

An analysis of 'pride and prejudice' and its cinematic adaptation

[Experience](#), [Human Nature](#)



" My courage always rises with every attempt to intimidate me."

- Elizabeth Bennet, Pride and Prejudice

'Pride and Prejudice' dwells as a piece of literature which continues to go on captivating our hearts to this very day by its realistic portrayal of the then society, wit, humor and of course, love. Having graced the pages and charming readers, it has also set its foot into the visual world of art, catering to a further larger audience, enchanting the cine-goers as well.

This research article is an analysis of 'Pride and Prejudice' and its cinematic adaptation with respect to the similarities and differences between them regarding the theme, setting, characters, and plot, along with examining it through the lens of the literary and adaptation theories and criticisms, while exploring the limitations and advantages of both the mediums, keeping in mind that film adaptations have been a boon to some people, while being a source of discontentment for the others.

In 'A Theory of Adaptation', Linda Hutcheon, defines an adaptation as "an extended, deliberate, announced revisitation of a particular work of art does manage to provide some limits: short intertextual allusions to other works orbits of sampled music would not be included." (Hutcheon, 170).

Deborah Cartmell, in her beautiful introduction of A Companion to Literature, Film, and Adaptation explains to us how "new technology has always been greeted with suspicion". She gave the example of Plato who "expressed horror over the invention of writing in the fear that it would destroy the art of memory".

" Today the words " memory" and " writing" could be replaced with " literature" and " ? Im" insofar as writers and literary critics, from the very beginning of film history, were deeply suspicious of cinema, especially adaptations of literary works. But she adds that though Plato's fears may have come true, " most would agree that it was a price worth paying". Besides, " Scepticism often follows innovation: photography could be the ruination of painting; the car of the horse; and the film of the book".

THEORIES

Michael Klein and Gillian Parker discuss adaptation theories in *The English Novel and the Movies*, (NY: Ungar, 1981).

They see three types of adaptation:

1. " most films of classic novels attempt to give the impression of being faithful, that is, literal, translations"
2. " retains the core of the structure of the narrative, while significantly re-interpreting, or in some cases de-constructing, the source text"
3. " regards the source merely as raw material, as simply the occasion for an original work"

Morris Beja in *Film and Literature*, (New York: Longman, 1977) sees two major " schools" of adaptation, and admits that they are oversimplified in his presentation:

1. The screenwriter believes that integrity of the original work be preserved, and therefore that it should not be tampered with and should in fact be uppermost in the adapter's mind.

2. The screenwriter believes that it's proper and in fact necessary to adapt the original work freely, in order to create -- in the different medium that is now being employed -- a new, different work of art with its own integrity.

Now it is a well-known fact that tension between literature and film have been present from the beginning of screen adaptations, which in fact, is as old as cinema itself.

Leo Tolstoy considered film " a direct attack on the methods of literary art" 10, while Virginia Woolf felt that cinema and literary adaptations in particular, were responsible for the moral decline and vulgarization of modern society, invoking the biological in her description of cinema as a " parasite" and literature as its " prey" 11 .

An anxiety about the potential death of writing posed by film adaptation in the early twentieth century, still prevalent today, is perhaps as much about a fear concerning the death of the author, a concept that André Bazin notes is at the core of hostilities to adaptation

" the problem with adaptation," that is to say the irreducible expectations of a substantial part of the audience to experience " their" reading of the novel when watching the film adaptation, which inevitably leads to disappointment.

According to Robert Stam, there are several factors which have informed the traditional privileging of literature over film (and other media forms), including class prejudice, iconophobia (suspicion of the visual), logophilia (a

belief in the primacy of the written word), and anti-corporeality (distaste for the ways in which the medium of cinema engages with the body of the spectator)¹².

But there are people whose opinions about adaptation are more inclined towards Beja's second school of adaptation.

" The test of a good adaptation is one which achieves repetition without replication"

— Mark Brokenshire

For instance, Satyajit Ray does not approve films being just " slavish translations", he believes that an adaptation will have to undergo " a process of thorough reshaping", but not " reshaping beyond recognition". Moreover, he adds that, one " may borrow his material, but he must colour it with his own experience of the medium." (Ray,

The rift between how the author is perceived by literary critic and film director is a subject area that continues to bewilder and fascinate and the two authors whose works are most discussed by enthusiasts of adaptation are undoubtedly Shakespeare and Austen.

In this paper the 2005 cinematic adaptation An Austen adaptation which has not been universally well received is Joe Wright's *Pride & Prejudice* (2005) it rather has polarized opinions and gained fans as well as foes.

Firstly, let us examine *Pride and Prejudice* through few literary theories and criticisms:

FEMINIST LITERARY THEORY

"As a social movement, feminist criticism highlights the various ways women, in particular, have been oppressed, suppressed, and repressed. It asks new questions of old texts. It develops and uncovers a female tradition in writing. It analyzes women writers and their words from female perspectives..." (Bressler 185)

- Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice

Elizabeth, the main character of the book as well as the most beloved character of has been portrayed as a very strong independent woman who lived her life on her own terms. She was not known to give in under pressure, an example can be that she objects to her mother's wish of having her getting married to Mr. Collins. She also rejects Mr. Darcy's proposal despite his ten thousand pounds a year, which was considered an enormous fortune back in 1813.

When Lady de Bourgh confronts Elizabeth about her relationship with Mr. Darcy and insults her she firmly states that, " he is a gentleman; I am a gentleman's daughter; so far we are equal." (Austen, Chapter 56), a true feminist moment, after all Feminism is a doctrine that equates women and men equal.

The most ultimate moment in the book when Elizabeth is truly emerged as a feminist is when Elizabeth is described as having a sporty demeanour by Georgiana. " Georgiana had the highest opinion in the world of Elizabeth;

though at first she often listened with astonishment bordering on alarm at her lively, sportive manner of talking to her brother" (Austen, Chapter 61).

MARXIST LITERARY THEORY

As one can clearly see, *Pride and Prejudice* revolves around the theme of social class very frequently. Austen uses characters like Mr. Collins, Ms. Bingley and Lady Catherine de Bourgh to elucidate how class difference is always maintained within the folks, be it social gatherings or personal meetings.

Mr. Collins, quite unknowingly, reveals to us what a snob Lady Catherine was and how she adhered to the practices of class distinction,

" Do not make yourself uneasy, my dear cousin, about your apparel. Lady Catherine is far from requiring that elegance of dress in us which becomes herself and her daughter. I could advise you merely to put on whatever of your clothes is superior to the rest—there is no occasion for anything more. Lady Catherine will not think the worse of you for being simply dressed. She likes to have the distinction of rank preserved." (29. 6)

We also see Mr. Darcy, unwittingly trifling with Elizabeth's self-esteem during his first proposal,

" He spoke well; but there were feelings besides those of the heart to be detailed; and he was not more eloquent on the subject of tenderness than of pride. His sense of her inferiority—of its being a degradation—of the family obstacles which had always opposed to inclination, were dwelt on

with a warmth which seemed due to the consequence he was wounding but was very unlikely to recommend his suit." (34. 5).

STRUCTURALISM THEORY

We see the novel being infused with a series of binary oppositions. Few examples would be gentry/non-gentry, rich/poor, male/female, parent/child officer/subordinate, older/younger, attractive/unattractive. In each of these cases, the first of the paired qualities are associated with power and are more highly valued in the village.

For Michael Foucault, informal control mechanisms function to enforce power structures. Continuous form of information circulation is established. For example, the way, at the ball at Netherfield, by which the villagers pay close attention to who dances with whom and how many times. It is also important to note that informal social control mechanisms are used to intimidate those who appear to be overstepping or challenging social norms, as when Lady Catherine tries to prevent Elizabeth from marrying Darcy.

In many ways, Austen shows resistance to the operation of power in several moments of subversion. Her positive portraits of the Gardiners and the acceptance of them by Darcy and Elizabeth subverts the binary opposition between tradesmen and gentry, and suggests that noble character is not a matter of birth or profession but inner goodness. One can view Elizabeth's marriage to Darcy as ultimately an example of subversion or of assimilation.

NEW HISTORICISM

New Historicism is a theory applied to literature that suggests literature must be studied and interpreted within the context of both the history of the author and the history of the critic.

Jane Austen lived in an era when land, property and other materialistic needs were the factors that were taken into account of while deciding a matrimonial alliance rather than considering the presence of love and understanding between the couple. By Lydia's marriage to Wickham in contrast to Jane and Elizabeth's respective marriages, Austen is criticizing her culture's notion of marriage being a form of security or an increase in one's own wealth. Another example could be Mr. Collins's proposal to Elizabeth using the argument,

" My reasons for marrying are, first, that I think it a right thing for every clergyman in easy circumstances (like myself) to set the example of matrimony in his parish; secondly, that I am convinced that it will add very greatly to my happiness; and thirdly... that it is the particular advice and recommendation of Lady Catherine"
(Austen 65).

The above state showcases the mentality of the then society which is focussed on the first reason of Collins's intention to get married.