

Books, Bras and Bridget Jones: reading adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice*

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'Miss Eliza Bennet,' said Miss Bingley,
'despises cards. She is a great reader and has
no pleasure in anything else.'

'I deserve neither such praise nor such
censure,' cried Elizabeth; 'I am *not* a great
reader, and I have pleasure in many things.'

At no time in the two hundred years since Jane Austen submitted *First Impressions* for publication has her work been more popular than in the last decade.² The phenomenon of Austenmania has seen *Sense and Sensibility*—a novel that for years struggled for inclusion among Austen's 'mature' fiction³—on the *New York Times* bestseller list, one hundred and eighty-four years after its first publication.⁴ The impetus for this sudden explosion in interest in Jane Austen can be traced to one week in September 1995, when ten million people in Britain watched Mr. Darcy dive into his pond at Pemberley.⁵

Before the end of that year, film versions of *Persuasion* and *Sense and Sensibility* would be released and the BBC would immediately replay the entire six-part series of *Pride and Prejudice*.⁶ In the following year *Clueless* would be joined by separate film and television versions of *Emma*.⁷ Eventually, *Pride and Prejudice* would become one of the BBC's (and the American A&E station's) most successful programmes.⁸ Its popularity brought new readers to Austen's best-known novel, readers who, for the most part, read outside of any academic context. It is these new readings of *Pride and Prejudice*, however, proliferating in the wake of its adaptation, which contain the greatest significance for our contemporary understanding of Austen, and compel us to examine and re-examine the novel and its adaptations in light of one another.

As Deborah Kaplan has recently argued, fresh readings of Austen's novels arising from both popular and academic interest in their adaptations have helped to reclaim Austen from identification solely with an 'intrinsically highbrow...culturally elite' readership, and reasserted Austen's own engagement with and qualified endorsement of the popular fiction of her time.⁹ Austen's family were 'great Novel-readers & not ashamed of being so'¹⁰ at a time when, as she herself wrote, 'no species of composition' was 'so much decried' by readers, writers and reviewers alike.¹¹

Occupying similar territory in Regency culture as television does in our own, novels were frequently dismissed as 'trash' while their production and circulation thrived. It is a betrayal of Austen's own artistic and critical commitment to dismiss television adaptations of her work because of a distaste for the medium in which they appear, or for their popularity merely. It is essential, however, that we at least attempt to bring the same kinds of rigour to our readings of these adaptations as we would to any critical analysis of Austen's work. In his book *Recreating Jane Austen*, John Wiltshire proposes that, in analysing television and cinematic adaptations of Austen's novels,

scriptwriter and filmmakers be understood as readers, and that one advantage of all such revisions is that they make public and manifest what their reading of the precursor text is, that they bring out into the discussably open the choices, acceptances, assumptions and distortions that are commonly undisclosed within the private reader's own imaginative reading process.¹²

An adaptation like the 1995 *Pride and Prejudice*, which conforms so closely to the plot of Austen's original, clearly operates as a ficto-critical interpretation of the primary text, dramatising the choices made in every reading even while offering itself as a faithful re-presentation of the 1813 novel.

Interestingly, however, the choices made in adapting the novel for television seem to render the adaptation resistant to the sorts of critical readings demanded by Austen's own reflections on reading fiction. Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is preoccupied with questions of what constitutes a good

reading, or a great reader. At times it appears to suggest that reading can be a difficult, even a painful task: a task at odds with our wish to be entertained, to 'have pleasure' in it. The 1995 adaptation evinces no evidence of any such preoccupation, but the responses it provokes suggest that it should be carefully and critically read, if only because of the pleasure it abundantly gives.

This article will examine the kinds of readings of Austen's novel that are performed by the 1995 adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*. In attempting to understand the adaptation and its cultural reception it will be necessary to plunge into the inter-reflexive textual explosion of *Pride and Prejudice* adaptations that have followed its appearance, but my primary concern is with the mini-series itself: identifying, accounting for and evaluating the ethics of its preoccupations, in comparison with the novel.

At stake in an analysis of the 1995 *Pride and Prejudice* is our ability to read literary adaptations as both critical and artistic works. We must recognise, moreover, that because of its immense popularity, our response to this adaptation will impinge upon our understanding of its source-text. Many younger readers (myself included) were introduced to Austen's novels through this adaptation. Its success is such that, without necessarily supplanting the original text, the adaptation must influence readers and readings of *Pride and Prejudice* for some time to come. Nearly ten years after its release, the adaptation seems only to have gained in respectability: it has been discussed in numerous academic works and appears on school curricula. It is only by revisiting the height of Austenmania and its excesses, however, that the true significance of this adaptation for readers of Austen can be made apparent.

In April 1996, a curious incident was reported in *The Times*.¹³ The managing director of BBC Network Television had called a conference to rebut claims made in a recent press release by bra manufacturer Berlei that 'its products had been responsible for "giving a lift" to the "eye-catching cleavage" of the actresses in the series'.¹⁴ According to the article, a 'sheepish spokeswoman for Berlei acknowledged that the company had been wrong to claim it had made the bras used in the series', after the BBC made it clear that 'any support for the actresses came from the historically authentic soft corset, or on occasion, by the Empire line ties under muslin'. Any 'modern bra',

claimed the BBC, 'would have completely ruined the line' of the actresses' costumes.

This incident is worth studying in some detail, as it illustrates the most important and controversial issue of the early days of the adaptation's production and reception. Even before filming started, the adaptation was beset-and for commercial purposes, blessed-by rumours that it contained nudity and sex scenes, drawing accusations from Austen scholars of anachronistic infidelity.¹⁵ The filmmakers persistently countered that the novel itself was sexy, and that their adaptation was faithful to the book's erotic sensibility. Austen didn't need a Wonderbra™, was their argument-Regency cleavage was just as provocative as anything in modern television.

The adaptation successfully contradicted the popular image of Austen as a prudish spinster, reasserting *Pride and Prejudice's* erotic content above all else. From his first discussions about the adaptation, scriptwriter Andrew Davies wanted to 'make it clear' that *Pride and Prejudice* is 'principally about sex and it's about money'.¹⁶ Its producer, Sue Birtwhistle, emphasised the novel's sexuality when lobbying to have the adaptation made.

I knew that if I contacted the ITV companies and said, 'Would you like to do *Pride and Prejudice*?' I'd probably have received a short, sharp 'no.' So, instead, I telephoned Nick Elliott ... and said: 'Andrew Davies and I would like to take you to lunch and sell you a six-part adaptation of simply the sexiest book ever written.' We refused to name the book. He was so keen that we met the following day and we told him the story as if it had just been written: 'Well, there's five girls aged from 15 to 22' ... and so on. He became rather excited and asked if the rights were free. When we finally confessed it was *Pride and Prejudice* he was stunned.¹⁷

Much of the film's eventual success may be attributed to the filmmakers' emphasis on the novel's eroticism, but the manner in which that eroticism was communicated carries important implications for our understanding of the adaptation's reading of Austen's text and for its own internal ethical orientation.

The naked bedroom scenes predicted by the tabloids did not appear in the final version of the adaptation, but various interpolated scenes set in such ostensibly private spaces did, while the settings of many episodes from the novel were shifted from drawing rooms and parlours to bedrooms and from day to night. This transfer of setting enabled the actresses and (less often) actors, while still in period costume, to be shown in varying states of undress: in their nightgowns and undergarments.

The appearance of visible underwear has become a visual cliché in literary adaptations scripted by Andrew Davies. Nightdresses and foundation garments make notable appearances in, for example, *Middlemarch*, *Circle of Friends*, *Emma*, *Vanity Fair*, *Bridget Jones's Diary*, *Tipping the Velvet* and *Daniel Deronda*.¹⁸ Underwear is used in these adaptations as a way of hinting at sex where it does not feature in the original novel or cannot be portrayed due to censorship classifications. It also works to make characters more appealing to the audience: seen without any protective layer of outdoor clothing, they seem vulnerable, more accessible to us.

This effort to bridge the distance between character and audience is overcome in Austen's literature by the narrative medium of free indirect speech. What Roger Gard has called 'the artistic paucity of mere looking' is a poor substitute indeed for Austen's 'glittering pages of strong and delicate exposition'.¹⁹ It is, unfortunately, an inescapable fact that a character's innermost feelings cannot be revealed with the same artistic subtlety as literary narrative merely by filming images of actresses' innermost petticoats, yet this approach continues to dominate literary adaptations and 'period' films, to the exclusion of other, more artistically adroit techniques.

The greatest drawback of Davies's formula, however, is that it objectifies women, setting up a regressive double standard which encourages the audience to assess female characters primarily in the devaluing light of their sexuality. It is possible to see this double standard operating in the most notorious incident of the 1995 *Pride and Prejudice*. Returning to Pemberley from London, Davies's Darcy, sweaty from horse-riding and (the audience is encouraged to assume) tormented by memories of Elizabeth, plunges into a pond on the property. The image of his wet body with its transparent,

clinging shirt became an iconic image of the mini series. Rather than suggesting a more vulnerable hero, however, Darcy's semi-nakedness, occurring in the context of panoramic shots of his enormous house as his horse is led away by another of his servants, only serves to exaggerate his virtues.

The combination of images indicates that Darcy is not only powerful and almost impossibly wealthy, but that he looks good with his jacket off too. Whenever Darcy appears in less than formal attire, as in earlier scenes that show him in the bath at Netherfield and fencing in London, Darcy is always accompanied by servants and employees whose presence demonstrates his undiminished power. This may be contrasted with scenes showing Elizabeth and Jane in their undergarments. In these scenes, the sisters' dialogue centres on their prospective poverty, and their need to marry well. Filmed on their beds or seated at dressing-tables, the actresses are framed by numerous mirrors to emphasise, where the dialogue does not, that it is the women's physical appearance and their sexual desirability that must be their 'pleasanteest preservative from want' (pp. 122-3), through marriage.

Unlike the 1995 adaptation, Austen's novel reveals little of the detail of her characters' bodies. Austen rarely figures the men and women of her fiction as physical, sexualised beings. By comparing her lack of particularising description with that of a contemporary (such as bestselling author Ann Radcliffe) it becomes clear that Austen's omissions must be read as deliberate, rather than conventional. The reader's first introduction to the heroine of *The Romance of the Forest* (a novel similarly preoccupied with the role of women readers²⁰) depicts her in 'the utmost distress':

Her features, which were delicately beautiful, had gained from distress an expression of captivating sweetness...A habit of grey camlet, with short slashed sleeves, shewed, but did not adorn her figure: it was thrown open at the bosom, upon which part of her hair had fallen in disorder, while the light veil hastily thrown on, had, in her confusion, been suffered to fall back.²¹

Adeline is displayed, uncovered, exposed: not decoratively, nor deliberately

on her part, but as a very feminine victim of violence. In contrast, the first narrative description of Elizabeth is that 'she had a lively, playful disposition, which delighted in anything ridiculous' (p. 12), and it is not until chapter six that Darcy's admiration of Elizabeth informs the reader that he finds her face 'rendered uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression of her dark eyes' (p. 23).

Here, as throughout the novel, Austen's artistic choices emphasise Elizabeth's intelligence and humour-the 'easy playfulness' of her manners (p. 23)-rather than her physical appearance.²² This cannot be the case, however, in a mini-series taking 'Darcy's sexual attraction to Elizabeth' as its 'central motor which drives the story forward'.²³ By necessity, viewers must be able to comprehend the basis of Darcy's attraction, and the attention the camera clearly drew to the actresses 'eye-catching cleavage'²⁴ explains some of the effect of the adaptation's 'show, don't tell' approach to visual story-telling.²⁵ The message portrayed in this medium is that the Bennet sisters' low-cut necklines are their greatest assets in a competitive marriage market.²⁶

In Austen's novel, the rightness of Darcy's and Elizabeth's union is grounded in their presentation to the reader as the novel's two most intelligent characters. As Margaret Kirkham has noted, from Elizabeth's reading of Darcy's letter, 'she becomes the best informed, as well as the most intelligent character in the entire novel', able to recognise Darcy's 'solid virtues of head and heart', as well as the 'central intelligence through whose eyes and understanding events and character are mediated to the reader'.²⁷

Davies' screenplay, however, shows far more of Darcy's behaviour away from Elizabeth-even inventing scenes of his search for Wickham and Lydia in London and his negotiations with Mr. Gardiner. These extra scenes place the viewer at the apex of the adaptation's hierarchy of knowledge. As they are able to see the actions of both Darcy and Elizabeth, viewers have an understanding of events and character that exceeds that of any reader of the novel. These changes render Elizabeth less knowledgeable than the viewer about events in the adaptation's plot that concern her, thereby lessening her intelligence relative to that of the viewer. Readers of the novel share Elizabeth's limitations: the adaptation's plural perspective means that the viewer,

exceeding those limitations, is granted an understanding superior to that of the central character.

These changes are not accidental, just as their effects are not inconsequential. They reflect the fact that the makers of the 1995 adaptation had very different needs and intentions from Jane Austen. By taking into account these differing intentions, and recognising the needs underlying the film's omissions and additions, it may be possible to reclaim some of the power of the reader that critics of literary adaptations assert is ceded to the narrating images of film.

The most obvious difference between producing a novel and producing its filmic adaptation is the relative cost. Austen published most of her novels 'on commission', or at her own risk, and to a woman of Austen's means the outlay was not insignificant.²⁸ Austen's risk, however, dwindles in relation to the millions of pounds (and dollars) spent in producing the 1995 *Pride and Prejudice*. The extent of the material risk involved in filming a mini-series like *Pride and Prejudice* necessitates the very careful consideration as to what is likely to please an audience, if the sponsors are to recoup their investment. While Austen clearly wrote with an eye, not only to publication, but to popularity, her dependence on the novel's financial success was by no means as absolute.

The financial risk of such a production demands a certain level of conservatism, of the prudent reproduction of narrative formulae already known to be successful. Austen faced similar pressures, yet her fiction consistently overcomes much of the reactionary political morality of contemporary courtship novels. She achieved this through experimenting with novelistic conventions and developing the sustained and complex irony that characterises her narrative voice. Transposed into the medium of film, the deftness and sensitivity of Austen's highly skilled narrative is lost. The television satirist John Clarke laments the absence in the film of the self-conscious, knowing relationship established between narrator and reader in the novel. 'In the BBC adaptation it is demonstrated that if the writer's asides to the reader are removed from a novel, what is left is the plot.... [T]here is no narrator, no irony, no Austen'.²⁹

Indeed, if the camera *could* approach that kind of complexity, the final product would be almost impossible to follow. An adaptation, moreover, which attempted faithfully to replicate each nuance of every one of Austen's ambivalent sentences would be demonstrably less pleasurable than one which-like the 1995 *Pride and Prejudice*-offers a single coherent reading of the novel, without attempting to convey the possibilities of multiple readings so easily suggested by the original prose.

The filmmaker's aim in this is to produce a film whose meaning is easily legible, because it is this very legibility that makes the film pleasurable to watch. Thus, the visual grouping of Elizabeth and Darcy convinces the viewer of their compatibility even in the first episode (roughly, chapter eight of the novel). 'At this early stage in the film' writes Cheryl L. Nixon, 'when the novel still has Darcy and Elizabeth bristling at one another, the viewer cannot help but feel that the two are connected both physically and emotionally'.³⁰ An instance is Elizabeth's cross-country walk to Netherfield to visit her ailing sister. In the novel Elizabeth is ushered, in her somewhat dishevelled state, into the Netherfield breakfast parlour, where she is received by the entire Netherfield party. In the adaptation Elizabeth runs into Mr Darcy, also enjoying a solitary walk in Netherfield's grounds, thereby highlighting the similarities of their tastes, and their mutual difference from Elizabeth's rival, Miss Bingley. This comfortable sense of the inevitability of a happy ending engendered by such scenes is one of the principal factors identified by Deborah Kaplan as contributing to the 'harlequinization' of Austen's novels enacted by their recent adaptations. She writes that the 'pleasures of this form are to be found not only in the unfolding of desire and the achievement of gratification but also in the comfortable knowledge of what is to come and how it is to occur'.³¹

Austen was well aware of the pleasurable effects of reading within a known genre. Her concern in *Pride and Prejudice* was that her narrative was 'rather too light & bright & sparkling'³²-conforming too well to novelistic conventions-to the extent that its readers would fail to recognise its literariness. Upon rereading the novel's first edition, Austen wrote to her sister Cassandra that she felt it needed

to be stretched out here & there with a long Chapter-of sense if it could be had, if not of solemn specious nonsense-about something unconnected with the story; an Essay on Writing [for example]...or anything that would form a contrast & bring the reader with increased delight to the playfulness and Epigrammatism of the general stile.³³

Austen, as usual, is being only half-serious. Yet her insistence on the fictionality of her fiction is one feature wholly absent from the plot elevating adaptation. As Bridget Jones says, the problem with stories that (unlike her beloved *Pride and Prejudice* video) admit their fictionality, is that 'You can tell it isn't real'.³⁴ This is, of course, Austen's point.

What the mass of academic studies of the adaptation-and one very funny novel-suggest is that viewers of the BBC *Pride and Prejudice* attempt to reclaim the ironic possibilities of Austen's original by analysing their own reactions to the film: critically reflecting on their 'reading' of its images. The most commercially and culturally successful of these readings of the adaptation is Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary*. Bridget's response to *Pride and Prejudice* is straightforward.

8.55 a.m. Just nipped out for fags prior to getting changed ready for BBC *Pride and Prejudice*. Hard to believe there are so many cars out on the roads. Shouldn't they be at home getting ready? Love the nation being so addicted. The basis of my own addiction, I know, is my simple human need for Darcy to get off with Elizabeth. ... They are my chosen representatives in the field of shagging, or, rather, courtship. I do not, however, wish to see any actual goals. I would hate to see Elizabeth and Darcy in bed, smoking a cigarette afterwards. That would be unnatural and wrong and I would quickly lose interest.³⁵

Bridget is, of course, destined to enact her own version of *Pride and Prejudice*. John Wiltshire has noted those scenes in Fielding's novel in which, 'in what one might call a meta-novelistic conversation ... Bridget and her friends discuss television adaptations of classics'-scenes which draw

attention to the novels' processes of translation, rereading, and adaptation.³⁶ What makes *Bridget Jones's Diary* such an enjoyable novel is the subtlety with which Bridget's reading of the BBC *Pride and Prejudice*-not only her response to it, but also her emotional incorporation of its romantic themes-is tested by her responses to 'real' life. On Monday morning, following the Darcy-fest of the previous night, Bridget stumbles

upon a photograph in the *Standard* of Darcy and Elizabeth, hideous, dressed as modern-day luvvies, draped all over each other... Apparently they are already sleeping together. That is absolutely disgusting. Feel disorientated and worried, for surely Mr Darcy would never do anything so vain and frivolous as to be an actor and yet Mr Darcy is an actor. Hmmm. All v. confusing.³⁷

Fielding uses the historical fact that the actors who played Elizabeth and Darcy, Jennifer Ehle and Colin Firth, were dating at the time the series was screened to demonstrate the nostalgic hypocrisy that characterises Bridget's reading of the BBC *Pride and Prejudice* and its ancillary media hype. Bridget's distaste for the real, however, and her affection for the fictional is never wholehearted. While her quixotic obsession with 'Mr Darcy' occasionally spills over into breathless mania,³⁸ for the most part Bridget successfully and self-critically maintains a tension between the pleasurable fantasies of *faux*-Austenian romance and the somewhat harsher realities of modern existence.

Unfortunately, in the film adaptations of Fielding's novels, once again scripted by Andrew Davies, any trace of literary irony (apart from a casting decision placing Colin Firth in the role of Mark Darcy) is lost. Fielding's intelligent, if somewhat beleaguered heroine becomes in the film a target of buffoonery, the accident-prone butt of mainly slapstick comedy that renders her a far stupider, more credulous creature, with whom audiences can no longer comfortably identify, but only laugh at.

Observing the shift in emphasis in *Bridget Jones's Diary's* transition from novel to film is helpful for recognising the processes at work in adapting *Pride and Prejudice*. One major casualty in both cases is the

novels' political concerns. In Fielding's novel, Bridget is flanked by two friends representing her conflicting tendencies: Jude, the extremely successful stockbroker whose faithless boyfriend daily reduces her to a teary mess hiding in the bathroom, and Sharon, a more overt feminist, who encourages Bridget's resolution not to 'sulk about having no boyfriend, but develop inner poise and authority and sense of self as woman of substance, complete *without* boyfriend, as best way to obtain boyfriend'.³⁹ Whereas in the novel Sharon acts as a check to Bridget's most self-destructive thinking, the film's hurried exposition establishes her as 'Shazza: journalist. Likes to say 'fuck' a lot', while her feminist theories of the novel are chauvinistically transformed into paranoid, expletive-filled rants, in which Bridget herself is not complicit.

A similar effect can be noted in the 1995 *Pride and Prejudice*, which has been frequently criticised for its dramatisation of 'postfeminist' values.⁴⁰ While it might be assumed that the last years of the twentieth century would prove less hostile to feminist concerns than the reactionary environment of early nineteenth-century England, the film's emphasis on the relationship of Elizabeth and Darcy, and its portrayal of Elizabeth herself, neutralise and even efface most of the indicators of Elizabeth's somewhat surprising strength and independence. One instance of this is Elizabeth's reflections following her final meeting with Lady Catherine de Bourgh. Elizabeth predicts that Lady Catherine's influence over her nephew will be so great as to 'settle any doubt' in one who had often seemed to be 'wavering'. If he should not return to Netherfield, reasons Elizabeth,

I shall know how to understand it. I shall then give over every expectation, every wish of his constancy. If he is satisfied with only regretting me, when he might have obtained my affections and hand, I shall soon cease to regret him at all. (p. 361)

In the film's more rapid denouement, Lady Catherine is barely out of the Bennets' driveway before Darcy reappears and all misunderstandings are swiftly cleared away. The greater inevitability of their union, as it is portrayed in the film, leaves Elizabeth no scope for expressions of independence such as those in the novel.

Most disconcerting is the viewer's response at this moment which is, predictably perhaps, total unconcern. The adaptation conflates several scenes, and even chapters, in its rush to have the lovers together before the episode's fifty-five minutes are up. As Austen herself once opined, 'There might as well have been no suppers at Longbourn',⁴¹ as all the film's previous fidelity to Austen's careful plotting is abandoned. Ellen Belton claims that the 'ending confirms the primacy of the romantic relationship over other claims and valorizes the drive toward individual self-fulfillment and gratification' that resonates with contemporary attitudes,⁴² but its speed and full-blown romanticism also endorses the *viewer's* desire for fulfilment and (almost instant) gratification.

This is in stark contrast to Austen, who diverts readers away from such gratification by refusing to present directly Elizabeth's answer to Darcy's second proposal, or the dialogue that immediately follows it. She writes

The happiness which this reply produced, was such as he had probably never felt before; and he expressed himself on the occasion as sensibly and as warmly as a man violently in love can be supposed to do. (p. 366)

The phrase 'violently in love' is used deliberately-and somewhat mischievously-to emphasise that the narrative is adhering to convention. The phrase is discussed earlier in the novel as 'so hackneyed, so doubtful, so indefinite ... as often applied to feelings which arise from an half-hour's acquaintance, as to a real, strong attachment' (pp. 140-1). At the same moment in the adaptation the (tastefully understated) violin music builds as the next six pages of dialogue are curtailed into a minute and nineteen seconds' worth of film. Its very restraint seeks to emphasise its distance from cliché in a kind of romantic realism-or realistic romance-that draws attention away from its status as fiction.⁴³

The narrator of *Pride and Prejudice* wants its readers to mistrust what we read, to pay attention to the artifice of the novel and to endeavour to remain aware of our suspension of disbelief. Austen's use of free indirect speech asserts this constant tension in the novel, incessantly ironising not

only the narrative's portrayal of the action, but also its reader's emotional investment in the plot. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the novel of mistaken first impressions, of mis-readings of character, we should be constantly alert to 'the appearance of ... goodness' (p. 295).

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen repeatedly emphasises the difficulty even good readers of character have in performing their readings, as Elizabeth misjudges first Darcy, then Wickham, and even her old friend Charlotte Lucas, while Darcy's misinterpretation of the behaviour of Elizabeth and her sister Jane embarrasses him and leads to the prevention of an engagement between Jane and Bingley that Elizabeth had understood to be inevitable. Austen is careful to stress that Elizabeth is 'not a great reader' (p. 37), either of books or of people, while constantly interrogating the educative or moralising potential of her own text by insisting, like Anne Elliot in *Persuasion*, that she 'will not allow books to prove any thing'.⁴⁴

Unlike in *Emma* and *Northanger Abbey*, actual titles of books (other than Mr Collins's favourite, *Fordyce's Sermons*) are not mentioned in *Pride and Prejudice*, and nowhere are they permitted as a shorthand means of understanding character. Provoked into conversation at the Netherfield ball, Darcy asks Elizabeth 'What think you of books?' to which she replies, 'Books-Oh! no.-I am sure we never read the same, or not with the same feelings. ... I cannot talk of books in a ball-room'(p. 93). This passage is cut from the adaptation, but books, like physical activity and a love of the outdoors, become part of the film's visual vocabulary to emphasise Elizabeth and Darcy's similarities, their 'made-for-each-otherness'. Thus, when Elizabeth visits Pemberley, the housekeeper first shows her into what was Mrs Darcy's 'favourite room'-a study whose walls are lined with books. The image suggests (citing Freud via Bridget Jones's well-thumbed copy of *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*) that Elizabeth's love of reading somehow reminds Darcy of his dead mother. It's a strange moment, especially as Mrs Darcy is hardly mentioned in Austen's text.

Bridget Jones's Diary resurrects Austen's conversation in Mark Darcy's dreadful *non sequitur* of a pick-up line:

'Have you read any good books lately?' Unbelievable.

'Mark,' I said. 'If you ask me once more if I've read any good books lately I'm going to eat my head.' ...

.....'But Una Alconbury told me you were a sort of literary whiz-woman, completely obsessed with books.'¹⁴⁵

Bridget attempts to explain that, working in publishing as she does, the last thing she wants to do in her free time is read *more* books. In the *Bridget Jones* adaptation, however, Bridget's refusal to comply with the endorsement by Mark's legal partner Natasha of a cultural hierarchy that positions literature above television becomes merely another way of demonstrating Bridget's stupidity, when she embarrasses herself in front of both Salman Rushdie and Jeffrey Archer.

By consciously displacing the role of novels as arbiters of cultural truths, both Fielding and Austen draw attention to the assumptions made by readers in the novels as well as by readers of the novels. What Austen questions is the function of reading itself, and the kinds of value ascribed by readers to their reading material. Elizabeth Bennet, ready to believe anything the handsome Wickham will tell her to Darcy's detriment, is blinded by his appearance and 'agreeable manner' (p. 76) to the impropriety of his communications. The extreme realist Charlotte Lucas cautions Elizabeth 'not to be a simpleton and allow her fancy for Wickham to make her appear unpleasant in the eyes of a man of ten times his consequence' (p. 90).

Viewers of the adaptation risk a similar blunder. Austen's narrative cautions her readers against investing too credulously in plots and appearances, even as the pleasure of the narrative compels us to do so. We are constantly precluded from reading—that is, comprehending—the full extent of Austen's satire, by the pleasure we have in what we are reading. The too light and bright and sparkling tone of the novel diverts attention from its real political tendencies, just as the beautiful costumes, sets, actors and music of the adaptation divert our attention from the essential emptiness of its conservatism, its troubling lack of politically conscious meaning. Readers of the adaptation are, without the benefit of ironically-laden free indirect speech, destined to have pleasure in too many things. Overcome with admiration for Colin

Firth's wet shirt, or Jennifer Ehle's embonpoint, we are blinded to the adaptation's jettisoning of ideas of ten times their consequence.

NOTES

- 1 Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, ed. R.W. Chapman (1813; London: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 37. Further references to this edition are incorporated in the text in parentheses.
- 2 The manuscript was offered by her father, Rev. George Austen, to the publisher Robert Cadell on 1 November 1797, and rejected 'sight unseen': Deirdre Le Faye, 'Chronology of Jane Austen's Life', in *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, ed. Edward Copeland and Juliet McMaster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 4-5.
- 3 See Claudia L. Johnson's introduction to Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson (1811; New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2002), pp. ix-x.
- 4 Deborah Kaplan, 'Critics take pride in prejudices', *The Australian*, 13 April 2005, p. 26.
- 5 Filmography' in *Jane Austen on Screen*, ed. Gina Macdonald and Andrew F. Macdonald (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 264. Forty percent of the total viewing audience for the UK reportedly watched the final episode. References to the adaptation are to *Pride and Prejudice*, dir. Simon Langton, 1995). The screenplay for the series was by Andrew Davies. It was first aired in September 1995 in the UK and in January 1996 in the USA.
- 6 *Persuasion* (dir. Roger Mitchell, 1995); *Sense and Sensibility* (dir. Ang Lee, 1995). *Persuasion* had already aired on television, but the success of *Pride and Prejudice* enabled its cinematic distribution: Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield, 'Introduction: Watching Ourselves Watching', in *Jane Austen and Hollywood*, ed. Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), p. 1.
- 7 *Clueless* (dir. Amy Heckerling, 1995); *Emma* (dir. Douglas McGrath, 1996); *Emma* (dir. Diarmuid Lawrence, 1996).
- 8 Troost and Greenfield, 'Watching Ourselves Watching', p. 2.

- 9 Deborah Kaplan, 'Critics take pride in prejudices', pp. 26-7.
- 10 Jane Austen, *Jane Austen's Letters*, ed. Deirdre Le Faye (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 26.
- 11 Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, ed. R.W. Chapman (1818; London: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 37.
- 12 John Wiltshire, *Recreating Jane Austen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 5.
- 13 In Australia, it was reported as 'a storm in a D-cup': *The Australian*, 1 May 1996, p. 11.
- 14 Alexandra Frean, 'Bra Company toes the Empire Line', *The Times*, 30 April 1996, 1f, p. 5.
- 15 Sue Birtwhistle and Susie Conklin, *The Making of Pride and Prejudice* (London: Penguin, 1995), p. vi.
- 16 Birtwhistle and Conklin, *The Making of Pride and Prejudice*, p. v.
- 17 Birtwhistle and Conklin, *The Making of Pride and Prejudice*, p. vi.
- 18 *Middlemarch* (dir. Anthony Page, 1994); *Circle of Friends* (Pat O'Connor, 1995); *Emma* (dir. Diarmuid Lawrence, 1997); *Vanity Fair* (dir. Marc Munden, 1998); *Bridget Jones's Diary* (dir. Sharon Maguire, 2001); *Tipping the Velvet* (dir. Geoffrey Sax, 2002) and *Daniel Deronda* (dir. Tom Hooper, 2002). Andrew Davies is a prolific screenwriter with writing credits in over fifty television series and films dating back to the late 1960s, almost all of which are literary adaptations: Internet Movie Database, at <<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0203577/>>.
- 19 Roger Gard, 'A few skeptical thoughts on Jane Austen and Film' in *Jane Austen on Screen*, p. 10.
- 20 See Deidre Shauna Lynch, *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 130.
- 21 Ann Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest*, ed. Chloe Chard (1791; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 5, 6-7.
- 22 See Penny Gay, *Jane Austen and the Theatre* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 90.
- 23 Andrew Davies, quoted in Birtwhistle and Conklin, *The Making of Pride and Prejudice*, p. 3.

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- 24 Frean, 'Bra company toes the empire line'.
- 25 Birtwhistle and Conklin, *The Making of Pride and Prejudice*, p. 2.
- 26 Throughout the mini-series, the Bennet sisters (with the notable exception of Lucy Briers' Mary) wore costumes displaying far more décolletage than any of the other female characters. Julia Sawalha (Lydia Bennet) took this to the extreme of constantly bending forward when engaged in dialogue—a movement bizarrely approximating a pigeon's attempt at a curtsy—thereby revealing as much of her chest as the programme's G rating would permit.
- 27 Margaret Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction* (London: Athlone Press, 1997), p. 91.
- 28 Jan Fergus, 'The professional woman writer' in *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, p. 17. The copyright of *Pride and Prejudice* was eventually sold to the publisher Thomas Egerton for £110. *Letters*, p. 97.
- 29 John Clarke, in *Jane Austen: Antipodean Views*, ed. Susannah Fullerton and Anne Harbers (Sydney: Wellington Lane, 2001), pp. 116-7.
- 30 Cheryl L. Nixon, 'Balancing the Courtship Hero: Masculine Emotional Display in Film Adaptations of Austen's Novels', in *Jane Austen in Hollywood*, p. 32.
- 31 Deborah Kaplan, 'Mass Marketing Jane Austen: Men, Women and Courtship in Two Film Adaptations', in *Jane Austen in Hollywood*, p. 178.
- 32 *Jane Austen's Letters*, ed. Le Faye, p. 203.
- 33 *Ibid.*, my italics.
- 34 Helen Fielding, *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* (London: Picador, 1999), p. 176.
- 35 Fielding, *Bridget Jones's Diary*, pp. 246-7.
- 36 John Wiltshire, *Recreating Jane Austen*, pp. 1-3.
- 37 Fielding, *Bridget Jones's Diary*, pp. 247-8.
- 38 The most extreme episode of Bridget's fixation is her interview with Colin Firth in *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* (pp. 170-8). For this section, Fielding (as Bridget) actually interviewed Firth, and much of its humour is derived from its resemblance to similar Darcymania-era interviews by besotted journalists.
- 39 Fielding, *Bridget Jones's Diary*, p. 2. _

- 40 See particularly Ellen Belton, 'Reimagining Jane Austen: the 1940 and 1995 film versions of *Pride and Prejudice*' in *Jane Austen on Screen*, ed. Macdonald and Macdonald, pp. 175, 194.
- 41 *Jane Austen's Letters*, ed. Le Faye, p. 203.
- 42 Belton, 'Reimagining Jane Austen', p. 186.
- 43 The BBC adaptation may be contrasted here with Gurinder Chadha's *Bride and Prejudice* (2004), which in adhering to Bollywood conventions (the joyful heroine literally breaks into song, while the lovers are showered in blossoms and the screen fills with vibrant colour, loud music and elephants) is in some ways closer to Austen's narrative technique.
- 44 Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, ed. R.W. Chapman (1818; London: Oxford University Press, 1954) p. 234. See also Katherine Newey, "'What think you of books?': reading in *Pride and Prejudice*", *Sydney Studies in English* 21 (1995-6), 81-94.
- 45 Fielding, *Bridget Jones's Diary*, p. 235.

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