

***Pride and Prejudice* Revisited**

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Abstract

Even as this is being written, someone in the world may be either reading *Pride and Prejudice* or writing another story about a Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet. Reading Jane Austen's classic novel is like a ritual participation in a legacy. It enlightens readers about what marriage is, what to expect from it and what it does to us and our lives. Over the ages, reenactments of the story have appeared, subtly, like a *Bridget Jones' Diary*, and not so subtly, like in *Jane Austen Stole my Boyfriend*, or *Pride and Prejudice and the Zombies*, and Sharon Lathon's Pemberley series that continue Elizabeth and Darcy's love.

Two film versions, by Simon Langton and Joe Wright, have remained true to the original milieu whereas *Bride and Prejudice* by Gurinder Chadha takes it totally out of context into India and America, like the popular Indian teleseries *Trishna* set in India.

The question arises: while critiquing their own social milieu adopting the trenchant satire of Austen's pen, do they offer anything to surprise, interrupt, and interpret our engagement with the experience of the original reading of the classic? The paper attempts to answer these questions in the light of the New Historicist notion of cultural exchange.

Keywords: Film Studies, Adaptations, New Historicism.

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Adaptations are now being analyzed as artistic creativity products caught up in the ongoing whirl of intertextual transformation to convey new meanings. In this process, for an adaptation to remain a work of art, it needs to be an independent, coherent, and convincing creation with its subtleties of meanings. Our favourite books, like Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, written and revised between 1796-1811, published in 1813, possess the ability to plunge us into a magic realm, into an atmosphere that embraces all our senses. Films and other media, images, sounds, the spoken word, music, and the performing artist's mediation guide us to a new aesthetic experience, bearing intertextual echoes with the original text. Ranging from narratological to historical, critics such as Linda Hutcheon, Thomas Leitch, Brian McFarlane, Dianne Sadoff, and Julie Sanders have expanded the field of adaptation study beyond issues of fidelity. The result is that, as Deborah Cartmell observes, the "most recent adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* are ... as much dependent on previous film and television adaptations as they are on Austen's novel" (126).

Ever since the novel was adapted into a movie in 1940 by Robert Leonard, *Pride and Prejudice*, in its 80 years of visual media history, has engaged and intrigued the changing generation of viewers. The legacy continues even in the 21st century. Apart from the staggering number of television series and movies, *Pride and Prejudice* in its visual manifestation reveals the New Historicist notion of cultural exchange--a process by which cultural practices and images are negotiated and exchanged between two generations of historical eras. Alistair Duckworth "suggests that Austen tends to be all things to all people: conservative, feminist, Romantic, Augustan, etc" (Stasio and Duncan 144). Linda Hutcheon maintains that, in experiencing work as an adaptation, the reader/ viewer "oscillates" between the adaptation and its source (xv). Andrew Wright asserts in a detailed evaluation of early 20th century adaptations of the novel that even the first world versions across genres are "at least as open to challenge as the third-world versions" (424). According to New Historicists, just as the author is "historically bound and cannot escape

the power of her culture and ideology”, the text is also used to understand the “social energy in order to decipher the ideology of a given culture” (Dogan 92).

The once much-appreciated dramatization of *Pride and Prejudice* by Helen Jerome had been performed in both New York and London in the mid-1930s. Aldous Huxley and Jane Murfin (1940) wrote a script for a film produced by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Even the musical *First Impressions*, which was performed in New York in 1959, was inspired by Helen Jerome's play. There are some distinct differences in these versions, especially in the play: there are three daughters instead of five. Moreover, the type of production house of the film version and the plays determined their length and their run-time in the theatres.

Some conclusions can be drawn from the adaptation by Helen Jerome, and the film and musicals: regional and historical origins of the adaptations impacted upon them, adaptations were controlled by the market and commerce by way of transmission and dissemination, and proximity to the original language was indeed important, because as Wright says, “no one writes Jane Austen so well as Jane Austen” (423).

Due to the very fact that films depend on screenplays, and therefore on the literary source material as well, they are essentially doubly performative. On-screen, the performers must adapt from a written script adapted from a novel, as Leitch says, “the script is a performance text - a text that requires interpretation first by its performers and then by its audience for completion - whereas a literary text requires only interpretation by its readers” (Wilson 150, 323). As Thomas Leitch points out, direct communication from writer to reader, which we often take for granted, is a two-layered adaptation between the audience and the original source.

In the film *Bride and Prejudice*, scripted by Paul Mayeda Berges and directed by Gurinder Chadha, there is a unique multi-layered interface between filmmaker and audience. Cheryl L. Wilson comments that “*Bride and Prejudice* is and is not Jane Austen, is and is not Bollywood, and is and is not Hollywood, it can reach the "multi-national" audience Chadha identifies as her target by providing each viewer with something that is familiar and something that is not” (324).

Since both the texts, the film and the novel, critique women's status and the performance of femininity required to achieve and maintain it, they achieve the same ends with some humor. Chadha's position as an African-Asian immigrant originally from Punjab is unique. Moreover, she is a British filmmaker tying up with Hollywood, shooting in India, and using Bollywood

conventions. She is both inside and outside of the West, and the East as well as Hollywood, and Bollywood, introduces multi-layered nuances regarding race, gender, family, and nationality. In the words of Cheryl A Wilson, "such complication prompts a reflexive re-reading of the novel's conclusion" (324). As a result of this mix-up, a Westernized feminist and social perspective, an extended Indian perspective of identity embedded in Bollywood, a genre she effectively uses, Chadha can convey the incongruities at the heart of globalized encounters, though modern, yet something akin to Jane Austen's perspective.

In two of the critical areas, one finds that the tweaking of the plot/story: the additional layering of three different social conventions, Indian, American and British: and the use of filmic grammar both challenge and enrich the existing fictional framework that *Pride and Prejudice* offers.

Firstly, Lalita, Chadha's Darcy, an American, doesn't need to rescue Lalita or even stage manage Lakhi's wedding as Lalita herself joins him in her search for her wayward sister. Lalita has more agency than Elizabeth in the original. She and Darcy also manage to fall in love and marry despite their two mothers, one who searches online on Indian matrimonial sites for a husband for her daughter. The other who openly matchmakes for her son at a party, right? in front of Lalita, his beloved.

Secondly, Darcy, by convincing his mother not to expand her hotel chain empire in India, rejects the power structure his class and position offer him. However, will the mixed-race couple not always have to negotiate the class and cultural difference imposed by the presence of the controlling mother-in-law in Lalita's life? Is their marriage not already fraught with the contradictions of American metropolitan/ultramodern society versus Indian rural/traditional? The adaptation thus succeeds in "ultimately tempering the celebratory ending of the film", as Wilson comments (329).

Thirdly, Chadha had made her intentions clear about how she would make "a Bollywood-style Hindi movie that somehow interacted wholeheartedly with another cultural tradition," in this case the "English literary tradition" (Chadha and Burges cited in Wilson 331). Since both the Austenian novelistic milieu and the Bollywood format make integral use of song and dance to suggest sexual tensions and attraction, Chadha uses song and dance full tilt in her adaptation, successfully integrating the two traditions of comedy and song and dance, effectively closing the gap "from Amritsar to UK"(331).

The term fanfiction, called fanfic for short, refers to stories produced by fans based on plot lines and characters from either a single source text or else a whole group of books. They express the passionate rendition of fans and their admiration and aspirations for their favourite characters or era, or an ethos the characters inhabiting that world, represent. These fan-created narratives often take the pre-existing story world in a new, sometimes bizarre, direction. While the activities of fans may take many forms, writing stories deriving from one or more source text has long been the most popular way of concretizing and disseminating their passion for a particular fictional universe. Pugh (2005) hints at the democratic quality of the genre, whereas Stasi (2006) claims that fanfic is “canny, sophisticated and resonant with postmodern textuality” (129). While some critics place fan-fiction alongside conventions of the literary world, critics from the media studies world consciously avoid evaluating fan-fiction based on the any kind of serious evaluative criteria. Due to their tendency towards making academic value judgments, they are often called “Aca-Fans” (Thomas 3), like Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandhogs, and S. Lee Herrington. Alan McKee (2004) accuses first-wave theorists of ignoring the discourse of fanfiction as something powerless compared to the pre-existing powerful text. Later theorists look at fanfiction as a more participatory culture: fans create communities, they are like a process, these works are like work in progress, they are additive, they want more and more of a never-ending story, they participate in social networking, uphold standards of privacy, loyalty and belongingness. They create merchandise and tell stories about an Alternate Universe: they create new models for new theories to emerge. For example a whole new occupation or home industry has emerged, of making memorabilia and “merch” or merchandise of these fictional characters. In the case of *Pride and Prejudice*, through puppet-making of actors like Colin Firth and Jennifer Ehle, the larger than fiction aspect of these characters emerges: to so many fans these actors ARE Darcy and Elizabeth in their collective imagination. Bronwen Thomas shows how fanfic has evolved new terms like PWP (Plot what Plot): AU or Alternative Universe, Merchandising and OOC (Out of Character), (9) Fanon (10), in place of “canon.”

Jonathan Gray (2003) proposes new values for appreciating fan fiction, especially those related to challenge and change, and even according to genre or medium. Bronwen Thomas suggests that “we may need to explore a new understanding of the aesthetic value that reflects the decentralization of contemporary culture” (13).

Sarah Cardwell justifies the use of comparative studies for "comparison of texts in different media" to gain "a fuller and more complex understanding of the specificity of the media themselves" ("Adaptation Studies" 56), while George Raitt suggests that "one must approach an adaptation as an intertext" (128), going beyond binaries and good or bad choices.

Raitt further proposes that screen adaptation, and in particular reading/viewing a screen work informed by differences, enables us to study how new and different stories actually emerge. For example, what if the heroine was not intelligent or pretty? Aragay and López Apegaon write about the post-feminist world, in the late-twentieth-century cultural context, in which women like Bridget Jones of the famous intertext *Bridget Jones' Diary* are free to choose their lifestyle. Still, they are therefore free to choose even traditional roles and feel anxious in fulfilling them. Bridget is a free modern woman who is still trapped to find a socially acceptable date, first, and then a husband, in a socially acceptable dress to cover a socially unacceptable figure. Seeing her plight, one feels that Elizabeth or Lydia were far better off in their times. Thus a modern adaptation actually challenges the precepts of the *Ur* text.

New tele-series are the latest to join the intertextual paraphernalia of *Pride and Prejudice* remakes. These texts often show how the younger generation is quite jaded in their view of the adult world, like Amanda Price in the tele-series *Lost in Austen*, whose relations with parents, feelings of rejection, and loss colour her perceptions of love and romance as well. Through the device of time travel, Amanda becomes an "Elizabeth Bennet figure" (Raitt 132) and starts judging the new fantasy world she inhabits with the eye of a disillusioned adolescent critical of hypocritical parents.

Amanda Price switches between the two worlds, the world of Austen in which Lizzie has left the village to stay in London and whom she replaces at her home as if she were a secret friend. Amanda meets with the most awful of scrapes, as a result of being from the modern American world thrust onto Regency England. She is unaware that her disclosure to Darcy that she is not a virgin could make a difference and is distraught when he says he consequently cannot marry her. Darcy does not rescue the Bennet family from ruin, and it is he who articulates the world view attributed to Austen's Elizabeth when he tells Amanda he cannot marry Caroline Bingley because he does not love her. Elizabeth is in London and is not interested in marrying at all! Caroline Bingley discloses to Amanda that she is a lesbian but is determined to marry Darcy and will endure physical love with a man because endurance is the specialty of the female sex. After a twist in which Jane marries Mr. Collins before she realizes that Bingley loves her, Mrs. Bennet tells Amanda "there is nothing to be done for it - the world is full of miserable, loveless marriages - she will find a way to endure

it - women do." Amanda using her best her post-feminist voice replies "we are not condemned to endure our lives: we can change them." But she really doesn't have the power to change anything at all.

Thus, at first glance, *Lost in Austen* portrays a post-feminist heroine choosing to change the direction of her life, to voluntarily enter a fantasy world that limits her role as a woman. But, when the novel and television series are read /viewed together with other works like *Bridget Jones' Diary*, in an intertextual cluster, resulting differences and new interpretations tend to undermine a reading of the post-feminist view of the world in the respective literary and screen works.

Similarly, in *Jane Austen Stole My Boyfriend* by Cora Harrison Jane Austen and Jenny are friends who while away their time in Bath: dancing, shopping, watching men, fantasising over them and finally falling in love, but alongside that there's the life at Bath which complicates the innocent friendship, and Jane becomes the talk of the town as a girl who steals boyfriends. This Jane is also the repository of an extraordinary imagination, fantasy, irony and capability of high flirtation and is yet is full of vulnerable charm. The Austenesque persona is exploited by the author to carry fanfiction to the level of mock autobiographical fiction.

In Seth Grahame-Smith's *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, in an original twist, Austen allegedly co-authored her last novel with the American author, Seth Grahame-Smith, in April 2009, with elements of modern zombie fiction. Specifically, Grahame-Smith has meticulously preserved the original effects of dry-humour, emotions, and even syntactic constructions of the original text. Also, by publicly crediting Austen's co-authorship, Grahame-Smith has surpassed the boundaries of a regular adaptation and steered a creative practice of remixing to negotiate between two eras and generations. While transforming Austen's intended social depiction from subtle metaphors to literal monsters, Seth Grahame-Smith has blended into a classical text the paradigms and conventions of horror and popular fiction.

"It is a truth universally acknowledged that a zombie in possession of brains must be in want of more brains. Never was this truth more plain than during the recent attacks at Netherfield Park, in which a household of eighteen was slaughtered and consumed by a horde of the living dead" (Grahame-Smith 1).

So begins *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, the undead reformulation of the canon. Smith declares in an interview that, “The point wasn’t to rewrite or modernize the original. Rather, it was to preserve as much of it as I could while surgically weaving in (as seamlessly as possible) new words, lines, paragraphs, and occasionally – pages of new battle sequences” (2009).

Therefore, the purpose of this literary-remixing is a more metaphorical reinterpretation of certain aesthetics in cultural history, under the humorous and sarcastic veils of horrification and ‘zombification’. The Zombies are roaming the English country-sides and yet everyone is as excited to dress up and go for a ball to meet their probable match. As Smith further comments: “Many of Austen’s characters are rather like zombies...They carry on single-mindedly in their bubbles of immense wealth and privilege, no matter what’s going on around them,” (Dennis 2009), very much like Mrs. Bennet during the Napoleonic wars. Jane Austen’s Elizabeth who is a strong willed, intelligent, lively, attractive girl here becomes a far more ferocious person, whose reaction to Darcy’s opinion about her in the ball brings out killer instincts:

“As Mr. Darcy walked off, Elizabeth felt her blood turn cold. She had never in her life been so insulted. The warrior code demanded she avenge her honour. Elizabeth reached down to her ankle, taking care not to draw attention. There, her hand met the dagger concealed beneath her dress. She meant to follow this proud Mr. Darcy outside and open his throat”(Smith 15).

The Bennet sisters are trained warriors, Mr. Bennet trains them in martial arts and weapons training, moulding them into a fearsome zombie-fighting army, Elizabeth being the best among them. She can singlehandedly fight and defeat a hoard of the living dead. Even Lady Catherine is described as the greatest warrior in whole of England. This fictional, almost radical feminist, description of the Victorian women as warriors and saviours of England from the ‘unmentionables’ empowers the live female characters created by Austen and at the same time renders a sarcastic comment on their political nature hidden under the masks of sophistication. Austen presents the callous argument between Lady Catherine and Elizabeth as follows:

‘And will you promise me never to enter into such an engagement?’ (Austen 193) Smith, however, alters the scene with a more literal expression of the characters’ animosity:

"I would sooner die than see my honour so defiled." "Then Miss Bennet," said Lady Catherine, setting down her parasol and removing her coat, "die you shall." Upon this, she set her feet for combat (Smith 193).

Seth says in an interview to Den of Geeks that "many of Austen's characters simply carry on with their gossip and romances and manners and balls, despite the fact that people are being gored and eaten alive." Thus, Seth Grahame Smith's creative exemplar *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* has paid its own unique homage to this canonical text by Jane Austen in more than one way, interrupting it with references to Zombie fiction, nuancing it with radical feminist undertones, which surprise the readers and interpret the original text in a challenging way.

A YouTube video adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* called *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, produced specifically for the Internet platform YouTube, transfers the story of Bennet family to the year 2012. Lizzie, an American graduate student, the protagonist and primary first-person narrator telling her story format typical of YouTube: the vlog. Biweekly, a video was posted Lizzie Bennet's YouTube channel, resulting in an adaptation that spread over the course of almost an entire year, ultimately reaching one hundred episodes on the main channel and adding up to seven to ten hours' worth video material. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* creators also chose to embrace a trans-medial approach to the adaptation process, adding other Internet-based media like Twitter, Tumblr, Lookbook, Pinterest or Facebook to entertain fans. Followers could explore the characters', as well as the cast and crew's social media profiles. Additionally, *The Secret Diaries of Lizzie Bennet*, a fictitious diary in print, complementing the YouTube series was published in 2014 and a novelization from Lydia Bennet's perspective is due to be released subsequently.

Vlogs, like new series, fanfiction and film or television series have thus the ability to give viewers a sense of intertextuality, narrative fiction, experimentation, transmedia storytelling and the unique possibility of interactivity. Even if it remains fragmentary, an adaptation is worthwhile because it embeds the text in a network of creative activities and interpersonal communication. They can no longer be dismissed as adolescent forays into fictive adventures: rather, they do surprise, interrupt, challenge, and interpret our engagement with the experience of the original reading of the classic. And all through this, Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* lives on.

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