary and film scholars. Fan comments on various Internet forums suggest that two of the adaptations have particularly captured the imaginations of Austenites and met with their general approval. These are the 1995 BBC/A&E mini-series adaptation, scripted by Andrew Davies, directed by Simon Langton, starring Jennifer Ehle and Collin Firth, and the 2005 film *Pride & Prejudice*, scripted by Deborah Moggach, directed by Joe Wright, starring Keira Knightley and Matthew Macfadyen. The vast majority of commentators discussing the merits and demerits of each adaptation attempt to apply the fidelity criterion to their value judgments, tending to generally consider the 1995 mini-series as the more faithful to the spirit of Austen's original, whilst they summarise the 2005 film as beautiful, but not Austen.

This paper wishes to argue that the fans' general dismissal of Wright's film is too harsh a judgment: Wright's film is just as faithful to Austen's original as is

¹ This paper was inspired by the debates on the forums on the *Internet Movie Database* ("Pride & Prejudice (2005)"; "Pride and Prejudice") and *The Jane Austen Film Club* ("Pride and Prejudice 1995 vs 2005 (vs 1980 vs 1940)").

² As a point of comparison, the unabridged Audible Audio Edition of *Pride and Prejudice* has a listening time of 11 hours and 35 minutes (amazon.com).

Langton's mini-series, when one takes into consideration the limitations that a feature film has – notably a limited running time – and the complexity of Austen's narrative. Indeed, there are elements of Wright's film that are artistically more effective narrative solutions than what Langton achieved in three times the running time. Another aspect that should be commended is Moggach's compression of the novel into a film, running just under 120 minutes, which contains all the vital plot elements for Austen's narrative to be presented in full. In order to illustrate these points, the paper will look at three major sequences in the film³ and analyse them alongside both Austen's original and how the same scenes were adapted to the screen by Davies in the mini-series.

These cyber debates, however, bring to the fore the old question of which elements render an adaptation successful, and specifically raise the question whether it is at all feasible to compare a mini-series, which has a running time of approximately 300 minutes, to a feature film, which is expected to attain the same level of fidelity in a generally accepted running time of 90 to 120 minutes. An analogy in literary terms would be attempting to compare, for example, Kate Chopin's novella *The Awakening* with her short story "The Story of an Hour." One could, of course, make a comparison with respect to theme, setting, perhaps even style, but the essence of the novella, or novel, and the short story greatly differ with respect to the possibilities or the limitations of each prose genre. For example, the novel, like the mini-series, can, besides the main plot, have several subplots evolving simultaneously. It can introduce and develop a multitude of characters – round, flat, and stock; present several points of view, develop ideas, symbols, themes. The short story, on the other hand, like the film, must compress all of the aforementioned elements in search of the best way to convey the author's desired message. It would therefore be more logical to generically compare the 1940 and the 2005 film adaptations with respect to "fidelity," and the 1980 and 1995 mini-series likewise, rather than attempt the cross-comparison between that which can only be considered two separate genres within the medium of film. However, despite being an enjoyable film, the 1940 black-and-white film is too loose an adaptation to qualify as *Pride and Prejudice* but in name. Similarly, the 1980 mini-series is most frequently

³ This paper will only consider the original UK release of *Pride & Prejudice*, which ends with Mr Bennet asking for any more suitors to be admitted to him. The US release ends with the newly-wed Darcys in dishabille on the grounds of Pemberly, declaring their joy and happiness. This supplementary ending appears to be the offending element of the film for most fans along with Elizabeth's "Your hands are cold" when accepting Darcy's second proposal.

dismissed due to the stage-play atmosphere, a characteristic of the early BBC mini-series, though the script by Fay Weldon has fans who consider it to be the most faithful adaptation.

Indeed, many critics have noted that the sheer length and complexity of "classic" novels are more conducive to the mini-series format where "every facial tic and verbal nuance could be captured, lovingly, in an eight-hour adaptation, every gasp, every sigh, every wink of the eye" (Welsh xvii), possibly rendering the adaptation faithful to the original, which appears to be the desire of most fans. Yet, even the mini-series is unable to capture everything "lovingly," let alone a feature film.

It is thus the task of the scriptwriter to identify the core of the narrative and to reduce or compress it into a given framework. The core in the case of *Pride and Prejudice* is the central plot whose protagonist is Elizabeth Bennet. It is, however, impossible to tell the story of Elizabeth and Mr Darcy without the Bingley-Jane, the Collins-Charlotte, and the Lydia-Wickham subplots, or for that matter, without the Darcy-Caroline Bingley subplot, requiring any adaptation of the novel to have many characters, some with very small roles, but all integral to the narrative.

The key techniques, therefore, in the adaptation of a novel are omission and compression, simultaneously maintaining and translating the "spirit" of the novel. These omissions and compressions will, however, always have fans in uproar saying "it wasn't like that in the book" (McFarlane 3). While the 1995 mini-series has the space and time to introduce and do justice to practically all of the characters present in Austen's narrative, the 2005 film has to reduce the script to the essential events and characters that affect and influence Elizabeth's personal development. This means that characters like the Hursts, who function as a sounding-board for Caroline Bingley and further illustrate the snobbishness of the *nouveau riche*, are expendable. Their condescending attitude towards those who are further down the economic ladder, and the desire of their class to ascend the social ladder by marrying into the aristocracy, is adequately expressed in and by the character of Caroline Bingley. Unlike her sister, Caroline is single and also essential to the plot in that her desires resonate with the opening sentence of the novel: for it is not only the less affluent young women who want a rich husband; the wealthy maidens do, too. In a similar juxtaposition, Mrs Bennet is not the only mother trying to catch a husband for her daughters: she

has an aristocratic foil in Lady Catherine de Bourgh, who wants to catch the most eligible bachelor for her own daughter.

Similarly, with the exception of Charlotte Lucas, who is important as a foil to Elizabeth, the film also reduces the role of the Lucases, thus requiring the important developments at the Lucas Lodge party to be compressed into another event. Moggach deftly compresses three scenes from the novel into one scene in her script. The events at the Meryton assembly, Lucas Lodge and Mrs Bennet's ravings when at Netherfield are all compressed into the crowded assembly hall where Elizabeth first overhears Darcy's derogatory comments about her being "tolerable . . . but not handsome enough to tempt me" (Wright 00:09:58; Austen 9). The compressed scene thus establishes several important elements necessary to the development of relations in the book. Wright's revolving camera (starting at 00:11:53) shows the inappropriateness of Mrs Bennet's topic of conversation, the absolute mortification of both Jane and Elizabeth at the content of their mother's speech, Darcy's contempt of Mrs Bennet's indecorous behaviour, Elizabeth's adept social skills in changing the topic, Darcy's new interest in Elizabeth in his attempt to strike up a conversation with her, and Elizabeth's contempt of Darcy as she delivers her scathing put-down: "Dancing. Even if one's partner is barely tolerable" (Wright 00:12:36). This scene takes less than one minute to establish these initial relations; the mini-series takes approximately seven minutes to establish the same (the corresponding events are covered in Chapters Three to Six and Chapter 10 of Volume I in the novel).

Another example of a well-compressed scene is the first proposal scene, containing the proposal proper and half the contents of Darcy's letter to Elizabeth following her rejection of his proposal. Letters are an important facet in *Pride and Prejudice*, but generally present challenges to all scriptwriters: they are very static on the screen and bypassing watching someone read a letter on screen requires an innovative approach. For example, Andrew Davies introduces additional scenes, flashback, and voice-over to make the letter more dynamic. The letter writing itself comes at the beginning of Episode 4, where the viewer first sees a distraught Elizabeth hearing Darcy's voice repeating the derogatory remarks from the failed proposal. Similarly, the viewer sees Darcy hurrying to Rosings with Elizabeth's derogatory remarks ringing in his head, and subsequently fleeing from the company of his aunt and Colonel Fitzwilliam. Darcy is then seen commencing the letter and the contents are heard in voice-over. When he starts to recount his dealings with Mr Wickham, altering Austen's or-

der of issues addressed in the letter, Darcy moves to the window, which frames him. The camera zooms out and away from Darcy to a flashback, depicting the history between Darcy and Wickham with a voice over by Darcy. Once these events have been recounted, the camera moves back to the present, showing Darcy washing up and the letter sealed and addressed. In order to break up the lengthy letter scene, the camera cuts to breakfast at the Collins' cottage and Elizabeth's desire to forgo breakfast in favour of a walk. Here she meets Darcy, is given the letter, and then she proceeds to read the letter. The viewer once again hears Darcy in voice-over reading the letter, and Elizabeth's subsequent comments on the content, along with flashbacks to the events described.

Whereas the mini-series has sufficient time to cover all the letters and insert additional scenes, the film does not. Therefore, Deborah Moggach embeds Darcy's objections to Elizabeth's family, which were the first item in Austen's letter, into the proposal scene itself. What results from the compression is a very dynamic scene, containing a paraphrase of the original direct and indirect speech in the text and exhibiting all of the emotions that the scene entails: Darcy's resolve to propose, his misgivings about her social standing, his declaration of his ardent love, his firm belief in her acceptance of his proposal, her flat refusal of his hand, her accusations of his interference in the Bingley-Jane relationship, his explanation of the impropriety of her family's behaviour, and her accusations of his treatment of Wickham. Their showdown in the rest of the scene follows the original closely, with their respective anger breaking the confines of civil behaviour.

The scene that follows the first proposal in the 2005 film is, however, one that the fans most like to criticise, being offended by the omission of what is considered to be Elizabeth's recognition scene, where she states to herself: "Till this moment I never knew myself" (Austen 137). The lengthy scene, which follows the proposal, is a nuanced scene which clearly depicts the different stages of Elizabeth's growing self-knowledge. Back at the Collins' cottage, Elizabeth is seen first sitting on her bed, her face in shadow, and her shoulders slumped, suggesting dejectedness and reflection on the events that have unfolded. The camera follows her down the narrow corridor into the parlour, where her face is revealed. After reading a short paragraph in a book, she puts the book down and moves to the mirror, with the camera focusing on her reflection as day passes into night. The scene suggests that Elizabeth is having a hard think about the most recent events and evaluating herself in the light of the detrimental

role her family's inappropriate behaviour has had on Jane's romance, though her simmering anger suggests that she is still struggling with denial. The full recognition comes only after reading the letter delivered to her by Darcy, which presents the history of his dealings with Wickham. Darcy's departure jolts Elizabeth from her semi-catatonic state, but Darcy is gone before she can react. What follows is Elizabeth reading his letter by the window, the contents read by Darcy in voice-over. The reaction of Elizabeth to the letter is well portrayed by Keira Knightley, whose shoulders gradually droop the more she learns about the wickedness of Mr Wickham, clearly suggesting that Elizabeth has realised her error in judgment. This sequence is complete when we see her rereading the letter by the fireplace. She conceals the letter upon Charlotte Collins' entrance, and when Charlotte asks if she is alright, Elizabeth replies in a trembling voice "I hardly know" (Wright 01:12:59). This is a visual translation of Austen's literary depiction of Elizabeth's growing self-knowledge. There is no need to include Elizabeth's monologue, which is essential in the novel for the reader to understand the effect the knowledge attained in the letter has on her personal development; the body language in the scene and the trembling voice say it all.

In contrast, the mini-series does contain Elizabeth's recognition scene; however, it is placed in a different context. In the mini series, Elizabeth makes the statement aloud to Jane after divulging the details of Wickham's sordid past ("Episode 4" 00:22:29), as opposed to the novel, where the recognition of her blindness and faults comes whilst reading Darcy's letter, and is never shared with her sister, despite their close bond. This is not, however, the only displacement that Andrew Davies makes of Austen's text, the majority of which is present in the 1995 adaptation, albeit not all delivered by the same characters as in the novel or in the same contexts. Yet, fans on the Internet forums choose to ignore the series' displacement of the recognition scene and other dialogue, but are offended by the omission of the words in Wright's film.

Furthermore, the commentators also choose to ignore other liberties that Andrew Davies has taken with the text, even though these liberties seriously reduce the suspense that is inherent in the novel. The suspense surrounding the relationship between Elizabeth and Mr Darcy is an integral part of the main plot until Lydia's slip that Mr Darcy was at her wedding. Even then, one cannot be too certain that the mysterious Mr Darcy will renew his addresses to Elizabeth. This is one of the many aspects of the novel that the 2005 film does exceedingly well.

Andrew Davies, however, inserted additional scenes into his script, wanting "the audience to get a sense fairly early on that there is a lot more to Darcy than Elizabeth sees" (Birtwistle 5). Davies' insertions, despite his belief that they "were careful not to give too much away" (Birtwistle 5), do give too much away and shatter the viewer's suspense. The viewer sees Darcy's thoughtfulness after returning from Lambton, Caroline Bingley's barb about Miss Eliza Bennet, and Darcy's subsequent rudeness towards Caroline. We are then privy to seeing him scour the seedy parts of London in search of Wickham and Lydia in the sense of "in the meantime" while the Bennets are shown at their wits' end at Longbourn. The viewer knows from these scenes that Darcy's interest in Elizabeth has not waned, eliminating the surprise of Lydia's slip and the revelation through Mrs Gardiner's letter and his subsequent arrival at Longbourn with Bingley. In contrast, the 2005 film stays true to Lizzie as the focal point of the narrative, very rarely presenting scenes in which Lizzie is not present, and in this case, maintaining Austen's original suspense.

Indeed, the major difference between the two adaptations hinges on point of view. The 2005 adaptation chooses to present the majority of the story through Elizabeth as the focal point, just like Austen does. There are only very short scenes or inserts which occur away from our central consciousness. For example, the scene at Netherfield, where Miss Bingley and Mr Darcy are having breakfast, frames the arrival of the dishevelled Elizabeth and functions to clearly illustrate the lack of interest that Mr Darcy has in Miss Bingley despite all her attempts to engage him in conversation. Similarly, Elizabeth's exit from the same room serves to simultaneously illustrate both Darcy's interest in Elizabeth and Miss Bingley's disparaging remarks on her account, mirroring and adapting similar situations and scenes in the novel.

The above-mentioned scenes appear to establish Mr Darcy's attitude to the situations he finds himself in, reflecting Austen's omniscient narrator who, at times, gives the reader insight into Mr Darcy's thoughts, starting with his ruminating on Elizabeth's "fine eyes" at Lucas Lodge (Austen 19). These short insights are predominantly shown through conversations between him and the Bingleys, and stop after Elizabeth receives the letter from Jane, informing her of Lydia's elopement. From Darcy's departure from the inn at Lambton to Mrs Gardiner's letter, in which Darcy's role in Lydia's marriage is revealed, the reader, like Elizabeth, is under the impression that any relationship between them is impossible.

Moreover, any scene away from Elizabeth's consciousness in the film serves a set purpose. Jane's arrival at Netherfield, soaking wet and sneezing, besides being humorous, illustrates the lengths to which Mrs Bennet will go, even jeopardising her daughter's health, to catch a husband for her daughter. Similarly, Mrs Bennet's reaction to the news of the regiment's arrival in Meryton and the welcome in Meryton itself highlights the silliness not only of Mrs Bennet but her younger daughters as well – a point that Mr Bennet cares to make several times in the novel. In addition, the announcement of the arrival of the Bennet women at Netherfield by the butler serves both as humour and to highlight Caroline's disdain of the Bennets. The departure of the Netherfield trio highlights the stage of emotional development of the characters and their attitudes: Bingley's sad countenance, Caroline's triumphant expression, and Darcy's wistfulness. The brother and sister scene at Pemberley before the arrival of Elizabeth and the Gardiners shows the Darcys impatiently waiting for their visitors and, finally, Bingley's mock proposal to Darcy is not only Moggach's brief insight into Darcy's human side but it also emphasises the rudeness of Mrs Bennet in not receiving her guests according to decorum. These short glimpses away from the central consciousness help portray character and have their source in Austen's nuanced text.

Scriptwriters use the tools available to them in accordance with the limitations of their respective formats or genres to present their own visions. Andrew Davies' script and the mini-series format could afford to give Mr Darcy more screen time. This, on the one hand, greatly appeals to female viewers and reviewers on-line, but on the other, alters the novel's point of view by sharing the consciousness between Elizabeth and Darcy, thereby reducing the suspense which is an integral part of Austen's novel. Deborah Moggach, in contrast, maintains Elizabeth as the central consciousness throughout her script, thus maintaining Austen's suspense with respect to the Elizabeth-Darcy relationship. In creating her script, Moggach had to resort to omission and compression in order to evoke the spirit of Austen's novel in the two-hour time frame. Her script, together with Joe Wright's direction, has resulted in an adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* that is not only beautiful but is also Austen – perhaps more so in many respects than the 1995 mini-series.

Consequently, this paper wishes to suggest that the mini-series and the feature film, although both visual media, are as different to each other as a novel is to a short story, and as such should not be evaluated according to the same

adaptation criteria. However, generic concerns and limitations very rarely cross the average fan's mind when assessing a work. Today, Internet forums enable everyone to voice his or her opinion on what they feel passionate about. What these forums make abundantly clear is that consensus will never be reached with respect to which of the *Pride and Prejudice* adaptations is the best, as every individual response is a subjective value judgment based on many elements – the actors, the dialogue, the setting, the period costumes, the music, and the pacing, to name but a few. It may, nevertheless, be possible to use objective criteria, as this paper has attempted to do, by looking at only a segment of the adaptation process and investigating the tools available to scriptwriters. Yet, despite attempts to move away from the fidelity criterion in adaptation studies, any adaptation of a novel will necessarily draw comparisons between it and the original, extending the fidelity debate's lease on life – if not in the classrooms, then at least on the Internet.

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„DO OVOG TRENUTKA NISAM SE UOPĆE POZNAVALA”: ADAPTACIJE ROMANA *PONOS I PREDRASUDE*

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Adaptiranje nekog djela uvijek podrazumijeva donošenje teških odluka: scenarist i redatelj imaju vlastitu predodžbu onoga što ta adaptacija treba biti, kao što i svaki čitatelj ima vlastitu predodžbu o likovima i zapletu, a te se predodžbe vrlo rijetko podudaraju. Ovaj rad inspiriran je aktualnom debatom koju obožavatelji Jane Austen vode na internetskim forumima, a cilj joj je utvrditi koja je adaptacija najvjernija predlošku – Austeninu romanu *Ponos i predrasude* (1813.). Debata je iznjedrila dva kandidata, a to su BBC-jeva miniserija iz 1995., u kojoj glume Jennifer Ehle i Colin Firth, te film Joea Wrighta iz 2005. u kojemu protagoniste tumače Keira Knightley i Matthew Macfadyen. U radu će se utvrditi ključni momenti romana kako bi se pokazalo da su obje adaptacije vjerni prikaz izvornog teksta. Nadalje, rad će se osvrnuti na prednosti i nedostatke miniserije i filma kao žanra da bi se mogli detaljno analizirati prednosti i nedostaci samih adaptacija. Rad upućuje na to da Wrightov film posve uspješno prenosi duh Austenina romana zahvaljujući vještoj uporabi perspektive i simbolizma i to u dvostruko kraćem vremenu negoli miniserija.

Ključne riječi: Jane Austen, *Ponos i predrasude*, vjernost pri adaptaciji, BBC, Joe Wright, simbolizam