Ideology in Images: The 1990s Austen Film Revival

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Lois Dawn Atkinson

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to the required standard

Dr. Lisa A. Surridge, Supervisor (Department of English)

Dr. Judith Mitchell, Department Member (Department of English)

Dr. Lianne McLarty, Outside Member (Department of History in Art)

Dr. Leslie Saxon, External Examiner (Department of Linguistics)

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University of Victoria

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Supervisor: Dr. Lisa A. Surridge

ABSTRACT

In the 1990s all five of Jane Austen's two-hundred-year-old novels were newly adapted for cinema, television, or both. This thesis seeks to understand the appeal of these adaptations by examining a selection of three. The first to be discussed is the popular television mini-series *Pride and Prejudice.* Although the most technically faithful to Austen, it is also the most embellished. Austen's heroine and hero are frankly exploited as objects of desire, luxury goods are displayed as part of the entertainments, and romantic passions repeatedly upstage Austen's social commentary. The second is a high art film version of *Sense and Sensibility.* In this adaptation, new feminist dialogue and a pronounced Cinderella motif are inserted into Austen's romantic plot. Again, Austen's social debate is eclipsed by romance, and feminist protest is finally absorbed into wedding imagery. The third film under discussion is the avant-garde production of *Mansfield Park* in which Austen's plot and characters are virtually re-invented so that a post-colonial feminist political agenda can be developed. Austen's passive and long-suffering heroine is transformed into an active one who has romantic adventures, and who becomes a narrator as well. Meanwhile a new slave sub-plot simmers with sex and violence. In the end, the heroine achieves an idealised post-feminist resolution: she becomes a traditional wife and a successful fiction writer. Although these adaptations differ in style, all three minimize, exclude or distort Austen's social-feminist agenda. Although these adaptations differ in style, all three reflect a self-conscious 1990s approach which, despite updated feminist content, results in an increased emphasis on romantic love as a woman's ultimate fulfilment.

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IDEOLOGY IN IMAGES: THE 1990s AUSTEN FILM REVIVAL

Introduction

> The concerns at the center of Austen's plots—sex, romance, and money—are central concerns in our own era. (Troost and Greenfield)

The Austen film revival began in 1995 with the release of two productions that display its breadth: writer/director Amy Heckerling's *Clueless* (a pop version of *Emma* uprooted to Beverly Hills and updated to the 1990s), and Nick Dear's classic screenplay of *Persuasion.* That same year, *Sense and Sensibility,* written by and starring Emma Thompson, arrived in art-house cinemas as Christmas entertainment, and the New Year was ushered in on television with the BBC/A&E blockbuster mini-series *Pride and Prejudice.* In August 1996 another film version of *Emma,* starring Gwyneth Paltrow, was released, and the following February A&E presented its new television version of the same novel. In 1999 Canadian writer/director Patricia Rozema's *Mansfield Park* opened the Christmas season, and in the year 2000 productions of *Northanger Abbey* and *Sanditon* were said to be in the works. All seven releases are available on home video cassettes, and all are repeatedly shown on various television networks and movie channels. Indeed, an American newspaper has dubbed Jane Austen "one of the hippest women of Anglo-American pop culture" (*Orange County Register*).

Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield, editors of *Jane Austen in Hollywood* (1998), recognise that these films have initiated an Austen revival that extends beyond the small and large screens, a revival that includes "tie-in editions of the novels" and related publications. The membership of the Jane Austen Society of North America "jumped 50

percent over the course of 1996 alone" (*Hollywood* 1–2), and American Home Treasures distributes a three-volume home-video package entitled "Jane Austen's Life, Society, Works." Yahoo shows 53 Austen websites, including annotated and electronic text of all Austen's novels, as well as her minor works. Some of these sites promote the revival films while others review them. Still other sites, not unlike the revival films themselves, are a fusion of pop and classic Austen: there is a "Jane Austen Campfire Chat" website, a hypertext Jane Austen archive, and a website of "Piano Classics From the World of Jane Austen." There is also a published paperback of Emma Thompson's *Sense and Sensibility* screenplay and diaries (1996) which boasts that this version of Austen is a happy combination of art and profit which has earned an Academy Award and "more than $125 million world wide". The success of the Austen revival must lie in the fact that Austen's works, which addressed needs in her society, address needs in our own.

Austen in Her Own Time

The novel as a form allowed Austen to clearly, yet indirectly, voice her opinions about her sex and her class, and argue accordingly for social reform. As an early nineteenth-century feminist, Jane Austen favoured the genre of the love story and the territory of the domestic. However, both form and territory contain tensions that ensure these novels are not a retreat from the world for her readers. In particular, three Austen heroines who are discussed in detail in this thesis—Elinor Dashwood, Elizabeth Bennet and Fanny Price—are trapped, and in significant ways unloved and isolated, inside the domestic sphere. Yet as impotent members of unstable, dysfunctional families, these women have an intelligence and moral agency that allows them to gain their perfect mate,

and in doing so they develop a measure of autonomy, influence and power.

Austen wrote at a time when novels were criticised in much the same way as many television dramas and movies are today. Although novel-reading was a popular pastime among the middle classes, the literary establishment considered novels addictive trash that dulled reason and had an unhealthy effect on morals and the imagination. Nonetheless, as Austen critic Gary Kelly (1996) points out, the novel provided models and formulas for those readers aspiring to raise their material and class standing (157). These middle-class novel readers were preoccupied with distinguishing themselves from the lower orders, and they aspired to merge with the landed gentry. Austen was a member of the middle classes and her "business" was similarly upwardly mobile; novel writing was "her occupation, task, province, profession, agenda, concern and—not least—her line of commerce" (154). Austen upgraded the novel as a form, and within that form she worked to empower women and better the reputation of her class.

Austen did not legitimise "trash," but she improved a form which was labelled trash, and transformed the "sub-literary" into "Literature" (154). In 1996, Kelly lists four ways she accomplished this: first, she stayed "within a decorously feminine range of reading"; second, she represented the advantages of women having "cultivated minds" while condemning "the dangers of female intellectual presumption…[and] the culture of Sensibility"; third, she depicted "a constructive interchange of gentry and middle-class virtues"; and finally, she portrayed the "stabilising force of a social hierarchy led by a coalition of enlightened gentry and professionals" (156/159). Kelly's four points demonstrate that Austen's ambitions for the novel, women and the middle class cannot be separated; they are integral one to the other. Nancy Armstrong makes a similar claim when

she writes, "I will insist that one cannot distinguish the production of the new female ideal either from the rise of the novel or from the rise of the new middle classes in England" (*Desire & Domestic Fiction* 8). Armstrong argues that "political events cannot be understood apart from women's history, from the history of women's literature or from changing representations of the household" (11).

In his essay "Jane Austen, Romantic Feminism, and Civil Society," Kelly argues that Austen was a feminist, and through her novels she participated "in a feminism of her time" (19). British Romantic feminists "subsumed elements of the Revolutionary feminism of the 1790s led by Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Hays" (23). But society was reacting against British reform movements that had become associated with the French Revolution, and these feminists "abandoned Revolutionary feminists' claims for women's direct participation in the public and political sphere" (23). Nevertheless, they wrote against "social, legal, and economic injustice" that had disempowered, threatened and impoverished women, and forced them to depend on feminine wiles and egocentric behaviour (24). In *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), Austen's plot implicitly argues against male-biased inheritance laws. However, as a Church of England supporter and a member of the rising middle classes, Austen does not seek to empower her heroines in ways that threaten her class or her church; reform rather than revolution meets her needs. In contrast, the more revolutionary Wollstonecraft needs society to undergo an ideological transformation. Austen and Wollstonecraft part ways in regard to women's place. Both of them believe women should play an active role in reshaping society, but Wollstonecraft argues that women be allowed to work in the public sphere alongside men, and Austen has her heroines experience social and personal fulfilment in the domestic sphere.

Similarly, Austen's views on marriage may be illuminated by a contrast with Wollstonecraft. Austen's heroines are freed by the institution of marriage and Wollstonecraft's are trapped in it. Wollstonecraft's only finished novel, *Mary* (1788), ends in gloom:

> Her delicate state of health did not promise long life. In moments of solitary sadness, a gleam of joy would dart across her mind—She thought she was hastening to that world where *there is neither marrying* [Wollstonecraft's emphasis], nor giving in marriage. (68)

Austen's novels declare her investment in her class as a stabilising social force and in her Church as a stabilising moral force, with marriage as their meeting ground, and in sharp contrast to Wollstonecraft, her last completed novel, *Persuasion* (1818), literally ends in glory:

> She gloried in being a sailor's wife, but she must pay the tax of quick alarm for belonging to that profession which is, if possible, more distinguished in its domestic virtues than in its national importance. (180)

Both Austen and Wollstonecraft confront the "conflict between reason and feeling" that came out of the age of Sensibility but, again, they differ profoundly in their responses (Kelly x, introduction to *Mary* and *The Wrongs of Women*). Kelly characterises Wollstonecraft's first novel, *Mary,* as "emotional" in "matter" and "moral and philosophical" in "form" (x). The opposite could be said of one of Austen's early novels, *Sense and Sensibility,* which is emotional in form (a love story with a conventional happy ending), and moral and philosophical in its matter (its argument that privileges reason over feeling).

In making the novel form her own, Austen elevates it: in creating heroines like Elizabeth Bennet, Elinor Dashwood and Fanny Price she makes strong moral and intellectual arguments for empowering women; in creating a romantic hero like Captain

Wentworth she argues for the advance of her class in the public sphere; in creating good churchmen like Edmund Burtram and Edward Ferrars, she buttresses her religion, and in creating a weak and foolish one like Mr. Collins she warns against complacency. Although the nation was in a profoundly reactionary mood, Austen managed to use her charm to advocate change—a charm that is literary, a charm that has everything to do with ability, intelligence and wit, rather than "feminine wiles."

Austen in the 1990s

Having legitimised the novel form, Austen's works soon began to acquire a literary status, and their wider popularity built steadily until "by the end of the [nineteenth] century there were many, cheap and illustrated, [editions of her novels] on sale" (Tomalin 277). In the twentieth century her novels have become popular classics. Austen is "one of the few great writers who is popular outside academe as well as in...[B]etween 1952 and 1972 there were 551 books, essays and articles published, not to mention 85 doctoral dissertations" (Tomalin 284). In the 1990s Austen's status rose to that of an icon and she became a high-growth industry:

> In the 1990s you can buy virtually disposable copies, paying 1 (pound] for an Austen novel on a station bookstall and throwing it away at the end of the journey if you can bear to. With films and television, sequels, prequels and examination syllabuses, Austen has become very big business. (Tomalin 277)

Although Austen's popularity has been marked by film and television productions in the past, the 1990s revival has been special: it has produced spectacular hits in the two media simultaneously. What is the reason for this phenomenal success? As Troost and Greenfield ask, "What in Jane Austen's novels has made them so readily adaptable to film in the 1990s, and exactly what changes have they required to be successful in this period?"

(3). A full-page advertisement on the back of a television program guide gives some insight to such cultural needs:

> FORGOTTEN VALUES
>
> In an era of virtual environments—and plastics—old stones are a reminder of forgotten values; the nobility of the material, the serenity of things that are made to last and that elegance, that bold line that emerges from the imagination, from the human sensitivity (*Times Colonist*).

This ad sells bedroom furniture; yet, like the Austen revival productions, material comfort, traditional values and humanity are represented as a package of luxury goods, and dubbed the "Heritage Collection." Troost and Greenfield point out that Austen's "values," "characters" and plots of "sex, romance, and money" have always been the main attraction, but among the text's six contributing essays are arguments that these 1990s productions also encourage "reactionary escapism" and "a retreat from reality" into visions of a genteel past (3-4). Some critics argue further that these films undercut Austen with picturesque images of settings and people, enhanced romance, and the introduction of a superficial feminism (7). Is such enthusiasm the response of a threatened middle-class nostalgically watching their forebears thrive in pastoral comfort? Are city dwellers escaping the urban wasteland? Or is this popularity largely the response of women who acknowledge the gains made by the women's movement, but perceive feminists as unnecessarily radical?

Austen was forging a vision of new women in a new civil society when she created heroines who earned intellectual respect and acquired power in their domestic roles, but the viewers of these revival films look back at an idealised past and watch female characters who support what are now entrenched middle-class conventions and family structures that inhibit rather than free women. In the happy endings of these film

adaptations the divisions between patriarchy and feminism appear to be resolved. Furthermore, these Austen narratives are revised with contemporary socio-political references in order to be relevant to today's audience: when Elinor, in Ang Lee's *Sense and Sensibility,* complains to Edward Ferrars that she cannot work in the public sphere— "you will inherit your fortune. We cannot even earn ours"— this is not Austen but late twentieth-century liberal-feminist commentary. And because such revisions are scattered rather than sustained they do not detract from the ideologically safe precincts and pretty images that make up the self-contained, beautifully groomed, middle-class world of the film.

A further result of such changes is that in the process of being entertained, and especially through relating to reconstructed film versions of Austen's heroines, viewers are encouraged to feel a part of what Armstrong calls Austen's "middle-class aristocracy" (160). Parallel with this promotion, the low status of the Hollywood picture and television industry is advanced through such a production. For those who are so frequently condemned as producers of trash, these Austen revival productions are mitigation. Instead of showing (and some say encouraging) predatory sex and violence, these gentle romantic comedies present a select slice of genteel country life that encourages a nostalgia for the values, decorum and social hierarchies that Austen subscribed to, and in doing so support the status quo. This comforting association is reinforced through the notion that watching a production of a work of Austen, unlike so much popular entertainment on commercial television, shows good taste. Simply through enjoying an Austen production we are enjoying Literature, and can perceive ourselves as part of a dominant social group actively engaged in a high-culture activity, rather than that worrying alternative—a couch potato

mindlessly "watching tv." Indeed, Troost and Greenfield worry that

> the Caroline Bingleys of the 1990s may just visit the Colin Firth websites and buy CDs of music from Austen's era, thinking that they are participating in High Culture. (9)

Recycling Heroines and Revising Austen's Agenda

Austen's novels, like those of so many other nineteenth- century writers, seem to lend themselves to screen productions because of their realism. But Austen's narrator, who is as integral to these novels as plot or protagonists, is largely missing from the films. At best she appears in fragments: Elizabeth Bennet is given a few of the narrator's witty speeches and allowed many satirical smiles; Fanny Price periodically steps out of her role as heroine and addresses the viewers directly as narrator, and even as a version of Austen herself. However, Austen's narrator is a much larger and more controlling presence than this—as controlling as the motion picture camera.

Unlike Austen revival film makers, Roman Polansky, for example, was able to relocate Thomas Hardy's narrator from the novel *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* into his 1980 film adaptation of *Tess*. He was able to do so because Hardy's narrator is an observer who describes the natural world, and his is the gaze that ceaselessly watches Tess. Polansky's camera gives us Hardy's panorama and also becomes the voyeur who keeps Tess under close surveillance. Polansky's *Tess* succeeds because the novel's narrator and the camera (which is any film's primary narrator) communicate through visual images, not because the film is a replica of Hardy's novel. Austen's narrator is not a voyeur, nor does she produce finely observed descriptions of the natural world: "Austen, after all, is notoriously cerebral—a resolute niggard in her descriptive dealings with food, clothes, animals, children, weather, and landscape" (Amis 34). This narrator's wit and skill as a story-teller

can be dispersed in the films, surfacing most notably in the heroine's speeches or the camera's observations, but her role as commentator and moral agent is another matter altogether. Frequently Austen's narrator insists the reader stop and reflect. Indeed, even the renowned first sentence of *Pride and Prejudice* has such an effect: the most careless reader must pause and re-read ("It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife." [5]). In contrast, a conventional—that is, a commercial—motion picture invests in a dramatic flow of images and events.

The complexity Austen's narrator brings to a novel is lost to the film when the storyline dominates rather than the personality that tells it. Stripped of the narrator, what remains is largely a clever plot in need of embellishment, and it is these embellishments that are so important because they contain influential revisions. The screenwriter, director, and camera become the trio of storytellers that take over the role of Austen's narrator, and the embellishments most frequently consist of romantic imagery. They include images of an idealised past: postcard views of pastoral landscapes and magnificent country homes, meticulously arranged period interiors, horses and carriages, costumes and corsets. These details are entertaining in themselves and encourage a nostalgia for a fictional past that is ideologically safe and financially lucrative for the film's investors. Although these adaptations have a broad embrace that accommodates the left-wing feminist, the right-wing reactionary, the devotee of popular romance novels and the lover of Literature, finally these heroines endure and thrive in the traditional domestic sphere. Such productions implicitly advocate the preservation of middle-class patriarchal traditions for our comfort, safety and profit.

This thesis will study three films that represent a cross-section of the Austen revival,

a popular, a classic and a radical production. The first chapter will evaluate the mini-series *Pride and Prejudice* (1995) which has been a spectacular hit on pop culture's most favoured medium, television. Of these three revival adaptations, as well as being the most technically faithful to Austen's novel, this is also the most embellished, with exhibitions of fashion, wealth and comfort, and with Austen's heroine and hero frankly exploited as objects of desire. Troost and Greenfield note that "the translation to a visual medium encourages a far greater reliance on images...[these] unremitting images, however, provide far more than visual equivalents for Austen's text; the images inescapably change the emphasis" (6). Each invented scene "carves a new facet into the text" (6) as do "beautiful lead actors": In *Pride and Prejudice* the lightest and most beloved of all Austen's works, moral issues and social disasters are weighty matters lessened largely through the narrator's wit. In the mini-series, wit leads and weighty matters are reduced, sidelined and upstaged by a procession of lush romantic images.

The second chapter will discuss *Sense and Sensibility* (1996) as a Hollywood-style high art production that raises feminist concerns, only to assimilate them into a patriarchal resolution. Although careful to retain the stamp of Literature and honour the Austen mystique, this film makes an all-out bid for popular appeal through enhanced romantic themes and images, enhancements that undercut Austen's rational proto-feminist heroine and support her romantic antithesis. Of all the Austen revival screenplays, it was this one, written by Emma Thompson, that Hollywood rewarded with an Oscar. The Hollywood film industry's image is doubly enhanced via such a production, first by Austen's literary reputation, and second, by Thompson's reputation as a Cambridge-educated Shakespearean actor and the writer of what appears to be a feminist screenplay.

The final chapter discusses *Mansfield Park* (1999), the latest and most radical revival production. This film profoundly changes Austen's novel, brightening its sombre tones, enlivening and emancipating its heroine. It also attempts to make a political statement by presenting a revisionist history of the English gentry during the Regency period. Canadian film maker Patricia Rozema wrote the screenplay and directed. Claudia L. Johnson, a highly respected Austen critic, praises her artistry and ethics, asserting that Austen would have "concurred in the moral if not the manner" of Rozema's re-invention of Sir Thomas as a sadistic slave-owner (16). Johnson also praises Rozema' s accomplishment in delivering "Austen's presence as a narrator" (16). However, it is romantic passion rather than radical innovation that sells the film; for example, the advertisement in *Vogue* magazine that shows a close-up of a lovers' kiss superimposed in the clouds above an idealistic view of an English country estate; the copy reads, "A spirit that can't be broken. A love that knows no rules."

Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony as a political process is concerned with how social "conflict is contained and channelled into ideologically safe harbours. That is, hegemony is maintained...by dominant groups and classes 'negotiating' with, and making concessions to, subordinate groups and classes" (Storey 124-25). By analysing aspects of these revival productions, I will show this process of hegemony at work; in particular, I will demonstrate the way in which feminist rhetoric and the apparent dissolution of the division between high and low art are neutralised as threats and turned into assets that support the romantic plots which, in turn, support the status quo.

These film versions of Austen novels involve political negotiations, including probably the most important cultural change in the last thirty years, the status of women.

In particular two of the Austen adaptations discussed here, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Mansfield Park,* explicitly present contemporary feminist concerns, but the problems raised are resolved in romantic plots that honour and support traditional patriarchal institutions: in the same way that elite culture is accommodated within popular media, feminism is accommodated within patriarchy. Nancy Armstrong points out that when Austen marries off her characters in her novels they are fixed "to a role within a household among households, thereby stabilizing the community" (135). These films, with revisions which make them relevant to today's viewers, do much the same thing. They leave intact happy endings in which the heroines—even Fanny Price, who becomes a writer—embrace the traditional conventions of domesticity.

The revival productions of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility* entertain, comfort and provide the "ideologically safe harbours" described by Storey. In contrast, *Mansfield Park* attempts historical revision through incorporating militant socio-political material, but, as this thesis argues, with less-than-successful results. In these productions, Austen's Regency heroines and their stories are modified in order to link past with present, and in the process they come to serve as models for the "post feminist" woman of the 1990s. This socio-political accommodation has a parallel in the accommodation of art to the business of film making, an accommodation which can be observed in a remark Emma Thompson makes in her diaries: "am rewriting tomorrow's scene. It's too complicated for the time we have available to shoot it, needs simplifying" (233). In sum, this thesis is concerned to describe what is cut from Austen's novels, what is put in the place of those cuts, and to what effect.

Chapter 1: "Escape the Ordinary": A&E's *Pride and Prejudice*

Cultural critic John Storey argues that popular culture is difficult to pin down as a "conceptual category" since it can only be discussed in contrast with some other form of culture, such as high art (18–19). Certainly, the notion of otherness is present in a television network named "Art and Entertainment" (A&E), with "Art" signifying exclusivity (in the form of high art) and "Entertainment" signifying inclusiveness (in the form of popular culture). Paradoxically, the network name also implicitly merges the elite and the popular. Either way, it would seem fitting for A&E to invest in a work that meets the criteria for both categories—Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice,* co-produced by A&E and the BBC, is both a literary classic and an enduringly popular novel. Furthermore, it is a narrative that is concerned with collapsing boundaries between the upper and middle classes, and, through the emerging feminism of Austen's day, boundaries that separate the sexes. Yet this chapter argues that the A&E/BBC adaptation does not so much reveal Austen's concerns as reflect and promote conservative forces current in our own society—particularly the economic interests of capitalism and traditions of patriarchy. Gender conflicts are simplified to serve the interests of romantic comedy, and are resolved in a Hollywood-style grand finale wedding scene. Darcy's snobbishness becomes sexy and the Bingley sisters' elitism, diverting, so much so that class conflict seems superficial, and therefore can be ignored. This is not high art transformed into low entertainment, nor is it a merger of high and low—I will argue that this is an adaptation best understood as a hegemonic process that supports the status quo of the late 1990s.

The ideological point of view attached to this spectacular costume drama has much in common with A&E's slogan "escape the ordinary"—the "ordinary" being a tacit

definition of everyday life in the mid-1990s. According to Richard Dyer escapist films furnish "temporary answers to the inadequacies of the society which is being escaped from through entertainment" (277). In his essay "Entertainment and Utopia," Dyer uses the genre of Hollywood musicals for his analysis, and suggests that these films most often present "what utopia would feel like rather than how it would be organized." This feeling, or "sensibility," is encoded in non-representational signs...[such as] colour, texture, movement, rhythm, melody, camerawork" (273). In her novel Austen criticised social hierarchies, particularly those of class and gender, but in the mini-series the impact of these criticisms is reduced through images that encourage the viewer to feel rather than think. In this way the production supports Dyer's argument that an escapist film defines and delimits "what constitutes the legitimate needs of people in this society" (278). This chapter discusses some of the ways the A&E/BBC television adaptation limits the scope of Austen's work, and in doing so "delimits" legitimate needs—particularly through its relentless focus on romantic love and its idealised images of the past, a combination that supports patriarchal traditions, and objectifies and disempowers women. My first section looks at the ways in which romantic love—both the sentimental and the erotic—is packaged in utopian images that simplify Austen's narrative and lessen the impact of her concern with class, moral, and gender issues. I argue that this results in an intellectually undemanding production, one that limits the viewer to emotional swings between nostalgia and passion. The second section looks at the production's embellishments, how the historical trappings reflect and reinforce a consumer society, and how Austen's heroine loses her subjectivity when she is incorporated into the picturesque, becoming, in effect, just another glossy accessory.

Utopian Images: Nostalgic, Romantic, Erotic

> **nostalgia** n 1 sentimental yearning for a period of the past; regretful or wistful memory of an earlier time. 2 a thing or things which evoke a former era. 3 severe homesickness. (OED)

It is difficult, if not impossible, to read Austen's 1813 novel as an exercise in nostalgia, but the 1995 television adaptation, dramatised by Andrew Davies and directed by Simon Langton, invites that very sentiment. Even the opening credits are nostalgia-inducing since they roll over a pattern of embroidery worked upon the fine gown of a Regency gentlewoman. The gown, and the fleeting glimpse of the hand at work upon it, is clearly meant to be a metaphor for Austen's literary labour. However, the metaphor both compliments and belittles Austen's accomplishment; the exquisite embroidery is clearly a "feminine" art form, as frivolously pleasing as the nimble piano accompaniment. The embroidered cloth is also luxury merchandise fit for display in the finest shop window, and as such it represents—and advertises—consumer goods. Furthermore, this pink satin gown is a metonym for the female body itself, and anticipates how the mini-series objectifies and eroticizes women's bodies for the scopophilic pleasure of the audience. Finally, the embroidered pink satin signals the mini-series' emphasis on nostalgia, romance, and sensuality in its interpretation of Austen's novel. This is a fitting introduction for a mini-series that re-creates utopia in its images of the past —a "golden age" version which suggests how attractive, rather than restrictive, the social conventions of our past can be. In this adaptation, spectacle is always in itself visually entertaining, but it is also habitually used to heighten emotional sensation. The result is an all-feeling production that concentrates with fierce intensity on what Jennifer Ehle (the actress who plays Elizabeth) calls "a compulsive love story" (*Orange County Register*).

In this screen adaptation the central concern of Austen's novel—the class barrier that separated Elizabeth and Darcy—is romanticised and eroticized. The opening credits give way to a nostalgia-inducing postcard view: on a fine summer morning two young men, impeccably outfitted in Regency costumes, ride splendid horses over a time-honoured pastoral English landscape. This is soon to be followed by an equally nostalgic indoor scene—the Assembly ball. Garnished with candle light and decorative young women, Austen's modest country ball is translated into a screen spectacle. It is a delightful view, and along with its sheer entertainment value, the spectacle presents an idealistic vision of community—and in the process represents class hierarchy as something to be encouraged more than criticised. Aristocratic arrogance when manifested in the snobbery of Bingley's sisters is laughable, but in the romantic figure of Darcy it is highly attractive. Austen's novel criticises Darcy's arrogance; the film eroticizes this class difference. When Darcy proves to be "the proudest, most disagreeable man in the world," Austen's narrator transformes his "fine, tall person, handsome features, [and] noble mien" into "a most forbidding, disagreeable countenance" (11). In contrast, the mini-series' Darcy (Colin Firth) is a "heartthrob" who smoulders attractively (Littlefield, *The Orange County Register*).

This eroticization is heightened in the transformation of both characters into conventional objects of desire. In defiance of Austen's original, Elizabeth (Jennifer Ehle) becomes the beautiful sister (see fig. 1). Camera angles flatter her features and emphasise her breasts, and Darcy is objectified in scenes that emphasise his body. Short sequences are invented during which he is provocatively displayed in his bath, while fencing, and most notoriously, in a sexy swim scene. Many other brief incidents are added, often just a

Actresses Julia Sawalha, Jennifer Ehle and Susannah Harker star as Bennet sisters in BBC's *Pride and Prejudice*

Fig. 1. BBC's *Pride and Prejudice.* The Bennet sisters: Lydia (Julia Sawalha), Elizabeth (Jennifer Ehle), Jane (Susannah Harker). *In Britain* Jan. 1997: 3.

silent sequence of images that serve to enhance Darcy's role. One such incident occurs at Netherfield when Elizabeth enters the billiard room, encounters Darcy, and quickly exits. At this point Darcy's gaze, fiercely intense as always in this adaptation, shifts from Elizabeth's retreating figure to the billiard table, and in a play loaded with sexual innuendo he aims his cue and shoots the ball into a pocket. Inventions like these increase the erotic edge—so much so that the restrictive social conventions of the day seem to assist rather than constrain their romantic relationship, again making ultra-conservative restrictions appear desirable.

The mini-series invests in erotic tensions, not social ones, and its nostalgic gloss and emphasis on romantic melodrama are in stark contrast to Austen's novel. In Austen's novel, the Netherfield ball is a crucial episode but it is not the visual centrepiece that it becomes in the mini-series. Austen's ball is a social event and she uses it to increase social tensions; she accomplishes this not through building images with words but largely through the use of words themselves—Elizabeth's verbal sparring with Darcy, Mrs. Bennet's boasts and careless remarks, and Mr. Collins' intemperate speeches. Again, much of this is included in the mini-series, but in the face of the sheer entertainment of the visual spectacle the effects of words are decreased. Idealised images distort the original narrative even though the six-hour format allows more of the plot to be included than would any two-hour motion picture, and even though that plot is not profoundly altered (as in the revival production of *Mansfield Park*). Certainly, Austen wrote a love story, but she did not embroider it with description. Austen uses dancing and singing to move her plot forward, not as spectacle; passion is frankly used on occasion, but again, in order to drive the plot, which she does with great success. In her biography of Austen, Claire

Tomalin writes that the plot of *Pride and Prejudice* "moves at a cracking pace...and the pace is kept up with a series of crises and confrontations" (160).

Austen's Netherfield ball teems with plot development; however, in this television adaptation the opulent setting, highly structured dance, and elaborate costumes are their own justification. The Netherfield ball is the mini-series' visual centrepiece, and its dancing women adorned with jewels and décolleté gowns meet Dyer's description of "sensuous materialism…[as] the texture of femaleness" (280. The "texture of these performing women makes them objects of desire fit to decorate the patterns of the dance, intricate patterns of grace and elegance that emulate other social patterns in which men lead and women follow (see fig. 2). It is a vision of a "golden age" utopia which suggests how attractive the social conventions of our past can be. Indeed, A&E chooses select images from the ball to advertise the mini-series, and when the episode is seen in full it becomes apparent that this grandiose exhibition is a theatrical prop for romance—long shots of the great ball room are juxtaposed with close-ups of Darcy, his stern gaze virtually stalking Elizabeth as she dances. Darcy's feelings for Elizabeth are indeed one of Austen's developments but, in sharp contrast to the film's focus, only one clause in one sentence is devoted specifically to this fact: "In Darcy's breast there was a tolerable powerful feeling towards her" (83). Other interrelated plot developments involve Elizabeth not as the object of Darcy's interest but as subject: her defence of the character of Wickham, her humiliation as a result of the social blunders of various members of the Bennet clan, her inability to check Mr. Collins' "impertinent freedom" with Darcy (84), and her delight in Jane and Bingley's romance. All these are class-based concerns, as is her narrator's anxiety over Darcy's *"hauteur"* (79).

Fig. 2. BBC's *Pride and Prejudice*. Elizabeth (Jennifer Ehle) dancing. *In Britain* Jan. 1997: 18.

These plot developments are included in the translation of the Netherfield ball to television; however, the power and focus of the visual spectacle is such that it shifts the emphasis from class concerns to eroticised romance. For example, in the novel, Elizabeth's two dances with Mr. Collins are her "dances of mortification" (78), but when this is re-enacted in the mini-series the rhythmically moving camera follows Elizabeth, virtually replacing Mr. Collins as her dancing partner. At the same time, Elizabeth is under Darcy's close surveillance. The total effect is a harmony of stalking, as this twin gaze of camera and Darcy seems to encircle the dancing Elizabeth. This is one of countless instances in this television production when Darcy and the viewer together survey Elizabeth as object, and it can be considered in terms of Laura Mulvey's concept of scopophilia, which she defines as "taking other people as objects, [and] subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze" (307). She argues that the woman displayed on the screen functions as the erotic object for the male characters in the story and for the audience, and that these two gazes can unite "without breaking narrative verisimilitude" (Mulvey 309).

In Austen's novel class conflict, not romance, dominates Elizabeth's consciousness during the Netherfield ball. In turn, Elizabeth, in association with the narrator, dominates the reader's point of view, and she is far more concerned with what Darcy hears than what he sees:

> In vain did Elizabeth endeavour to check the rapidity of her mother's words, or persuade her to describe her felicity in a less audible whisper; for to her inexpressible vexation, she could perceive that the chief of it was overheard by Mr. Darcy, who sat opposite to them....Elizabeth blushed and blushed again with shame and vexation. She could not help frequently glancing her eye at Mr. Darcy, though every glance convinced her of what she dreaded; for though he was not always looking at her mother, she was convinced that his attention was invariably fixed on her. (86–7)

It is the gaze of the upper class, both male and female, that Elizabeth dreads, and the

narrator emphasises this by regretting "that [Bingley's] two sisters and Mr. Darcy...should have such an opportunity of ridiculing her relations" (88). In a later episode, at Rosings, Darcy's gaze does intimidate Elizabeth in a more intimate and romantic manner; yet, this also occurs in conjunction with what Darcy hears. Elizabeth is seated at the pianoforte, and

> [Darcy] stationed himself so as to command a full view of the fair performer's countenance. Elizabeth saw what he was doing, and at the first convenient pause, turned to him with an arch smile, and said, "You mean to frighten me, Mr. Darcy, by coming in all this state to hear me? But I will not be alarmed... My courage always rises with every attempt to intimidate me." (148)

Austen makes it clear that Elizabeth confronts Darcy's gaze and turns the situation into a duel of words, a duel that goes on for three pages. During the Rosings episode Charlotte, too, notices Darcy's gaze fixed upon Elizabeth, but not the intensely personal gaze captured by the camera in the mini-series; rather, "it was an earnest, steadfast gaze...and sometimes it seemed nothing but absence of mind" (154). The mini-series chooses to emphasise romance over these representations of class and gender issues, simplifying and downplaying Austen's concerns in the process.

Austen was most concerned with how Elizabeth and Darcy are able to know themselves better, and as a result change for the better: through understanding each other they come to understand themselves. In Austen's scene of emotional resolution, which takes place immediately after Darcy has proposed to Elizabeth for the second time and she has accepted, the lovers recite at length the education they have gained, and it is a litany of learning. This is an intellectual exercise, and the only overt show of emotion is made through acts of contrition: Elizabeth is "most heartily ashamed" of her abuse of Darcy (307), and Darcy understands that he was "spoiled...selfish and overbearing" (308). This,

the climax of the romantic plot, is one of the few times the characters are allowed to speak at length for themselves, rather than indirectly through the narrator, and it might seem that romance is downplayed, or even primly censored, but this is not necessarily the case; rather, feeling is represented through the lovers' more complete understanding of each other. This is reason encompassing emotion, an argument that mutual understanding makes for tolerance, which, in turn, makes for a good marriage. Austen has created a sharp contrast to the bad marriages of Mr. Bennet and Charlotte Lucas; for them mutual understanding is impossible, and endurance is the only option. Austen chose the romantic form of a courtship novel, but ensured that the content was functional—her love story plot is resolved through reason. The narrator stresses that "gradually all [Elizabeth's] former prejudices had been removed" (307), and Darcy admits that Elizabeth's censures "tortured" him so that "it was some time, I confess, before I was reasonable enough to allow their justice" (306).

The mini-series does not allow these oppositions of form and content, of emotion and reason; instead it invests in prime-time romantic spectacle. Ever technically faithful to Austen, the key points of Elizabeth and Darcy's confessional are included; however, they are overshadowed by the invention of a grand finale—the wedding scene. During the double wedding ceremony the Church of England marriage service is preached; however, the insertion of the Church's pious admonishment that marriage is for the procreation of children, not carnal pleasure, is only used for satiric effect—the words are juxtaposed with another invention, a post-coital vision of Lydia and Wickham. Equally, the mini-series' addition of the Church's solemn and pragmatic message that marriage is meant to provide husband and wife with "mutual society, health and comfort" is eclipsed by more visual

garnish—in the form of sentimental images of brides and grooms. This nostalgic and idealised view of the past is far from Austen's. Her novel does not include or even comment upon a wedding, except for the narrator to say, "Happy for all her maternal feelings was the day on which Mrs. Bennet got rid of her two most deserving daughters" (321). Indeed, linking Mrs. Bennet with even the vaguest reference to a wedding must cast a slur on any representation of the event.

Austen bypasses the wedding and ends her novel literally *in* the future, with a deceptively simple final statement that anticipates complex social changes:

> With the Gardiners they were always on the most intimate terms. Darcy, as well as Elizabeth, really loved them; and they were both ever sensible of the warmest gratitude towards the persons who, by bringing her into Derbyshire, had been the means of uniting them. (324)

The Gardiners have not only united the couple (and therefore the upper and middle classes), they have also saved the upper-class Darcy from himself, that is, from his class-based weaknesses. Earlier in her novel Austen makes it clear—through the odious Lady Catherine, and her plot to marry Darcy off to her puny daughter—that the worst of the upper classes are doomed to fail and to die out. When Lady Catherine plays the bully and tries to stop the union of Elizabeth and Darcy she only ensures their success. This is not just a private love story; it is a social history. Austen's vision of the future holds an allegory of ideas about social unity, a unity that she works out in the personal drama of Elizabeth and Darcy, a unity accomplished not through uncontrolled passion (violent revolution) but through social acceptance, and entered into with mutual recognition, understanding and respect. Two hundred years later Austen's resolution can be regarded in many ways as a conservative vision of change, but the mini-series ends with a vision that is essentially ultra-conservative, and it translates the culmination of Austen's plot into a

quite different social commentary—a utopian vision of an idealised past, represented in the image of a picturesque country churchyard, is filled with gaily costumed, cheering villagers. Even the landscape is decorated with a winter frost. This pretty picture steeped in nostalgia is far more Dickensian than Austenian, and in the last seconds of the mini-series, as Elizabeth and Darcy are driven from the churchyard in an open carriage, nostalgia, romance and the erotic are all encompassed on the screen (see fig. 3). The camera closes in on the happy couple, and they kiss in a lingering close-up. The kiss, of course, is pure invention, an embroidery of Austen's work. It is over this frozen image and voyeuristic climax that the final credits roll.

The Glossy Accessories

The mini-series' change of emphasis from thought to feeling is assisted by eye-catching embellishments that honour high fashion, middle-class comforts and upper-class opulence. These come in the form of historical costumes, stately homes and picturesque pastoral locations—trappings that virtually co-star with the characters and dominate this production. This is in sharp contrast to Austen's original where it is Mr. Collins who is so attached to material goods that he obsessively describes upper-class comforts and luxuries in endless and innocuous detail. Mr. Collins' obsession also serves to mark the material void that threatens many of Austen's female characters; patriarchal culture had rendered these women financially dependent on men. Legally, Charlotte Lucas's brothers have claim to her parents' estate (105), and the Bennet estate is entailed to the male line. In consequence of that void, and despite the fact that Mr. Collins is a tiresome fool, Charlotte is desperate to marry him:

Fig. 3. BBC's *Pride and Prejudice*. The wedding of Mr Darcy (Colin Firth) and Elizabeth (Jennifer Ehle). *In Britain* Jan. 1997: 16-17.

> Without thinking highly either of men or of matrimony, marriage had always been her object; it was the only honourable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservation from want" (106).

Charlotte's negative attitude towards men and matrimony, her financial trap, and her lack of independence are intimately joined in one sentence—the link is subtle but unmistakable. Mrs. Bennet is equally desperate to have Elizabeth marry Mr. Collins, because he is her husband's cousin and will inherit their entailed estate. As Mr. Bennet puts it when half teasing, half tormenting his wife, "when I am dead, [Mr. Collins] may turn you out of this house as soon as he pleases" (54).

In the mini-series, the gravity of Charlotte's financial position is never made clear, nor is her lack of "handsome" features, nor is her status as an old maid; she is, at the age of twenty-seven, almost a decade closer than Elizabeth to a future of penury (105-6). In consequence, her situation is simplified and Charlotte becomes a somewhat paradoxical figure—a nice but chilly young woman who seems to deserve her doom—that is, to live a limited life, and in some ways a martyred existence, because she marries for money. The Charlotte of Austen's novel is a more interesting woman in a more complex situation. This change in Charlotte from novel to mini-series is an example of how Austen's feminist concerns are sidelined and downplayed. This occurs in tandem with the change of perspective in regard to material wealth. Through Mr. Collins in particular Austen showed her scorn for those who simply honour wealth itself, and while the mini-series faithfully censures Mr. Collins, it nevertheless honours material goods through its entertaining displays of desirable objects (see fig. 4).

In Austen's novel there are no descriptions of clothes; in the mini-series Regency high fashion is paraded in an entertaining variety of muffs, parasols, hats and head-

Fig. 4. BBC's *Pride and Prejudice*. Set details inside Pemberley (Sudbury Hall) and on location at Rosings (Belton House). *In Britain* Jan. 1997: 15.

dresses. Darcy and Bingley model a variety of outfits, including ankle-length greatcoats. However it is the Bennet women's accessories that seem chosen to appeal to an audience of shoppers; for example, Mrs. Bennet virtually advertises pearls, and Elizabeth a matching jacket and gloves. Although the Bennet women's dire financial position in regard to the entailed estate is faithfully recorded, the threat is effectively nullified by the many pleasing images of their possessions and their lifestyle—they are, after all, so fashionable and appear to be well off.

In Austen's novel, the only people who comment upon fashion are those the author means to disparage because of their class prejudice, stupidity and immorality. Witness the Bingley sisters who complain about Elizabeth's careless attitude towards clothes: "I hope you saw her petticoat, six inches deep in mud, I am absolutely certain; and the gown which had been let down to hide it, not doing its office" (32). Witness Mr. Collins with his advice to Elizabeth that even her best clothes are bound to be inferior, and fittingly so, compared to Lady Catherine's "elegance of dress" (137). Witness Mrs. Bennet's "amazement and horror" when her husband—for moral reasons, not financial ones—refuses to buy Lydia wedding clothes (258). In the television adaptation, Austen's disparaging words may become spoken dialogue, but her words are nullified by appealing images of high fashion. For example, when Elizabeth walks to Netherfield and muddies her skirts in the process, the mini-series presents a picturesque Elizabeth in a picturesque pastoral landscape, and shows her mastering, with a determined spirit, the obstacles of a pasture gate and a muddy path. This is a charming pastel compared to Austen's vivid rendering of an athlete "crossing field after field at a quick pace, jumping over stiles and springing over puddles with impatient activity" (29).

Sometimes what appears in the screen adaptation is little more than a materialistic daydream—the vast treasure troves of the great country estates of Netherfield, Rosings and Pemberley are riches that are always visually entertaining. However, other middle-class residences provide more accessible window-shopping opportunities for today's consumer. The Bennet's home, Longbourn, in its setting of expansive lawns and flower beds, and with its elegant facade and columned entrance, is picture perfect—a dream house by today's standards. Inside, material comforts are on display in all forms of Regency fashion. A painting of the "Three Graces" and other classical scenes decorate the walls, a full set of what is clearly good china embellishes the table, and virtually every piece of furniture would sell today as a fine antique. Lit fireplaces add elegance as much as warmth to the atmosphere, as do the two hovering maid servants. In Part 1 alone (of 6 episodes) we witness four elaborate meals, two at Longbourn and two at Netherfield, during which great hams and other traditional English country fare are displayed and consumed. I do not meant to imply that such images are deliberately included in order to encourage consumerism, rather that our consumer society influences the choosing and placing of such embellishments in screen productions. In turn, these images of material luxuries are light entertainment that distracts viewers from their dissatisfactions and whets the shopper's appetite; in this way Austen's narrative becomes a diversion that absorbs protest as well as reinforces a consumer lifestyle.

In contrast with the mini-series' embellishments (and with the exception of Pemberley), Austen paints no decorative pictures of homes, gardens, gowns or characters. Netherfield is not described in any detail, and as for Rosings Park, long before Elizabeth's visit the narrator has nullified its charms and rendered it as unattractive as its owner, Lady

Catherine de Bourgh. Austen accomplishes this with a canny use of free indirect speech—she has Mr. Collins degrade Lady Catherine with his praise, and in the process reduce the magnificent country estate of Rosings to little more than his own household accessories:

> [Lady Catherine] had once paid him a visit in his humble parsonage, where she had perfectly approved all the alterations he had been making, and had even vouchsafed to suggest some herself—some shelves in the closets upstairs. (58)

Because Mr. Collins continues to champion Rosings, and Mr. Collins is continually mocked by the narrator, the great estate continues to be belittled, and precisely by way of its great value—whether with details like a "chimney-piece…[worth] eight hundred pounds" or simply by way of Mr. Collins' joy and contentment in "describing…all the grandeur of Lady Catherine and her mansion" (65). When Elizabeth finally visits, the narrator's description is frank, complimentary, and crushing in its brevity: "It was a handsome modern building, well situated on rising ground" (134). The narrator provides no more description, except, of course, through the use of free indirect speech and Mr. Collins. This is, once again, highly effective in making a mockery of him and, in turn, Rosings.

This mockery works well as a foil to Darcy and, of course, to Pemberley, which, until Elizabeth visits, is mentioned only sparingly. For Austen, the description of Pemberley is indeed expansive, although not highly detailed inside or out. H. Elizabeth Ellington also notices that "Austen's physical description of Pemberley is deceptively vague" (99). It is really through Elizabeth's dramatic reaction to visiting Pemberley that its magnificence is indirectly but most forcefully articulated: "she felt that to be mistress of Pemberley might be something!" (203). Austen's contrast, the belittling of one great estate and the honouring of another, does not occur in the mini-series. Instead, Rosings is presented as a

magnificent specimen, rich in visual embellishments outdoors and in, from its pristine park land and grand concourse, to its upholstery and wallpaper.

The mini-series' unceasing display of material goods is at odds with Austen's novel where property and possessions are rarely described, but are frequently despised or rejected, and are always associated with a complexity of moral dilemmas. Austen rejects a lust for wealth in her portraits of two shallow, stupid people who are obsessed by it— Mr. Collins and Mrs. Bennet. But she also pleads the importance of financial independence, particularly through the vulnerable figures of Elizabeth and Charlotte whose lack of material possessions places them in jeopardy. Thus, Austen entertains by presenting what is effectively a debate on wealth, one which encourages contemplation on the part of the reader. On the other hand, the mini-series entertains first and foremost with a love story embellished with elegant displays of material goods that are bound to encourage consumption. In this way the mini-series adaptation of Austen's novel represents not so much a merger of high art and popular culture as the "victory of commerce over culture" (Storey 16).

From Subject to Object: The Heroine's transformation to Accessory

H. Elisabeth Ellington argues that the mini-series capitalises "on British and American nostalgia for...the real star of the show, Old England, bucolic and gorgeous" (*Hollywood* 92). Ellington points out that although Austen's novel mocks tourism and the Picturesque, the mini-series exploits the scopophilic potential of Austen's text by eroticizing and commodifying a fine view" (96-7). She also describes a scene in the mini-series during which Elizabeth climbs a large rock to admire the view, and in so doing

becomes part of the landscape herself; Ellington points out that in this way the viewers' "scopophilic pleasure is, thus, doubled as woman and landscape merge into one" (97).

Significantly, the mini-series begins with Bingley and Darcy, Elizabeth, and the television viewer all admiring the "pretty prospect." During these opening moments we learn from the young men themselves that they are not mere sightseers; Bingley has leased this view—it is the country estate Netherfield Park. We watch the two men take possession of the landscape as a commodity, and then we watch Elizabeth, a traditionally "feminine" figure who playfully runs and skips, and gathers flowers as she journeys through a pastoral landscape. Rather than possessing the view, Elizabeth, like the mare with its foal that she passes along the way, becomes a part of the scenery. Thus, from the first moments of the mini-series Elizabeth is enshrined as part of the picturesque landscape. Frequently she is idealised in romantic displays. After her walk through muddy (but picturesque) fields she emerges from Netherfield's beautifully groomed park (and into Darcy's view); at Rosings she is formally framed in the landscaped grounds, and later in an atmospheric mist deep in the park (again in Darcy's view); in the gardens at Longbourn she is pictured gathering lavender, and later, roses. Such images encourage the viewer, often together with Darcy, to admire Elizabeth as a beautiful object that embellishes the landscape. A useful contrast to the idealised images in the mini-series can be found in Michael Riffaterre's analysis of Austen's representation of Pemberley which, he argues, functions to represent Elizabeth's libido (14). Riffaterre proposes that Austen's nondescript "sketches of ideal but necessary landscape components: hills and valleys, rivers and forests" (15), allow Pemberley its "sole function [which] is to provide a frame within which the pervasive statement of [Elizabeth's] desire can be expressed

repeatedly" (19). If Austen's novel uses landscape in order to frame Elizabeth's desires, the mini-series sabotages Austen when it uses the landscape in order to frame Elizabeth within it as an object of desire.

It is the novel's narrator who is instrumental in presenting Elizabeth as subject, not object, but that voice is absent from the mini-series. Dorrit Cohn writes that the "narrated monologue" is a technique which Austen essentially invented; her narrator seems neutral and objective but that voice is also unmistakably a third-person manifestation of Elizabeth's consciousness. Cohn points out that this form of narration is "peculiarly dependent on tone and context" (116). The following excerpt, which leads into the Netherfield ball episode, provides a good example:

> [Elizabeth] had dressed with more than usual care, and prepared in the highest spirits for the conquest of all that remained unsubdued of [Wickham's] heart, trusting that it was not more than might be won in the course of the evening" (77)

Austen uses free indirect speech, along with the withholding of descriptive details, in order to allow Elizabeth to enhance herself as an object of desire, but without allowing the reader to do the same. Readers must experience Elizabeth as subject, not object. However, the A&E/BBC mini-series distorts this passage in its translation, objectifying Elizabeth by exhibiting her seated in front of her bedroom mirror, carefully watching her reflection as the maid servant dresses her hair. This time the camera doubles as mirror, replacing the novel's narrator, displacing female consciousness, and objectifying Elizabeth. Embellished with beauty, this heroine loses a genuine character part and is essentially reduced to being a glossy accessory.

In her novel, Austen defies custom when she denies her heroine conventional beauty and instead emphasises her intelligence. The novel has scarcely begun when the narrator

makes beauty a cerebral matter, observing that "Mr. Darcy had at first scarcely allowed [Elizabeth] to be pretty" but then "began to find [her face] rendered uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression of her dark eyes" (21). Convention would have Elizabeth's face made "uncommonly beautiful by the intelligent expression of her dark eyes," but Austen's reversal excludes beautiful physical features altogether, at least in any conventional sense. Therefore, when Darcy annoys Miss Bingley by saying, "I have been meditating on the very great pleasure which a pair of fine eyes in the face of a pretty woman can bestow" (25), his conventional observation is a cover for his more profound and unconventional perception of Elizabeth. However, when the mini-series presents Elizabeth as a conventional beauty, Darcy's "pleasure" in looking at Elizabeth supports rather than opposes the objectification of women. Elizabeth, with her acquired beauty, is obscured as subject and displayed as a beautiful female object—this is exactly what Austen wrote against when she created an Elizabeth "not half so handsome as Jane" (6). The mini-series, it should be added, tries hard to have it both ways, that is, to be faithful to Austen's novel by *saying* that Jane is the beautiful sister, but by *showing* that, clearly, the title belongs to Elizabeth.

Austen's Elizabeth, more than any of her other heroines, can be described as a strong woman in a vulnerable position. As a Regency woman of modest means but with intelligence and an independent spirit, she is a proto-feminist with whom contemporary women still empathise. Although the plot of the novel is a romance that incorporates aspects of the Cinderella fairy tale, the content concerns itself with Elizabeth's ethical dilemmas and her material desires. In contrast, in the mini-series, with Elizabeth as a near-perfect package of beauty, wit and intelligence, we are largely caught up in her romance.

Furthermore, because of this emphasis on romance Elizabeth loses her lone status as the central figure and must share the spotlight with Darcy. In fact, he frequently upstages her in the many scenes invented in order to include him, scenes that objectify and eroticize both of them. Elizabeth, during her stay at Netherfield to nurse her sister Jane, loses her status as subject while Darcy gains it, particularly when he spies on her from his bedroom window, and when he encounters her in the billiard room. These are erotic confrontations, not social ones; they create sexual tension and display Elizabeth as a sexual object.

In turn, viewers are given the opportunity to objectify Darcy, in a provocative (but modest) view of him bathing. Certainly, this turns the tables on the Hollywood tradition of exposing women in bath scenes, but the tables are instantly turned back again when Darcy, Zeus-like, spies upon unsuspecting Elizabeth below his window—a child-woman playing flirtatiously with a large hound. Ellington calls this play "frolicking" rather than flirtatious but she, too, notes the sexual nature of it, commenting that the "sexual symbolism of this scene is almost too obvious" (107). However, the obvious is commercially successful, so much so that the English press dubbed the teenage response to Colin Firth's portrayal of Darcy as "Darcymania" (Birtwistle 11), and Darcy-style shirts became a fashion craze among teenage boys in England (Houlihan-Skilton 11). Similarly, displays of Elizabeth's cleavage caused a run on women's corsets (Littlefield, *The Orange County Register* F08). Television critic Gail Pennington noted that Regency underwear appeared "to function as an early Wonder bra" (8C). The corsets are an anachronism—Regency fashions allowed women a brief respite from such uncomfortable accessories, but the mini-series required their assistance in order to obtain enhanced images of women's bodies.

Finally, in conjunction with Elizabeth, "other" women of the novel are also

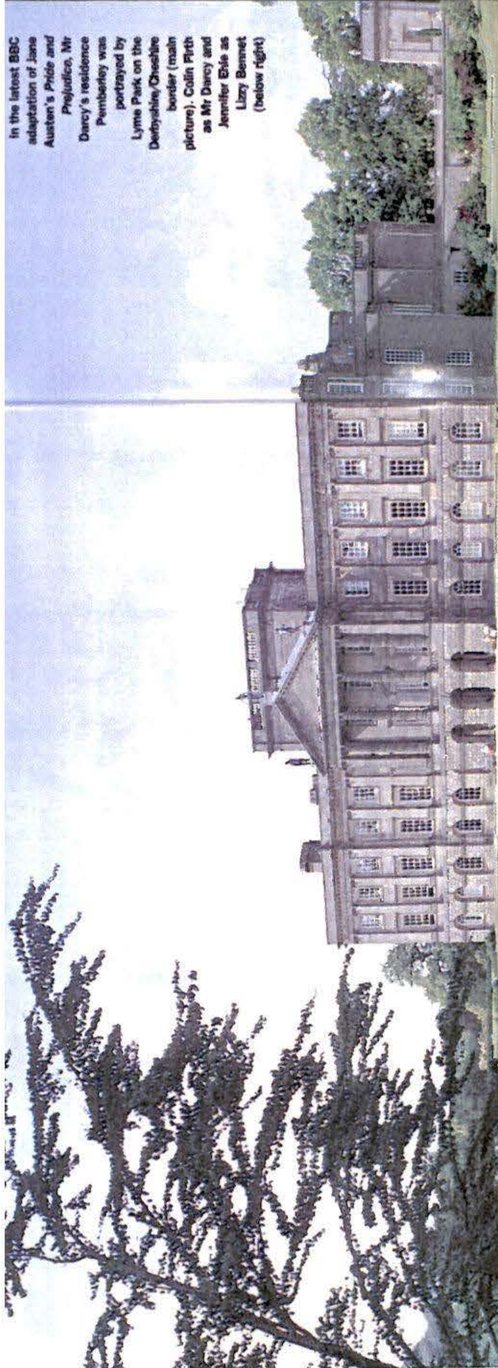
transformed, only they are distorted rather than enhanced in their translation to the small screen. Austen's negative portraits of female characters are inflated for comic effect, just as the heroine is enhanced for romantic effect. The mini-series Elizabeth is a near-perfect package of beauty, intellect and wit, and in juxtaposition with this superwoman there is a steady stream of images of stupid and ill-mannered women. This higher concentration of negative images of women occurs because the novel is cut to fit the screen, as indeed any screen version must be; however, the parts of negative female characters are not reduced and they are pitted against a perfected version of Elizabeth. The result is that even Jane is rendered spaniel-like, and Austen's prize caricature, Mrs. Bennet, is transformed from a foolish and vulgar woman into an idiotic, witch-like harridan who has pride of place in front of the camera far more frequently than on the pages of the novel.

Conclusion

Edward Ahearn, in a Marxist analysis of Austen's novel, notes that Darcy's property, wealth and power are "the supreme objects of desire" (99), and his words are a useful reminder of what a breathtaking victory Austen's Elizabeth wins. Austen endowed her heroine with immense wealth and class privilege, and at the same time satisfied her own moral and social concerns; essentially Elizabeth represents both a middle-class and a Christian solution for the abuse of privilege—she will exercise power carefully and temper its use with her innate good sense and acquired knowledge. Equally important, Austen ensured Elizabeth's material gain was balanced by the immaterial—her love for Darcy, and his for her, are unquestionably genuine and unselfish. In a spiritual context, such unselfish love is charity, and charity is the Christian antidote for the hoarding of

wealth. The television mini-series is, as ever, faithful to Austen's plot, and Elizabeth technically receives the same rewards as she did in Austen's novel, but extravagant imagery alters the message; what we see her finding is romantic, passionate love, and a life of luxury. The mini-series presents a grand finale with a carnival atmosphere, but this is a carnival that endorses rather than overturns established norms: in the showy ritual of a church wedding, patriarchal religion unites with the secular establishment to endorse the personal erotic. This is indeed a utopian imagery, and a reaffirmation of conventions that maintain the status quo.

The mini-series consistently manages to enhance Austen's romantic plot, even though, as Tomalin notes, "with its good-humoured comedy, its sunny heroine, its dream denouement" (159), this is a narrative that many might have thought could hardly be more idealised. The mini-series does so primarily by means of exaggeration (Elizabeth's beauty), invention (erotic scenes that turn Elizabeth and Darcy into sex objects), and embellishments (homes and gardens that would grace the cover of any glossy up-market decorating magazine). This is not meant to imply that the adaptation was created as propaganda, rather that aspects of the dominant ideology, particularly those that honour a consumer lifestyle and middle-class aspirations, are reflected in this screen adaptation. In North America, television is a popular medium used to sell consumer goods; therefore, it is not surprising to see images of material luxuries and romance layered between commercials that use similar techniques to sell their products. However, in the process Austen's concerns about class are downplayed and her feminist concerns are absorbed and subsumed; riches and romance become both goal and solution. In the end, Elizabeth becomes a trophy wife, and Darcy a trophy husband—here is equality, but on terms that



In the latest BBC adaptation of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Mr Darcy's residence Pemberley was portrayed by Lyme Park on the Derbyshire/Cheshire border (main picture). Colin Firth as Mr Darcy and Jennifer Ehle as Lizzy Bennet (below right)

ON LOCATION:

Pride and Prejudice

Jane Austen's romantic novel Pride and Prejudice *is more popular now than ever before. CHERYL BARNARD finds out where the latest BBC adaptation was filmed*

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife." What better opening could Jane Austen have had for her novel *Pride and Prejudice*, a witty romance in which the five Bennet sisters are in pursuit of husbands – wealthy ones, of course.

Jane Austen would never, in all her wildest dreams, have believed, some 180 years after *Pride and Prejudice* was first published, how people would be raving about it. Much of this is due to the huge success of the most recent BBC adaptation, screened in Britain late last year. The fact that it contains no violence and no daring sex scenes made little difference to the viewing figures. By the time the sixth episode arrived, nearly a quarter of Britain's population had become completely transfixed – once again – by this compelling love story.

At the centre of the story are the headstrong and opinionated Elizabeth Bennet (played by Jennifer Ehle) and Darcy (Colin Firth), a rich and seemingly conceited aristocrat. They are first introduced at a dance in the Bennets' local village of Meryton, where Lizzy herself later overhears Darcy's opinion of her, "She is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt me." Despite his cold, outwardly arrogant manner as Darcy, Colin Firth has most of the female population of Britain swooning; his being tall, dark and ►

Fig. 5. BBC's *Pride and Prejudice*. Mr Darcy (Colin Firth) and Elizabeth Bennet (Jennifer Ehle) at Pemberley. *In Britain* Jan. 1997: 12-14.

are far more reactionary than feminist (see fig. 5).

In Richard Dyer's terms of "delimiting" our legitimate needs, this adaptation of Austen's novel is a temporary escape into utopia—from varying degrees of poverty to abundance, from unrewarding work and the pressures of urban life to pastoral fulfilment, from manipulation through advertising and enforced gender roles to trusted traditional alliances in a unified community, and from the "ordinary" round of daily life to romantic excitement (277–8). With this release of "art and entertainment" the divide between high and low culture is papered over rather than resolved, and the relationship between the class, gender and moral concerns of Austen's era and our own are minimised or ignored in this highly romanticised television version of her novel, ensuring that any potential for protest is "channelled into ideologically safe harbours" (Storey 124–5).

Chapter 2: "A riveting, cinematic tale": *Sense and Sensibility*

Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), like all her fiction, has a standard romantic plot, but this novel is essentially concerned with social behaviour. As Claire Tomalin notes, it acts out a debate: the elder of two sisters, Elinor Dashwood, argues in favour of "discretion, polite lies and carefully preserved privacy" and the younger, Marianne, insists on "transparency, truth-telling and freely expressed emotion" (155). However, Tomalin also points out that "fiction can accommodate ambivalence as polemic cannot," and although Austen begins by "favouring one set of answers ...[she] grows less certain as the book progresses" (155). Austen's novel makes its principal argument against Marianne's behaviour, maintaining that "unprotected" women, in order to survive socially, cannot risk being open (156). The plot proves this theme when Marianne impetuously falls in love with Willoughby, is jilted, and suffers cruelly as a result. But Austen's resolution creates ambivalence—Marianne recovers and makes a good marriage. Yet, this final plot development is also unconvincing—Marianne's "learning to love Colonel Brandon [has never] cut much ice with the reader" (Tomalin 157). Tomalin argues that a "tragic shadow remains over Marianne" and that because of this the novel is ultimately a sombre one. *Sense and Sensibility,* she suggests, "lies between tragedy and comedy" (157-9). In conjunction with these observations, Tomalin notes that Austen began revisions on the novel soon after Mary Wollstonecraft's death in 1797 and that, through a family acquaintance, the Austens might well have heard about Wollstonecraft's troubles, including her failed love affair and attempted suicide. Tomalin does not go so far as to suggest that Austen "modelled" Marianne on Wollstonecraft, "only that the theme of sensibility, outspokenness, refusal to conform to social rules and attempted self-

destruction when love fails are paralleled in the two cases" (159).

The novel's territory thus encompasses what Gary Kelly describes as "the shape of [Wollstonecraft's] experience, a conflict between reason and feeling" (*Mary* x). We may see Elinor and her privileging of rationality in light of Wollstonecraft's commitment to rationality: By 1790 Wollstonecraft's "religion…was reason, and she waged holy war on sensibility and 'romantic' defence of chivalry" (Kelly, *Mary* xiii). Again, this is not an argument that Austen was directly influenced by Wollstonecraft, but it is evidence that Austen was involved in and reflecting on the "feminism of her time" (Kelly, *Discourses of Feminism* 19). Austen's Elinor, because of her discretion, her stoic endurance, and her privileging of the intellect over emotions, achieves her desire, that is, her marriage to Edward Ferrars, the man she loves. But a reader might also feel ambivalent about this heroine's fate, and think that she deserves better than this lacklustre hero who, even after he fell in love with her, did not reveal that he was engaged to another woman. Thus, the novel contains a complexity of light and shadow, as well as a complex commentary on contemporary feminist issues. Tomalin argues that it succeeds because of this complexity, even though Austen relies on "standard subplots to move things forward" (159).

Lindsay Doran, producer of the 1995 film *Sense and Sensibility,* describes the novel in a radically different way. He writes enthusiastically of the "strong love story…surprising plot twists, good jokes…[and] heart-stopping ending" and points to these as vital qualities that "translate into a good film" (11). His only concern was to ensure the translation of Austen's "somewhat sprawling book into a "riveting, cinematic tale" (11-12), thus avoiding what Columbia Pictures executives feared might be "a movie about a couple of women waiting around for men" (14). Of course, "waiting around for

men" is a fairly accurate description of what Austen's heroines spend a great deal of their time doing, and out of this experience of waiting an important point emerges. Martin Amis says of Austen's novels, "We notice, above all, the constriction of female opportunity: how brief was their nubility, and yet how slowly and deadeningly time passed within it" (34). This adaptation, directed by Ang Lee and scripted by Emma Thompson, is what Amis calls an art-house film, yet it invests heavily in the popular romance genre, high art's cultural antithesis. In this chapter I will argue that, in order to make a "riveting" movie, Austen's social debate is largely eclipsed by an increased emphasis on romance. In particular, I will discuss how the film, in spite of an explicitly pro-feminist slant, supports patriarchal traditions through its use of the romance genre. The first section discusses how Elinor is reinvented as a feminist with authority and an aristocratic persona, only to be disempowered, demoted to a woman of no rank, and recast as romantic figure in need of rescue. The second section discusses how the film justifies Marianne's romantic sensibility, elevating the romantic genre in the process and privileging emotionality over rationality.

Elinor's Transformation From Rationalist to Romantic

> Elinor, this eldest daughter whose advice was so effectual, possessed a strength of understanding, and coolness of judgement, which qualified her, though only nineteen, to be the counsellor of her mother...She had an excellent heart; her disposition was affectionate, and her feelings were strong: but she knew how to govern them. (Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* 5)

In Austen's novel, Elinor's "feminism" is essentially her appropriation of a "masculine" tradition of rationality, but in the film Austen's quiet intellectual is transformed into an articulate Regency model of late twentieth-century liberal feminism—

only to have this new persona sabotaged when she is transformed again, this time into a romantic figure. As the film opens, this all-female branch of the Dashwood family is falling upon hard times, but it is Elinor, rather than her mother or sixteen-year-old sister, Marianne, who is seen to lose her authority, and it is Elinor in particular who will be seen to suffer deprivation. In the novel, because of their uncle's caprice, the Dashwood women inherit very little money—a young nephew had "gained [his] affections" and the bulk of the family fortune (2). However, the film changes this aspect of the plot in order to have Elinor recite 1990s feminist dogma that draws attention to the Regency period's male-biased laws. She explains to her youngest sister Margaret, aged twelve, that they have lost their Norland home because "houses go from father to son, dearest—not from father to daughter. It is the law." Kristin Flieger Samuelian says this "postfeminist" lesson in feminism "simplifies to the point of obliterating the complicated history of the disposition of the Norland estate given in the first two pages of Austen's novel" (*Hollywood* 149). Furthermore, Elinor's dialogue is acceptable "antipatriarchal protest" and works to "reassure viewers that the distribution of gender power—figured, appropriately, as the distribution of property—is no longer what it was at the turn of the nineteenth century. Such unfair laws are no longer in place; women today have more choices and more hope" (150). However, this new Elinor's feminist knowledge affords her no protection or pleasure. She soon becomes a needy, and even a helpless woman who is eventually rescued by her Prince Charming, and regains her power not in the guise of an articulate feminist but in the mute image of a rapturous new wife (see fig. 6).

The film's Elinor (Emma Thompson) appears to be considerably older than nineteen, and as well as being a feminist she is introduced as far more controlling and aristocratic

Fig. 6. Ang Lee's *Sense and Sensibility.* Edward (Hugh Grant) and Elinor (Emma Thompson) at Marianne's wedding. From Emma Thompson, *Sense and Sensibility Screenplay and Diaries.* (New York: Newmarket, 1996). Illustration No. 35.

than the novel's middle-class Elinor. The first three scenes at Norland establish her as an authority figure by showing her efficiently managing her grieving mother ("I shall start making enquiries for a new house at once"), directing Marianne ("Cannot you play something else? Mamma has been weeping since breakfast"), and governing her rebellious youngest sister ("Margaret are you there? Please come down. John and Fanny will be here soon"). These small inventions are important because although Austen's Elinor is a rational nineteen-year-old she has, at best, only a limited influence on Marianne and her mother; although she disapproves of Marianne's fanciful nature, she only suggests and advises; she does not actively control. Indeed, self-control rather than the control of others is Elinor's paramount concern in the novel. Witness Elinor's tactics when Marianne collapses after reading Willoughby's rejection letter: Marianne "almost screamed with agony" but Elinor "knew that such grief, shocking as it was to witness it, must have its course, [and was] *watched by her* till this excess of suffering had somewhat spent itself [my emphasis]" (176). In Austen's novel, Elinor's silence and passivity are her greatest assets: when her rival, Lucy Steele, reveals her engagement to Edward, Elinor "turned…in silent amazement…and though her complexion varied, she stood firm in incredulity and felt in no danger of an hysterical fit or a swoon" (126); in the company of Lucy "Elinor's security sunk; but her self-command did not sink with it" (128).

In contrast, the film introduces Elinor as a woman who not only speaks feminist rhetoric, but is clearly in charge, especially of her mother, Mrs. Dashwood. In concert with this change Mrs. Dashwood is also altered in significant ways. On the screen Mrs. Dashwood is a woman who has more faults and none of the charm of Austen's original. Austen's Mrs. Dashwood may have an overblown romantic sensibility that offsets Elinor's

good sense, but she is also a woman with vitality who is "very stout and healthy, and hardly forty" (8); the film's Mrs. Dashwood looks distinctly elderly, wan and helpless. The novel's narrator says of Mrs. Dashwood: "In seasons of cheerfulness, no temper could be more cheerful than hers...But in sorrow she must be equally carried away by her fancy" (6); the film introduces her rushing about a chaotic room, until she "suddenly collapses into a chair and bursts into tears" (*Screenplay* 32). For some time after her introduction in the film Mrs. Dashwood is either weeping or petulant, and as a result it seems natural that Elinor has usurped her mother's position and taken over as head of the household. Not only are the mother's negative personality traits deepened, Elinor's class position is upgraded in these images: in one invented scene in the servant's hall she looks like the deposed lady of the manor as she bids farewell to Norland Park's large staff. In the novel Mrs. Dashwood does not have a large role, but Austen is careful to draw her as a loving mother and as a vital woman who never gives up her power. In the film, she has no power, and this allows Elinor to assume the role of a chatelaine fallen upon hard times. That elevation in turn magnifies her fall into a helpless Cinderella role; thus, the film's Elinor acquires both a high art and popular persona simultaneously.

The novel's Elinor survives socially by being a diplomat, and personally through sheer strength of character; the film's Elinor also survives socially by being a diplomat—but personally she appeals through romantic suffering. The film's transformation of Elinor from an in-control feminist to a helpless romantic figure begins in earnest as the Dashwoods prepare to move away from the family seat of Norland, in Sussex, to a modest cottage in Devonshire. A series of striking images and short invented scenes begins to build a Cinderella motif. One early sequence opens with Elinor and Edward Ferrars, the

man she falls in love with, out horseback riding. He complains of his career dilemma and Elinor responds with a feminist observation: "You talk of feeling idle and useless—imagine how that is compounded when one has no choice and no hope whatsoever of any occupation…you will inherit your fortune. We cannot even earn ours" (*Screenplay* 49). It is notable that this feminist comment is made in the context of a developing romance, which must reduce its force. And this romantic situation is enhanced by the fact that Edward Ferrars is played by Hugh Grant, a conventionally good-looking actor noted for playing the romantic male lead in light comedies. Elinor's romantic transition is assisted by Grant's attractiveness. Austen's Edward did not have "any peculiar graces of person or address. He was not handsome, and his manners required intimacy to make them pleasing" (13): Austen deliberately made Edward unromantic, but in the film, through casting alone, he becomes a romantic figure. And Edward is not only played by a handsome leading man in the film, he also becomes a wit. This reinvention of Edward is significant because his new arsenal of wit, charm, good looks and sympathy diffuses Elinor's feminist complaint—"Piracy," he quips, "is our only option." Kristin Flieger Samuelian uses this quotation as the title of her critique, in which she argues that Thompson's postfeminist pattern of "explicit feminist rhetoric" not only nullifies Austen's implicit criticisms of patriarchal institutions but is itself nullified "by means of a courtship plot that obviates the conditions protested against" (148).

Other invented scenes at Norland show Elinor's feminism in partnership with patriarchy through idealised images of a domesticated Elinor, images that anticipate her role as wife to Edward, and mother to future generations. Sometimes Elinor actively participates, sometimes she fondly watches Edward playing with young Margaret. These

are picturesque images of a traditional family with Elinor cast as the consummate mother and Edward the consummate father. However, such representations are little more than antiqued and romanticised images of a 1990s family, and are not in Austen's narrative. In her analysis, Samuelian writes that because Margaret is a child "[t]ransformed by Thompson from a plot device to an integral character" she is able to articulate explicit protest (149). She functions as a reassurance that pro-feminist changes reside in the future, and consequently "engenders a complacency that Austen resists" (Samuelian 150). Austen made no bald pro-feminist statements in her novel. Instead, as Samuelian points out, Austen's narratives implicitly critique "customs and institutions that support patriarchy" (148). Her form of feminism championed rational middle-class heroines like Elinor by allowing them to succeed in achieving their desires. Austen's Margaret is rarely seen or heard, and at the end of the novel she simply follows the path her sisters have taken before her, having "reached an age highly suitable for dancing, and...for being supposed to have a lover" (374). These last words imply that the world will not have changed for Margaret, and a further implication is that Margaret may or may not have learned from her sisters' experiences. In contrast, and as Samuelian argues, the film's Margaret becomes a symbol of future feminist victories; yet, the film ends with highly romanticised and traditionally patriarchal images of the bride.

The film invents scenes of Elinor and Edward's courtship that transform Elinor from an authoritative feminist into a helpless romantic figure. Not long after the couple is seen out riding together, and Elinor makes her feminist observation, we learn that she must leave Norland, and we see her in the stables with her horse. As the script directs, she "she strokes the soft face sadly." Edward asks her, "Cannot you take him with you?" Elinor

replies, "We cannot possibly afford him" (*Screenplay* 59-60). What Austen wrote in her novel has been significantly changed in the film. In the novel, Elinor walks rather than rides, and shows no interest in the keeping of horses. Instead, Austen writes that after the Dashwoods move to their cottage Willoughby gives Marianne a horse, but Elinor talks her into giving it back on the grounds that their mother cannot afford the expense of keeping it: "she must buy another for the servant, and keep a servant to ride it, and after all, build a stable to receive them—" (55). In the film, depriving Elinor, rather than Marianne, of her horse is an highly effective way to present Elinor as the patrician falling from power, and into her Cinderella role: in the 1990s owning horses had an aristocratic cachet, and riding them had romantic appeal (see fig. 7).

The film continues to build the Cinderella motif in images that show the Dashwood's new home as bare and cold, so cold that Elinor must put on a shawl and socks when she goes to bed. The motif is further entrenched when Elinor calls herself "a poor woman of no rank" and one "who can't afford to buy sugar," and yet again, when Elinor forbids the consumption of beef because it is too expensive. Carol M. Dole notes that these are "hardships never suggested in the novel" (*Hollywood* 63). In fact Austen writes that "Barton Cottage, though small, was comfortable" (26). In the film, a striking and beautifully composed tableau of Elinor as a Cinderella figure occurs in Barton cottage immediately after Willoughby's sudden departure. Marianne, Margaret and Mrs. Dashwood have retired, weeping, and Elinor is left alone on the landing. In a stark and dramatic overhead shot Elinor is seated on the steps of a barren stairwell. We literally look down upon this isolated woman who had so recently been Norland's chatelaine. Even the cup of tea that she holds becomes symbolic of her deprivation; she drinks, rather than

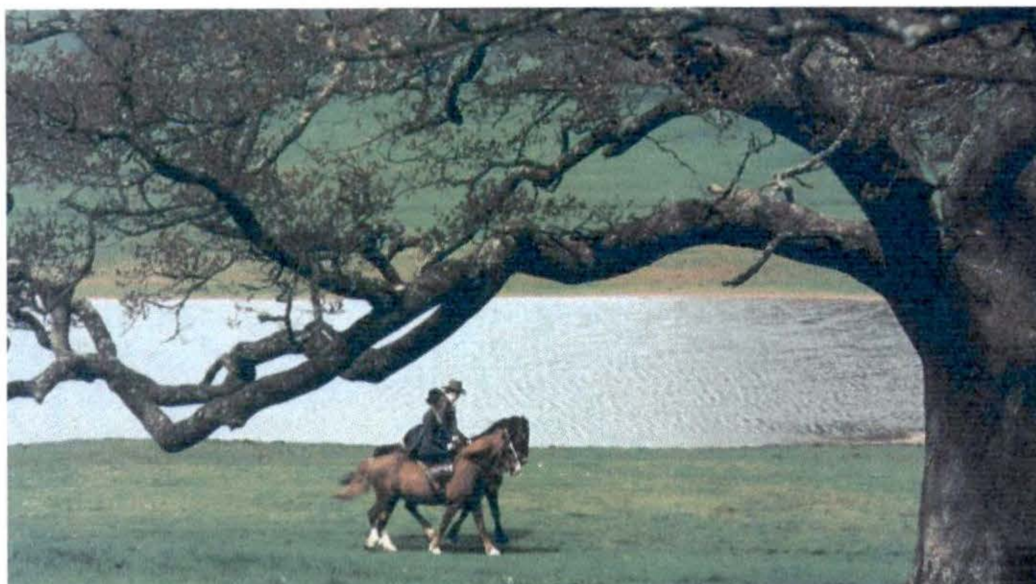


Fig. 7. Ang Lee's *Sense and Sensibility.* Edward (Hugh Grant) and Elinor (Emma Thompson). From Emma Thompson, *Sense and Sensibility Screenplay and Diaries.* (New York: Newmarket, 1996). Illustration Nos. 5 and 6.

wastes, what Marianne has rejected. This is an elegant composition—and a highly romantic image of a disempowered woman. Where the novel's Elinor, with her "sense" and self-control, was a version of an early feminist, the film's Elinor is an overt feminist with power and control over herself and others—but only to lose it all (and to be silenced insofar as she makes no more bold feminist statements).

The Elinor introduced in the film as a capable feminist is expertly undercut, and grows more and more helpless until she is finally broken. During the crisis of Marianne's near-fatal illness, the audience sees a grief-stricken Elinor; this contrasts sharply with the "exterior calmness" of Elinor in the novel (306). The novel's narrator does tell us that Elinor sheds "tears of joy" when the crisis passes, but Elinor's tears are hidden from prying eyes, including the reader's. The film, however, invents, exposes and exaggerates. When Marianne lies unconscious and near-death the doctor tells Elinor she must prepare for the worst, and when she is alone with her sister Elinor breaks down: "Suddenly, almost unconsciously, [Elinor] starts to heave with dry sobs, wrenched out of her, full of anguish and heartbreak...She falls to her knees by the bed, gulping for breath, taking Marianne's hand and kissing it again and again" (*Screenplay* 184). In the novel Elinor is certainly emotional but she does not show her misery, and even when it seems Marianne will die "she was calm, except when she thought of her mother, but she was almost hopeless" (306). When Marianne's fever breaks and she begins to recover, "exquisite comfort...led to no outward demonstrations of joy, no words, no smiles. All within Elinor's breast was satisfaction, silent and strong" (307). The camera insists on the voyeuristic gaze; the novel's narrator bars it. Yet the reader is informed, and understands why Elinor behaves the way she does, and sees how well she hides her feelings: the reader is encouraged to

pity Marianne's weakness but to admire Elinor's strength, and in the process is given a lesson in the value of discreet behaviour. In contrast, the voyeuristic filmgoer can only pity Marianne and Elinor because the filmgoer experiences only melodramatic images of blood-letting (by a male doctor, a paternal authority figure) and two helpless, suffering women. Blood-letting is absent in the novel, but Thompson writes in her diaries that bleeding Marianne "Adds to the edge" (274). Rebecca Dickson notes that in Austen's novel no male doctor has to tell Elinor to prepare herself emotionally for her sister's death (*Hollywood* 56); such minor inventions work in harmony with larger plot alterations and romantic images to endorse patriarchal attitudes. In this episode alone, Brandon, a heroic male, rescues Marianne, an emotionally and physically broken woman; add to this a professional male in charge of the two helpless and pathetic sisters and it equals an endorsement of men as strong—and women as weak—in mind and body and spirit.

The cinematic images of Elinor's emotional breakdown convert her stoic strength into romantic weakness. The sick-room melodrama of a doctor bleeding Marianne, and Elinor grieving, is invented for the film, whereas one of Elinor's longest and most dramatic scenes in Austen's novel is cut—her testing encounter with Willoughby. In the novel, Willoughby arrives just as Marianne's fever has passed its crisis. He is unhappily married to a rich wife, and Elinor, however unwillingly, is charmed by him—so much so that "for a moment [she] wished Willoughby a widower" (328). Emma Thompson writes that "bringing Willoughby back at the end... unfortunately interfered too much with the Brandon love story" (272). But Austen wrote no Brandon love story—that is simply a final development the narrator speaks of in the last pages of the novel. What Austen wrote was a powerful scene for Elinor, a scene in which, as Claire Tomalin points out, Elinor has

a flash of "murderous desires," and a scene in which "Austen's art…has lifted entirely away from pattern and precept into truthfulness to human nature" (158). Yet Thompson, after adding the maudlin spectacle of blood and grief in Marianne's sickroom (an episode that disempowers rather than tests Elinor) chooses to cut Elinor's tete-a-tete with Willoughby, despite its psychological insight and intriguing plot twist.

Deborah Kaplin points to Elinor's "self-suppression" in Austen's novel (*Hollywood* 184), while another critic, Rebecca Dickson, describes the film's Elinor as "repressed" (*Hollywood* 54). This slight shift in emphasis is significant: Elinor's "self-suppression" is judicious social behaviour in the novel; her "repression," however, implies psychological damage. In her diaries Thompson calls Elinor a "a witty control freak" (253); clearly, she sees Elinor's hiding of her emotions as negative behaviour, but Thompson is a woman who, in 1995, has her personal diaries published with her screenplay—Austen, in 1811, would not even allow her publisher to put her name on her novel. In Austen's novel Elinor's disciplined social behaviour is positive: the suppression of her emotions strengthens her, allows her self-control, enables her to comfort others and to endure the painful loss of the man she loves. When the Dashwoods are informed (erroneously) that Edward has married Lucy Steele, Austen's Elinor merely turns pale—it is Marianne who "fell back in her chair in hysterics" (346). In the novel, social customs and institutions lie at the root of Elinor's "self-suppression" and, in consequence, her isolation. In the film, Elinor's repression is presented as a negative barrier that blocks her emotions and is the reason she suffers in isolation. Not surprisingly, when she finally breaks through this repression it is a very public affair.

Elinor's second emotional breakdown in the film is one that brings her full circle and

signals the end of her suffering through gaining a husband. In doing so she regains the power and material comfort she lost with the death of her father in the film's opening scenes. In her final scene as a Cinderella she is literally on her knees and digging in the dirt, while Marianne is inside singing and playing her piano (a gift from Brandon in the film, but her own in the novel). Elinor appears to be gardening and looks weary and dirt-streaked from her toil, presenting a sharp contrast to Marianne, and to her mother who sits comfortably nearby, meekly and contentedly plying her needle. At this point Edward Ferrars arrives and reveals he did not marry Elinor's rival, Lucy Steele. Elinor reacts with an "emotional explosion" of sobbing (*Screenplay* 198). In the novel, when Elinor learns that Edward is still single, the narrator tells us Elinor "almost ran out of the room, and as soon as the door was closed, burst into tears of joy, which at first she thought would never cease"; the narrator then suggests that Edward "perhaps saw—or even heard— her emotion" (353). Again, the film exploits what the novel conceals. The novel's narrator comes between the reader and Elinor's show of emotion, this time leaving the closed door open just a crack in order to allow one character, not the reader, to be a witness. The effect on the reader is, again, to be informed, this time of the heroic effort involved in hiding one's emotions. In contrast, in the film version, Elinor's mother and sisters, as well as the audience, witness her storm of tears—this romantic resolution is clearly meant to be a cathartic moment for everybody. In the novel, for the next several pages, we witness Elinor, composed and witty, savouring her victory, and more than once teasing Edward—"when [your mother] has forgiven you, perhaps a little humility may be convenient while acknowledging a second engagement [to me], almost imprudent in *her* eyes as the first [to Lucy]" (365-6). Such remarks, together with conversation and explanation, reinforce the

fact that Edward is Elinor's hard-won prize, not vice-versa. The film does not reflect this significant re-ordering of the traditional romantic resolution; instead, it reverts back to the patriarchal order with elaborate and ultra-romantic images of Marianne as Brandon's hard-won prize.

Marianne's Romantic Justification and Rehabilitation

> Marianne Dashwood was born to an extraordinary fate. She was born to discover the falsehood of her own opinions, and to counteract, by her conduct, her most favourite maxims. (Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* 372)

Austen's Marianne is not simply an irrepressible romantic who wants to express her feelings; her feelings are in themselves extreme: "her sorrows, her joys, could have no moderation" (5). Marianne's extravagant personality weakens her and places her in danger—she is an accident waiting to happen, and highly vulnerable to a man like Willoughby whose "person and air were equal to what her fancy had ever drawn for the hero of a favourite story "(41). However, Marianne learns her lesson and the second time round she does not fall "sacrifice to an irresistible passion, as once she had fondly flattered herself with expecting" (372); instead, we are told, after learning to value good sense and moderate her own behaviour, she grows to love the sensible, middle-aged Colonel Brandon. In contrast, the Brandon with whom Marianne falls in love in the film has been reinvented as a Byronic hero. First seen on horseback, he is a "soldierly man of about forty...[with] melancholy, brooding eyes" (*Screenplay* 71). In the novel he is introduced on foot and indoors; the narrator describes him as "silent and grave...[and] though his face was not handsome, his countenance was sensible" (32). Because the film's Brandon is a romantic figure, Marianne's sensibility is legitimised rather than reformed, as it is in Austen's novel. Furthermore, the film reinforces the tradition of a male hero rescuing a

helpless female: Marianne is saved from the consequences of her reckless love affair with a (false) romantic hero by the actions of a (true) romantic hero.

In the novel, Marianne, as well as having no use for plain, middle-aged men like Colonel Brandon, has a sensibility that encompasses a weakness for dashing heroes, an excessive love of picturesque nature, and an excessive desire for personal liberty. When Austen's plot takes the Dashwood sisters to Cleveland, a country estate thirty miles from Willoughby's ancestral seat of Combe Magna, the novel's narrator is able to confirm, and mock, all of these extravagances simultaneously:

> from its Grecian temple, [Marianne's] eye, wandering over a wide tract of country to the south-east, could fondly rest on the farthest ridge of hills in the horizon, and fancy that from their summits Combe Magna might be seen. In such moments of precious, of invaluable misery, she rejoiced in tears of agony to be at Cleveland...feeling all the happy privilege of country liberty, of wandering from place to place in free and luxurious solitude. (295)

Without the narrator's mockery, and with the film's plot alterations that work in harmony with Brandon's new romantic persona, the flaws Austen created in Marianne are justified and even made admirable in the film. The invention of a melodramatic situation allows Colonel Brandon to behave heroically. Austen has Marianne catch a cold as a result of two imprudent but "delightful twilight walks...[and] the still greater imprudence of sitting in her wet shoes and stockings" (298). However, the film places Marianne upon her arrival at Cleveland in a picturesque pastoral landscape from which she needs to be rescued in short order. She leaves the carriage and walks into Cleveland's park land until she is on a rise and able to gaze upon Combe Magna. In a driving rain, she quotes Shakespeare:

> Love is not love / Which alters when it alternation finds / Or bends with the remover to remove: / O, no! it is an ever-fixed mark / That looks on tempests and is never shaken...

In the film her romance with Willoughby begins when they recite these lines together.

This does not happen in Austen's novel; instead, they read *Hamlet* aloud to the company. Typical of Austen's oblique style, the reader does not even hear this but learns of it through a passing remark made by Mrs. Dashwood: "We have never finished Hamlet, Marianne; our dear Willoughby went away before we could get through it. We will put it by, that when he comes again...But it may be months, perhaps, before that happens" (83). This indirect reference is perhaps the novel's most profound comment upon Willoughby's flawed character, upon his fate, and upon his Hamlet-like spurning of Marianne who, Ophelia-like, has a brush with madness and death as a result. In comparison, Thompson uses Shakespeare's most well-known love sonnet to gild and endorse Marianne and Willoughby's romance, a use of "high" art that is obvious rather than subtle, and far more simplistic than Austen's.

In Austen's novel Marianne's despondent mental state and careless indulgences bring on her illness; in the film, the same might hold technically, but exquisitely romantic imagery and heroic actions in new plot developments encourage rather than discourage a romantic sensibility. After Marianne's ostentatious mourning of Willoughby in the film, Brandon is shown carrying her in his arms back to Cleveland. This is virtually a repeat of the scene of her first rescue by Willoughby; indeed, the screenplay says, "It is like seeing Willoughby's ghost" (179). It is an extravaganza that virtually superimposes the image of one heroic male figure over another, and turns rain into a romantic spectacle (see fig. 8 and 9). Men's actions and images of the natural world are used to forge a solidarity with Marianne's romantic sensibility, and because their actions and images compliment rather than criticise this character defect, her fault becomes merit. Marianne is not radically reformed as she is in the novel; instead, she falls in love with Brandon, a man who is a

Fig. 8. Ang Lee's *Sense and Sensibility.* Marianne (Kate Winslet) and Willoughby (Greg Wise). From Emma Thompson, *Sense and Sensibility Screenplay and Diaries.* (New York: Newmarket, 1996) Illustration No. 14.

Fig. 9. Ang Lee's *Sense and Sensibility*. Marianne (Kate Winslet) and Colonel Brandon (Alan Rickman). From Emma Thompson, *Sense and Sensibility Screenplay and Diaries*. (New York: Newmarket, 1996) Illustration p. 178.

judicious *and* a romantic replacement for Willoughby, thus negating any need for authentic change.

In both novel and film Marianne falls dangerously ill and in both cases her illness can be understood as a punishment for her passion for Willoughby, but what occurs behind the closed door of the sick room in the novel is exposed in graphic scenes of suffering in the film—exaggerated suffering that, as well as being a punishment, will result in a transfer of her affections from Willoughby to Brandon. In vivid images that cater to the voyeur, Marianne is disempowered and exposed in a dramatic overhead shot that insists we look down upon her. Elinor was isolated on a staircase; this time the helpless female is a body on a bed, and the camera angle is rendered vampiric as well as voyeuristic because the unconscious Marianne is shown being drained of blood by a male doctor. Thus her suffering has an erotic component that befits her romantic film persona; indeed, erotic allure is fixed in Marianne during her first encounter with Willoughby— he appears out of the mist on a rearing stallion (in the novel he is on foot), and then, in the film only, he caresses her injured foot as she lies helpless on the grass.

There is no tragedy in the film's Marianne—she is a romantic heroine who is deceived in love, languishes and is rescued by the true romantic hero. Brandon cements his heroic image when, as Marianne lays deathly ill, he rides into the night to fetch Mrs. Dashwood. In the novel, the prudent Brandon "made every necessary arrangement" before he hurries off in a carriage (304). In the film, he is shown in his shirt sleeves, wildly distraught and pacing like a caged lion; then, he gallops off on horseback, "his cape billowing out behind him" (*Screenplay* 182). Upon his return the film's Marianne regains consciousness, sees him in the doorway and whispers her thanks, presumably for having

rescued her. In the next scene, time has passed and they are shown sitting outdoors together, and looking like a courting couple. The only noticeable change in Marianne is that she looks physically weaker, and she is certainly quieter—it is Brandon who recites (Edmund Spenser) and she who listens, without joining in or interrupting. In the novel, when she recovers from her illness Marianne confesses to Elinor what she has learned about herself. In the film Marianne repeats some of the novel's key phrases, admitting that she was imprudent, insolent and unjust, and adding, "I brought my illness upon myself—I wanted to destroy myself." Austen never went so far as to have Marianne admit a suicide attempt; instead, the novel's Marianne admits laxity: "My illness, I well knew, had been entirely brought on by myself, by such negligence of my own health as I felt even at the time to be wrong. Had I died, it would have been self-destruction" (339). Marianne's key speech of contrition in the film is concise and straightforward; in the novel it is long, grim and complicated. In the film Marianne announces,

> I shall mend my ways! I shall no longer worry others nor torture myself. I am determined to enter on a course of serious study—Colonel Brandon has promised me the run of his library and I shall read at least six hours a day. By the end of the year I expect to have improved my learning a very great deal.

In the novel her confession goes on for two and a half pages, and Tomalin points out that she "sounds almost as though she is speaking from a manual of advice warning young ladies to avoid passion in any form" (159). Certainly, Marianne's passion is socially dangerous in that it allows her to breach acceptable codes of behaviour for women; for example, and as Tomalin points out, she writes letters to Willoughby when she is not engaged to him (Tomalin 156). Austen links dangerous social behaviour intimately with personal danger—Marianne's passion almost kills her. Further, Marianne's solution of self-education may be the same in film and novel, but, more significantly, her painful

memories of her romance with Willoughby and her oppressive vision of the future are missing from the film:

> As for Willoughby, to say that I shall soon or that I shall ever forget him, would be idle. His remembrance can be overcome by no change of circumstances or opinions. But it shall be regulated, it shall be checked by religion, by reason, by constant employment" (Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* 340)

Cheryl L. Nixon writes that both Colonel Brandon and Edward Ferrars were the novel's "emotionally distant heroes…transformed into emotionally expressive heroes" for today's audience who "can feel best for a male who feels…[or] who struggles to display his feelings" (41-42). Equally, Marianne and Elinor are transformed from their final evolution as two sensible married matrons to two emotionally expressive brides. Viewer reaction, whether positive or negative, marks the effect of film's romantic re-writes: M. Casey Diana says that her first-year students preferred this film adaptation over the novel, and thought "the overriding reason for Austen's popularity [was] the timeless desire for love and romance" (146). Deborah Kaplan calls this adaptation "the harlequinization of Jane Austen's novels" (178); Amanda Collins calls it the "re-writing of Austen to fit audience preferences" (82), and she defines that preference as "a societal need for romanticism (88).

Endings

Austen's plot has a simple romantic ending; nevertheless, the content is complex, sometimes troubling and allows for different readings. As noted in my introduction to this chapter, Austen's Marianne reproduces crucial aspects of Wollstonecraft's emotionally turbulent private life, but Austen's Elinor is a model of masculine rationality, and to "'think like a man' was an ideal that Wollstonecraft not only embraced as her own; she

invented it" (Hoeveler 118). If Wollstonecraft lived out the ideological contradictions of early feminism, Austen seems to have been determined to resolve those contradictions in the acting out of her debate between sense and sensibility—only to have them remain unresolved in the sub-text. Austen critic Mary Poovey argues that "[d]espite its gestures towards realism, *Sense and Sensibility*...embraces the idealism of romance...Austen rewards both [Marianne and Elinor] at the conclusion of the novel precisely in terms of romantic love and of lives lived happily ever after" (193). Tomalin argues against this interpretation, saying that Austen's Marianne ends as a tragic figure who "sinks" into a marriage "in which the reader knows there will be no passion for her" (159). Certainly some aspects of Austen's ending are clearly unromantic: we learn that although Willoughby mourned his loss of Marianne, he did not die of a "broken heart" and found a good deal of "domestic felicity" (373). And Poovey also recognizes that Austen's "romantic" ending for Marianne has as much to do with controlling her as with her falling in love; she says that "Jane Austen...despite her recognition of the limitations of social institutions, is more concerned with correcting the dangerous excesses of female feeling than with liberating this anarchic energy" (193). This is, of course, particularly relevant to Marianne, who was fated to become a wife "who found her own happiness in forming [her husband's]" (Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* 373). Poovey writes that at "the ending of the novel, Austen ushers Marianne into Brandon's world of diminished desires in such a way as to make Marianne herself negate everything she has previously wanted to have and to be" (189).

Even though Austen's resolution for Marianne was that of a proto-feminist who believed in limited reforms rather than the destruction of patriarchal institutions, her

happily-ever-after ending amounts to no more than good marriages to good men—it is the 1995 film that provides an ecstatic and fanciful image of happily ever after. Had Marianne's self-sacrificing marriage been transferred into this screen adaptation viewers would have found the ending more disturbing and less romantic. Moreover, Austen goes out of her way to debunk romantic endings when she has her narrator make a tongue-in-cheek reference in regard to Marianne marrying a man who "still sought the constitutional safeguard of a flannel waistcoat" (372). Such a wry comment deflates, rather than inflates, romantic notions.

Finally, Austen makes no mention of Marianne's wedding (see fig. 10), and she devotes only half a sentence to Elinor and Edward's, saying, "the ceremony took place in Barton church early in the autumn" (368). However, the film, like the mini-series *Pride and Prejudice,* ends with the entire village celebrating what looks like a double wedding (although the screenplay says that Elinor and Edward are already husband and wife). The images outside the village church are ultra-romantic:

> A group of village children run down the hillside towards the church waving ribbons and dressed in their Sunday best...The entire village is present...The path to the church is strewn with wild flowers...An open carriage decked with bridal wreathes comes to meet them ...According to the custom of the time, Brandon throws a large handful of sixpences...coins spin and bounce, catching the sun like jewels...[Willoughby is] sitting on a white horse, watching (*Screenplay* 201)

This celebration of the institution of marriage corroborates Kristin Flieger Samuelian's argument that Thompson's screenplay is postfeminist because

> Thompson's film first posits and then rejects the possibility that its heroines' lives are governed by patriarchy. In demonstrating that feminist protest is both tolerated and satisfactorily answered by courtship, Thompson links such protest to the institutions—marriage, the family, compulsory heterosexuality—that feminism is engaged in critiquing. Hence, although appearing sympathetic to the goals of feminism, her film ends by undermining them. (*Hollywood* 149)

Fig. 10. Ang Lee's *Sense and Sensibility*. Marianne and Colonel Brandon's wedding. From Emma Thompson, *Sense and Sensibility Screenplay and Diaries*. (New York: Newmarket, 1996) Illustration p. 203.

Samuelian notes the film is advertised on television as "Jane Austen's most impassioned love story" but she says this is "passion largely inserted by Thompson in her reworking of a novel in which Austen, as many critics have noted, condemns passion as at best specious, at worst dangerous" (150). She defines Thompson's script as "appropriation and adaptation for profit" (150).

Indeed, in this film version of *Sense and Sensibility* the producer's desire for a "riveting" movie has been achieved, but through a translation that endorses rather than reforms Marianne's romantic sensibility, and converts Elinor's stoic power into romantic suffering. It is a harmony of profit making and hegemonic negotiations that absorbs the political protest of feminists; it is feminist accomplishment re-drawn in romantic images that support traditions of the dominant patriarchal culture; it is the dominant ideology reproducing itself.

Chapter 3: *Mansfield Park:* Avant-Garde Austen?

> [It] seemed there was nothing left to be mined by Hollywood. But Harvey Weinstein, the tenacious co-chairman of Miramax Films, thought there might be a way of extracting cinematic gold from the stubborn ground of *Mansfield Park* (1814), Austen's third and least popular novel. (Brian D. Johnson, *Maclean's* 106)

In 1996 Martin Amis predicted that, because of the phenomenal success of the 1990s Austen revival, "no doubt someone will...find the nerve to tackle the problematic austerities of *Mansfield Park*" (*New Yorker* 32). He prophesied correctly, and in the autumn of 1999 a film version of the novel, the product of screenwriter/director Patricia Rozema's "nerve," was being widely advertised in the media as "Jane Austen's Wicked Comedy" (*Times Colonist*). Claudia L. Johnson, a leading critic of Austen's fiction, reviews Rozema's film in the *Times Literary Supplement,* describing it as an "intervention" as opposed to "another precious adaptation," and praising it as a "stunning revisionist reading of Austen's darkest novel":

> Finally, a director has taken risks with Austen, treating her work not as a museum piece or as a sacred text but as a living presence whose power inspires flight. *Mansfield Park* is an audaciously perceptive cinematic evocation of Austen's unblinking, yet forgiving vision, and an accomplishment of dazzling imagination and originality in its own right. ("Authentic" 16/17)

Johnson's review describes a tough, funny, sexy film, without the sentimentality of earlier productions which invite escape into a decorative and romanticised past. Johnson, who has characterised Austen's Fanny as an "exceptionally timorous" mouse (*Jane Austen* 97), approves of Fanny's reincarnation as Rozema's "spirited" lion. She thinks Rozema is faithful to Austen by delivering "Austen's presence as a narrator," even though this is accomplished through the infidelity of changing "the frail, self-denying, inhibited girl of the novel [into one who is] sturdy, energetic, and self-possessed" (*TLS* 16). This

reconstruction, Johnson argues, "transforms Fanny into a version of the Austenian narrator we love" (*TLS* 16): Rozema's Fanny is a lively young author who entertains the audience with her "uproarious" fiction (largely drawn from the Austen juvenilia) and experiences incidents from Austen's life, in particular a fleeting engagement lasting only one day. As narrator, this Fanny stops the story, makes observations and shares them with the film audience. Johnson applauds these commentaries as "superb scenes...that break the illusion of realism to call attention to the intervention of [Fanny's] art" (17).

Further, Johnson argues that Rozema's Fanny—a composite of Jane Austen, her heroine and her narrator—is able to give us "what some read Austen to avoid: politics" (16): Johnson praises Rozema for her refusal to create an escapist narrative. She thinks Austen would have "concurred in the moral if not the manner" in which the film exposes the wealth of the Mansfield Park estate as maintained through the profits of slavery. Johnson applauds Rozema for refusing to glamorise the great English country house, and for her evocations of the erotic and the sexual, arguing that Austen's novel too "is suffused with frustrated, illicit, wayward, or polymorphous sexuality" (17). Johnson especially regards Rozema's film as one which, unlike so many recent Austen adaptations, is not all affluence and idealism, and where passion "is bewildering, not the easy stuff of Harlequin romances" (17). Johnson argues that Rozema's film is an inventive response to the failings of other Austen films, and her summation of those earlier productions is peppered with words such as "opulence," "lavish," "grandiose," and "idealized." She condemns them as adaptations that "circulate fantasies about Austenian elegance" (16). Her analysis suggests that, in opposition to such revival productions as *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility,* Rozema's *Mansfield Park* is concerned neither to privilege romance, nor to

encourage nostalgia, nor to ignore Austen's critique of the social and political; instead, Rozema's film re-inserts Austen's intelligent and ironic narrator, and constructs an inspiring screen "intervention" rather than "another precious adaptation."[1]

This chapter evaluates Rozema's film as the culmination of the Austen revival because it presents itself as an avant garde production that is self-reflexive, that re-inserts an interpretation of Austen's intelligent and ironic voice, and that presents political content. Rozema clearly attempts to fit Austen's domestic political agenda into her own feminist post-colonial agenda: Austen's Fanny Price lives out a domestic passage from subservience to empowerment, and Rozema links that passage to the public world of international politics and economics when she implies that Fanny's fate, as a little girl, is similar to that of the "black cargo" on a slave vessel moored in an English harbour. Yet, although this film exposes the darker world that lies beyond the elegant frame of an Austen pastoral, I will argue that Rozema's inventions simplify and sensationalise both characters and plot, as well as the moral and ethical dilemmas contained in the original. Where the moral strengths and weaknesses of the characters in Austen's novel demand the reader's reflection, those characters are changed in Rozema's film to elicit a more elementary and uncomplicated audience response of admiration or condemnation. Where

1. Alongside Johnson's ringing endorsement, Rozema's film has received mixed reviews, ranging from high praise to censure. The BBC's Kevin Lewin is enthusiastic, saying the film "improves a rather disappointing story" (BBC Online). The *Guardian's* Peter Bradshaw calls the film a "qualified success…even if the end result is a little more Bronte than Austen" (*Guardian* Unlimited Online). Stephen Holden's careful praise in *The New York Times* is thin: "in peering beneath Austen's genteel surfaces and scraping away the Hollywood gloss that traditionally accrues to screen adaptations of Austen, Ms. Rozema has made a film whose satiric bite is sharper than that of the usual high-toned romantic costume drama (NY Times On the Web, 2). Rich Groen in *The Globe and Mail* is sceptical: "it's some good and some bad and some downright silly" (G&M Online). Others condemn, including Alexander Walker in the *London Evening Standard* who calls it "wholesale traducing of [Austen] (*Evening Standard* Online), and Justine Elias in the *Village Voice* who writes, "in trying so hard to entertain [the film] ends up sabotaging itself" (*Village Voice* Online).

Austen's novel presents a moral challenge to the viewer, the film demands an emotional response which in turn inhibits reflection—the beautiful, or alternatively, the obscene image simply shocks the viewer into strong feeling, emotions that are soon soothed with a utopian plot resolution.

I will argue that far too much of Austen's most difficult and austere novel is sacrificed to spectacle and melodrama, with the result that Rozema's cinematic inventiveness undermines her own political agenda as well as Austen's. Martin Amis dubbed *Mansfield Park* Austen's "penance" for her extravagantly optimistic *Pride and Prejudice,* but in Rozema's version, Austen's complexity of emotional tensions and suffering is transformed into a sensational tale of gothic mystery. Rozema's major alterations are threefold: she changes the personalities of Austen's characters, reinvents Austen's narrative, and introduces a new story line that emphasises British colonial power. In Austen's novel, Fanny Price is a meek, physically delicate and introverted heroine; in Rozema's film, Fanny becomes robust, vivacious *and* a talented writer. Plot innovations include Fanny in erotic play with Mary Crawford, and having a romantic fling with her brother, Henry (in the novel she grimly, painfully and repeatedly rejects him), before she lands her ideal husband—and gains a publisher as well. Other characters are also profoundly altered. Fanny's beloved brother, William, is cut entirely and replaced by a pretty face—his adolescent sister, Susan. Of the Mansfield Park relatives, the happy wastrel Tom Bertram is reinvented as a tormented alcoholic artist; his mother, the magnificently indolent Lady Bertram, becomes an opium addict, and his father, the benevolent tyrant Sir Thomas, a sexual sadist. The new story line reveals Sir Thomas as a slave-owning colonist who rapes and tortures his African victims on his West Indian

plantation, while his son, Tom, sketches him in his depraved acts. This culminates in Fanny's accidental discovery of Tom's artistic illustrations, as well as her accidental discovery of Maria, Sir Thomas's recently married daughter, committing adultery with Henry Crawford. In short, Rozema's screenplay provides new opportunities to present feminist and post-colonial political concerns. However, her spectacular inventions are hegemonic in their effect: the melodrama absorbs the very concerns that spawned it, reducing feminist discourse and colonial history to light and racy entertainment that corresponds with the film's primary advertising slogan—"Jane Austen's wicked comedy" (see Fig. 11).

Rozema's Reincarnated Fanny Price

Claire Tomalin writes that *Mansfield Park* has "generated more debate than any of Austen's other books" (227), and this debate is rooted in Fanny, whose personality has irritated many readers. Tomalin relates that in "1917 Reginald Farrer...found Fanny repellent: cold, self-righteous, rigid with prejudice, 'the most terrible incarnation we have of the female prig-pharisee'"; more than four decades later Kingsley Amis agreed that Fanny and her Edmund were "humourless, pompous and morally detestable, and that Fanny lacked 'self-knowledge, generosity or humility'" (227). More positively, in 1954, Lionel Trilling defended Fanny as "a Christian heroine," and in 1986 Tony Tanner praised her "'stillness, quietness, weakness and self-retraction' as opposed to the [amoral] Crawfords" (228).

According to Rozema's interview with The *Globe and Mail*'s Ray Conlogue, she "started from the belief that *Mansfield Park* is an imperfect novel, and its heroine, Fanny

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Fig. 11. Patricia Rozema's *Mansfield Park*. Advertisement. *Times Colonist* Nov. 30, 1999.

Price, [is] altogether too immobile, moral and frostily correct to be of dramatic interest" (R1). Austen's original Fanny might well have existed in Miramax Films' original script which was "a straightforward Merchant Ivory-style transcription of Austen' s novel...[but Rozema] took one look and decided...[it] was 'a literal boring snore'" (Conlogue R1). After agreeing to write her own screenplay, Rozema says she researched Austen and "added a layer to [Fanny]" by incorporating Austen into her heroine (*Maclean's* 107).

Most of the "problematic austerities" that Martin Amis alluded to in Austen's *Mansfield Park* are directly related to the character of Fanny Price. While the plot of Austen's novel largely revolves around indulgence and sexual desire, Fanny's passage from neglected handmaiden to fulfilled matron is a grim documentation of psychological, physical and emotional survival in circumstances of suppressed desire. Like Elinor Dashwood in Austen's *Sense and Sensibility,* whose reason opposes Marianne's passion, and like Elizabeth Bennet in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice,* who is located as "the clear moral centre of the book" (161) around whom several less worthy satellite characters revolve, Austen's Fanny Price in *Mansfield Park* pits her "strongly held religious and moral principles...[against] a group of worldly... young people who pursue pleasure without regard for religious or moral principles" (Tomalin 226). In harmony with emerging feminist theory in Regency England, these three Austen heroines are rewarded for behaving rationally and restraining their emotions—most conspicuously, Elizabeth revises her judgement against Darcy, Elinor stoically endures the loss of a lover, while Fanny loves without hope, and adamantly refuses to lower her moral standards. In *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (1975), Marilyn Butler writes that Fanny suffers loneliness and temptation "like a true Christian," that her "humble and unassertive" silences come to

signify her moral strength (240), and that "her endurance sets right the wrongs done at Mansfield by the older girls" (221). Alongside Fanny's silent suffering, most of the novel's youthful characters are held in the thrall of romantic passion: Fanny's cousins Maria and Julia Bertram, Mr. Rushworth (Maria's betrothed), and Henry Crawford all suffer the agony, anger and frustration of unrequited love; Edmund Bertram and Mary Crawford's romantic pairing seems particularly genuine and is ultimately doomed (theirs is a tragedy wrapped in a comedy). But this frenzy of sexual feeling is countered by a heroine who, although she loves Edmund, ruthlessly holds her emotions in check. Again, in this Fanny is much like Elinor in Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*—and in both cases these heroines are abetted in turn by a narrator who adroitly controls the reader's point of view. The result in Austen's *Mansfield Park* is that the dross of unchecked sexual desire, material greed and dissipation transmutes into the gold of socially acceptable and morally uplifting fiction. The sordidness of much of the sexual content is counteracted by Fanny's overt prudishness, almost as if Austen made her heroine emphatically strait-laced so that she could write about such tainted subject matter.

Rozema's film exploits Austen's sexually charged story line, and Fanny and the audience are both manoeuvred into a voyeuristic arrangement. Ironically, provocative sexuality in Rozema's supposedly avant-garde film echoes provocative sexuality in the conventional television mini-series *Pride and Prejudice:* where Darcy is exhibited naked in the bath and in a swimming scene, Fanny is made to witness a nude sex scene between Julia Rushworth and Henry Crawford. Austen's treatment of Julia and Henry is markedly different. In her novel, their scandalous liaison is revealed in private correspondence and in a newspaper; thus, Austen avoids involving her narrator in such risqué revelations—a

canny exercise in discretion that allows her to speak of subject matter that would otherwise have to be censored. The film sensationalises this aspect of Austen's plot by having Fanny discover the illicit lovers *in flagrante delicto.* In Austen's novel, covert and suppressed sexuality increases the tension, and emphasises the danger to women of undisciplined emotions; in Rozema's film, overt and unrestrained sexuality is material for Miramax Film's "wicked comedy." When asked about the creation of two lesbian scenes between Fanny and Mary Crawford, Rozema insisted that "she only drew out an innuendo that is in the book" (Brian D. Johnson 108). Rozema's sincerity is not in question, but her interpretation of a two-hundred-year old novel also happens to support today's Hollywood movie industry which sells sex for profit. In this way, Rozema's adaptation of Austen's novel exemplifies hegemonic "negotiations" in the culture industry. Rozema may have been allowed to insert lesbian scenes into a mainstream film, but in the process lesbianism has been commodified for the profit of the Hollywood film industry. As John Storey points out, "hegemony is always the result of 'negotiations' between dominant and subordinate groups, it is a process marked by both 'resistance' and 'incorporation'; it is never simply power imposed from above" (126).

Fanny's reincarnation into a dynamic personality marks more hegemonic negotiations inasmuch as she is transformed into a model of the 1990s post-feminist woman. Although Rozema insists that her Fanny is not a "super-heroine. She's still really quite passive" (107), the film proves otherwise. Rozema's Fanny is robustly active, from her noisy and flirtatious play with Edmund to her story-telling as narrator. As an oppressed child she is able to talk back smartly to her elders (she questions the carriage driver about the slave ship) and her betters (she tells Sir Thomas that her journey was "impressive").

As a young woman, she shows that she has learned to hold her tongue, but Rozema allows her outlets to cool her emotions, including playful romps with Edmund around the mansion, creative writing, and passionate gallops on horseback through the night (excesses which are an invention more in keeping with Austen's Marianne in *Sense and Sensibility*). In these ways Rozema's Fanny is the polar opposite of Austen's Fanny. Austen's Fanny personifies Martin Amis's description of Austen's irony: she is "long-suffering" and she "doesn't incite you to transform society; [she] strengthens you to tolerate it" (35). In contrast, Rozema's Fanny has all the characteristics of a post-feminist heroine; she is strong in body and will, but still conventionally attractive; she is talented and successful as a writer, but is exhibited only in the domestic sphere. She is a girl-woman who cannot be kept down, or quiet, for long, and there is little sign of passivity or long-suffering in her, only the pressure of enforced obedience—which is not at all the same thing. Indeed, to show Fanny not passive but trapped could be an astute interpretation of Jane Austen's Fanny, and of women's social and political situation during the Regency. However, in Rozema's film this dynamic Fanny is attached to exaggerations and new fictions that detract from any such subtle distinctions as those between preferred and enforced passivity. Instead, she is updated and reincarnated as a post-feminist female lead in a romantic comedy plot.

Rozema's gallant young Fanny is a simplification of Austen's heroine, and Rozema exaggerates Fanny's opening circumstance into a Cinderella situation (not unlike that of Thompson's Elinor in *Sense and Sensibility*). Rozema's graphic images of poverty, dirt and confusion in Fanny's Portsmouth home are soon eclipsed by the girl's melodramatic arrival at Mansfield Park: in the dead of night, while a drunken Tom lolls on a balcony,

little Fanny, exhausted but plucky, is obliged to stand in the pitch dark waiting until dawn for somebody to let her in. Such a maudlin spectacle overpowers reflection on the finer points of social, moral and female entrapment that exist in Austen's plot. In the novel, Fanny's arrival at the Bertrams is mundane and poignant, a combination that resists sentimentality: the Bertrams receive her with kindness and her cousins greet her with "much good humour" (8), but Fanny is tearful and mute because she is "ashamed of herself" and cowed by the social superiority of her fine relatives (9). Austen's Fanny is stubborn and stoic. These are less than appealing character traits, but they enable her to survive the more testing, if less dramatic, cruelties visited upon her in the novel. In contrast the film's melodrama, including its new slavery sub-plot, overpowers any opportunity the audience might have to reflect upon the finer points of female entrapment that exists in Austen's plot.

As a narrator who exudes confidence, Rozema's Fanny sets out to educate the viewer as well as the young and impressionable Susan through direct address, as though both are equally ignorant. Johnson points out that, as Rozema's narrator, Fanny brings with her some of the most amusing quips from the novel, but the narrator's most unsettling humour is discreet, and much of it cannot be used in the film because it works in concert with the original Fanny's sombre nature. Butler identifies this as the narrator's "ironic detachment," and notes that the reader is meant to identify with Fanny's role, not with her "individual responses" (228). When Edmund asks Fanny for two dances at the upcoming ball, the narrator's mockery of the heroine is shrewd as well as amusing: "She had nothing more to wish for. She had hardly ever been in a state so nearly approaching high spirits in her life" (220). This combination of mockery and sympathy encourages reflection upon

such a grave heroine, and discourages a simple positive or negative reading of her. Again, in the novel's final pages, within a perfunctory and sardonic wrap-up that begins "Let other pens dwell on guilt and misery. I quit such odious subjects as soon as I can" (375), the narrator records with acute sensitivity that Fanny found her happiness in the knowledge that "she was useful, she was beloved; she was safe" (375-6). Wrapped in wit, this quiet observation is personal (to Fanny and to every reader) but it is also political in regard to women's status in the society; furthermore, it virtually compels introspection on the part of the reader. Such self-interrogation on the part of the film's viewer is lost or at best simplified.

Rozema may commandeer quips from Austen' s journals and letters, and excerpts from her novel, and she may mould Fanny into a combination of Austen's character, Austen's narrator and Austen herself, but by necessity and design the result is a simplified version of all three. Austen's novel ends with Fanny having become the centre of the domestic sphere; as the wife of Edmund she dwells in the Mansfield Park parsonage, but she is unquestionably the great estate's stabilising force and the moral guardian of all who live upon it; thus she has become a potent force for good in the nation. In the film, she marries her heart's desire and sells her fiction. One result of this simplification is that Rozema gives Fanny a persona similar to that of the lively, outspoken Elizabeth Bennet as depicted in the hit television mini-series *Pride and Prejudice.* It is ironic that Rozema made drastic changes to the personality of Austen's most retiring heroine only to make her more like a very conventional film version of another Austen heroine. Another disturbing consequence is that Rozema's post-colonial feminist political content is not only sensationalised, it is transformed into a Regency romance, and sold as such—as I noted in

my introduction, an advertisement in *Vogue* magazine reads "A spirit that can't be broken. A love that knows no rules." The first statement clearly describes Rozema's Fanny; the second is more obscure (and more late-twentieth century than Regency period). In any case, the full-page colour illustration has far more impact than the ad's words: it shows Mansfield Park, with its stately mansion as the distant centre, and another superimposed image filling the sky above it—a close-up of the heroine's face, eyes closed and lips awaiting the erotic (and proprietary) kiss of an unknown man. His face, all but obscured, descends upon hers from above (see Fig 12).

Rozema's Supporting Cast

If Rozema's Fanny loses many of the complexities of Austen's original, three secondary characters from the novel—Susan Price, Lady Bertram and Tom Bertram—are also simplified and visually exploited. In the novel, Fanny's closest relationship is with her brother, William. The eleven-year-old William is the ten-year-old Fanny's "constant companion and friend; her advocate with her mother...in every distress" (11). When William visits Mansfield Park after returning home from seven years in the navy, "Fanny had never known so much felicity in her life, as in this unchecked, equal, fearless intercourse with the brother and friend" (188). In a lengthy description, unique in its extravagance, Austen presents midshipman William as the new middle-class ideal, clothed in "[t]he glory of heroism, of usefulness, of exertion, of endurance... distinguishing himself and working his way to fortune and consequence with...self-respect and happy ardour" (190). A mature version of William appears in Austen's last novel, *Persuasion* (1818), in the form of Captain Wentworth, a shining example of a self-made man—a

EMBETH DAVIDTZ

JONNY LEE MILLER

ALESSANDRO NIVOLA

FRANCES O'CONNOR

HAROLD PINTER

A spirit that can't be broken.
A love that knows no rules.

MANSFIELD PARK

Fig. 12. Patricia Rozema's *Mansfield Park*. Advertisement. *Vogue* September 1999:

www.allianceatlanticfilms.com

BBC Films

middle-class hero who is a career navy officer, and the husband Anne Elliot is fortunate enough to win. But in Rozema's film, William is cut entirely and replaced by Fanny's younger sister, Susan, a pubescent girl who is beautiful to look at but otherwise a blank slate. Although Austen gives Susan only a minor role, she does not neglect to endow her with distinctive characteristics, including a lively, assertive personality that Fanny must tame, shape and educate: "her manner was wrong…her measures often ill-chosen and ill-times, and her looks and language very often indefensible" (322). Like Margaret in Austen's *Sense and Sensibility,* Susan in Austen's *Mansfield Park* is a work-in-progress who, because of the influence of her astute older sister, has a better chance for happiness. Austen's Fanny educates Susan; Rozema's Fanny entertains her. Where Austen's Fanny teaches Susan to read "the biography and poetry which she delighted in herself" (324), Rozema's Fanny reads to Susan from her own fanciful, funny stories (Austen juvenilia). Because Austen's William is a model of the middle-class male maturing and on the rise, he is a political vision of the future, and to a lesser degree so is Austen's Susan. Rozema's Susan, is not, because rather than being developed as a character, she is exploited as a beautiful object.

Austen's Lady Bertram is a carefully drawn portrait of an ageing beauty in a permanent state of ennui, and Austen uses her as a vehicle through which to voice early nineteenth-century feminist concerns. Lady Bertram is condemned for being a useless object—in particular for failing to educate her daughters and in general for being lazy—"She was a woman who spent her days in sitting nicely dressed on a sofa" (14-15). This observation of Austen's narrator has Lady Bertram lacking all that Mary Wollstonecraft deemed important when she wrote, "speaking of women at large, their first duty is to

themselves as rational creatures, and the next, in point of importance, as citizens, is that, which includes so many, of a mother" (*A Vindication* 145). Austen also plays Lady Bertram for laughs, but not entirely; as Tomalin notes "she may be a comic character…but the effects of her extreme placidity are not comic" (229), and Austen does not use drug addiction, which in the film is an easy way to sensationalise the character. Austen's Lady Bertram is a woman who, instead of being the female centre of the household, is virtually a vacuum, and accordingly the household fails. In contrast, Rozema's Lady Bertram appears to be an opium addict in a permanent state of drugged idiocy. Both times I watched the film in a cinema, Lady Bertram's quips and mannerisms generated much laughter, as they were meant to, but her character allows for little scrutiny of women's roles in the Regency era.

Austen's Tom Bertram is a useful minor figure, but in the film his role is enlarged in conjunction with the film's slavery plot, and he is transformed from a wastrel into a tragi-comic drunk. In the novel, the heir to the family fortune is a weak and idle fellow whose nature is that of "cheerful selfishness" (18). Because of his extravagant and pleasure-loving ways this spendthrift has "robbed" his younger brother, Edmund, of his rightful inheritance (17-18). Sir Thomas takes Tom with him to Antigua "in the hope of detaching him from some bad connections at home" (24-25). But soon enough Tom returns, and with his companion, Mr. Yates, sets in motion the theatricals which have such disastrous consequences in the novel. Finally, Tom's love of a good time is the root cause of his near-fatal illness, brought on by reckless carousing with his chums at the Newmarket races. This illness purges Tom of his "thoughtlessness and selfishness" (376). Austen's narrator assures us that he "became what he ought to be, useful to his father, steady and quiet, and

not living merely for himself" (377). Although his role is much smaller than Marianne's in Austen's *Sense and Sensibility,* like her, Tom is purged of his passion and reformed, and where Marianne "found her own happiness in forming" her husband's (373), Tom learns not to live "merely for himself." The new "steady," "quiet" and "useful" Tom becomes virtually a male version of Fanny, in much the same way as the reformed and subdued Marianne comes to resemble her more responsible sister, Elinor.

In Rozema's film we are introduced to a gloomy, mean-spirited drunkard who is too inebriated to stand on his own two feet (literally and metaphorically). Tom is also reincarnated as an artist, and as his self-portrait is surely meant to prove, not a very good one. But his artistic bent, invented by Rozema, works for her new political critique—the role of the British gentry in the slave trade. Tom will draw sketches (unaccountably excellent ones) that expose the torture and rape of slaves in Antigua by his father and their neighbours. In the film, Tom's alcohol addiction is an invention meant to be understood as a tragic evil, but it is also used to amuse Rozema's audience. His perpetual drunkenness is often slapstick, in much the same way as Lady Bertram's drugged state is funny. Tom's alcoholism, we are given to understand, began with his knowledge that his family lives on the profits of slavery, and his subsequent near-fatal illness is brought on from the trauma of witnessing his father's rape of slave girls. In the film, Tom is a less developed character than Austen's original, but he is seen more frequently. Rozema's Tom is largely exploited as visual entertainment: as a falling-down drunk he is comical, comatose on his sick bed he is a tragic figure, and as an artist he shocks, through his sketches of rape and torture. It is through this kind of visual sensationalism that the audience is "taught" the evils of the English slave trade, but the historical atrocity Rozema wanted to bring to our attention is

diminished through her melodrama.

Austen's Sir Thomas holds our interest because he is a contradiction in terms—a good man with a bad character: he will not force Fanny to marry Henry Crawford, yet even as he accepts Fanny's decision, he condemns her for refusing the marriage proposal by using specious logic that makes Fanny feel "almost ashamed of herself...for not liking Mr. Crawford" (254). Similarly, not for the world would he force his daughter, Maria, into a loveless marriage. But because she is willing and he will benefit, he allows her to do exactly that; he is

> happy to secure a marriage that would bring him such an addition of respectability and influence, and very happy to think any thing of his daughter's disposition that was most favourable for the purpose. (162)

Austen creates a finely drawn moral dilemma for Sir Thomas, and enormous consequences hinge upon his faulty "reasonings"—he endorses his daughter's marriage to Rushworth, a man he knows she "did not like" and whom he thinks "inferior," because it has been a "long standing and public engagement...[and he] was happy to escape the embarrassing [social] evils of a rupture" (160-2). Rozema's film dramatises the plot development, but Sir Thomas's fault in approving a loveless marriage for his daughter shrinks to nothing in comparison to his rape and torture of slaves (and, disturbingly, Maria's fault expands accordingly). Sir Thomas's blatant crimes against humanity are lurid inventions that hold viewer interest through shock and titillation—they are clear and simple evils rather than the more complex moral dilemmas Austen's readers are encouraged to ponder in order to fully appreciate. Powerful images do not necessarily elucidate; in this case images of sex and violence shock but they do not explain Regency England's involvement in the slave trade. Instead, the obscene history of the slave trade is

used to punch up the content of an Austen novel. Slavery is reduced to material for melodrama through being incorporated into a new sub-plot that turns on a sadist's sexual crimes.

Rozema's Slavery Plot

Susceptible viewers may feel inferior to Rozema's witty, attractive and talented Fanny, but Rozema's additions to Austen's novel allow the same viewers another avenue to self-righteous confidence—the slavery theme and plot. While these inventions expose the morally corrupt power of the Regency English gentry, they also emphasise the distance between time past and time present, and thus allow viewers to escape any immediate sense of moral responsibility. Indeed, we can pat ourselves on the back for having gained (in theory at least) liberation and equal rights for all. Readers of the novel do not find it so easy to escape involvement in Austen's more sophisticated moral dilemmas. In the novel, the subject of slavery is raised so briefly as to be inconsequential, were it not so memorably written:

> (Edmund] Your uncle is disposed to be pleased with you in every respect; and I only wish you would talk to him more. —You are one of those who are too silent in the evening circle.
>
> (Fanny] But I do talk to him more than I used. I am sure I do. Did not you hear me ask him about the slave trade last night?
>
> [Edmund] I did—and was in hopes the question would be followed up by others. It would have pleased your uncle to be inquired of farther.
>
> [Fanny] And I longed to do it—but there was such a dead silence! And while my cousins were sitting by without speaking a word, or seeming at all interested in the subject, I did not like—I thought it would appear as if I wanted to set myself off at their expense, by shewing a curiosity and pleasure in his information which he must wish his own daughters to feel. (158)

Under the surface of the gentle Fanny's earnest words lies the minefield of Austen's

subtlety. "Silence" is the key word and image, the silence forced upon Fanny by way of modesty and manners, and underneath that social image is the silence of a powerless female. Moreover, the reader is left to ponder the other half of the scene Fanny calls up, and those images of her silent cousins. Is their silence a protective cover for greed, guilt, ignorance, or boredom? Perhaps for all four. This is left for her readers to ponder and decide. The issue of slavery has not been ignored or passed over, it has been put on the table for everyone to see, and the "dead silence" that surrounds it is suggestive of a vacuum, and a vacuum is a good metaphor for the lack of moral and political will implicit in parliament's failure to abolish the slave trade. Tomalin notes that although from May 1807 anti-slavery laws forbade the transportation of slaves on British ships, the slave trade "continued illegally," and slavery remained a "divisive issue"; it was not until 1834 that slavery was finally outlawed in the British Empire (330). Tomalin points out that "that by raising the question at all, Fanny bravely makes her own abolitionist sympathies clear" (232).

In her film review, Johnson explains that she approves of Sir Thomas's reincarnation as a man "depraved by unchecked power, [who] makes no attempt even to appear right-thinking," because through it Rozema is able to make the point that "Sir Thomas's misrule abroad sullies his authority and leads to moral turpitude at home" (16). Rozema has Fanny play off Sir Thomas's depraved image, protesting to his face his use of slavery and protesting behind his back his marriage plans for her and Henry Crawford: "I'll not be sold off like one of your father's slaves," she tells Edmund. This also gives her the opportunity to protest being objectified—"get another adornment!" she declares. Such sentiments echo the feminist protests in Thompson's *Sense and Sensibility,* and amount to

no more than preaching to the converted—and so does having Sir Thomas re-created as a wicked slave owner. Furthermore, to present Sir Thomas as a crude and one-dimensional figure whose evil emerges full-blown and grotesque is a simplification of the issue of slavery. In contrast, a good deal of art and sagacity was required to create the novel's complex figure, a man with good intentions, but who is dangerous to young women—not as a morally bankrupt rapist but as a loving father and kindly guardian whose self-indulgent moral laxity affects his judgement. There is every reason for Austen to be so succinct in regard to the topic of slavery and so elaborate in regard to Sir Thomas—she is preoccupied with the domestic and interior lives of her own class. In the novel, Fanny's passage is from that of a powerless girl to an influential woman, and as her conversation with Edmund demonstrates, her success depends on her acute moral awareness, sound intellect and, in spite of her timidness, her independent spirit.

Rozema's final sardonic quip that Sir Thomas gives up his slaves and turns to tobacco farming is hardly an emancipation for the Africans, or if somehow it is, it scarcely matches Fanny's good luck. If the slavery story line is meant to educate, is at best marginally instructive. To show the evils of slavery in a film such as this is not only preaching to the converted; the viewer can also feel smugly superior to the English gentry who, two hundred years ago, lived off the profits of slavery. I am disturbed that the only way that Rozema chooses to equate our own commerce with that of the slave-owning Sir Thomas is through the tobacco industry. Sir Thomas, we are told, will profit from tobacco rather than slavery. Thus, with an ironic nudge and a wink he becomes today's bogeyman, and Rozema joins the establishment in the war against tobacco. Some of us would argue that multi-national capitalism, which profits at the expense of third-world countries,

brings us closer to the slave-owning gentry of Rozema's film than we might like to admit. Rozema does not choose to make such a link. Had she done so, we might have left the theatre feeling less comfortable. There are no moral dilemmas for the audience to ponder; the sinners responsible for slavery, rape, torture, drugs, alcohol and tobacco are a past elite represented by Sir Thomas, a figure more like a feudal lord than a capitalist businessman. Equally disturbing, the root causes of the enslavement of Africans by Europeans are not well served when slavery is represented in images of one man's depravity; indeed the issue of slavery comes dangerously close to being exploited. I think the film's political history lesson—that in Regency England there were wealthy estates thriving on the profits from slave labour in the colonies—is compromised when that history is revealed through sensational plotting and spectacle. First, Rozema has Fanny discover Tom's illustrations of Sir Thomas sexually torturing slave women, then, in almost the next scene, she has Fanny witness Henry Crawford and Maria Rushworth having sex—the proximity of these revelations is disturbing: singly, each might make a point, although neither advances any profound insight into either feminist or post-colonial issues; together, they seem gratuitous and exploitative. And since between them these two scenes amount to the film's denouement, they serve as a reminder that in Hollywood, sex sells.

The Camera as Narrator

Despite the fact that Rozema's Fanny is a narrator, the camera remains the dominant narrator. Images are the film's equivalent of the narrator's free indirect speech. Just as Austen's narrator uses free indirect speech to inform the reader, Rozema's cinematic images work to the same end, but Austen, as Martin Amis has pointed out, is "notoriously

cerebral" and niggardly with descriptions of the material world (34). In contrast, Rozema's film (like the revival's *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility* before it) is above all a marvellous visual experience, and one laden with an extravagance of sensual detail. In fact, Rozema's production is so aggressively sensual that it comes with a strong warning to parents: "PG—nudity, suggestive scenes." Johnson defends Rozema against "stupid and priggish" viewers who condemn overt sexuality in this film adaptation ("Authentic" 16). I am acutely aware that Austen's novel is deeply concerned with sexuality, and I agree with Johnson on this point; what I object to is the way in which Rozema has chosen to exploit Austen's sexually charged text: I object when the film camera manipulates me into having a quick voyeuristic peek at a naked couple engaged in simulated sex, and similarly when I find myself manoeuvred into craning my neck over Fanny's shoulder in order to have a glimpse at gruesome sketches of rape and torture.

In Austen's novel, the political agenda is complex and the sexual content covert; in Rozema's film, the political and sexual are explicit but simplified. No doubt self-censorship was involved in Austen's discretion, but instead of informing the audience by making explicit Austen's subject matter of individual and social reform through the emerging feminism of her day, Rozema's inventions forward her own post-colonial agenda—however, in doing so her sensational content and images defeat her purpose and distort Austen's text. In a *Globe and Mail* interview Rozema "defends herself by saying it's the film Austen herself would make if she were alive today and freed from the constraints of her time" (Conlogue 2). This is questionable, as Rozema's film is sensational and melodramatic, exactly the qualities Austen mocked. Austen's *Northanger Abbey* [1818] is a burlesque of "the Gothic and sentimental novels" (Ehrenpreis 10), but

Rozema uses those genres in all seriousness to forward her slavery sub-plot. Rozema does achieve, as Claudia Johnson's critique legitimately points out, a film that is a radical departure from those "television and movie adaptations that produce and circulate fantasies about Austenian elegance" (16). Yet the film confounds its own political agenda with aesthetically pleasing images that are also exploitative: a slave ship is an exquisite seascape, the impoverished Price family's home is on a picturesque dock, even the sketches that show slaves being tortured are finely drawn, and the gloom of a dark interior location is frequently the backdrop for the fine-textured and radiantly lit flesh of young women. Female bodies are on display in this film, whether in juxtaposition with the dark interiors of the austere mansion or tumbled together in a bed in the Portsmouth hovel. Splendid images of girls and young women, and distressing images of slaves and paupers become part of the artistic arrangements along with the beautiful views of pastoral landscapes and pastel seascapes.

Many reviewers of Rozema's film note that Rozema takes the viewer beyond a superficial eyeful of plush elegance. The Associated Press's Matt Wolf writes that "For once, we have a costume drama whose players aren't so many fashion plates" (*Times Colonist*). Yes and no—Rozema's Mary Crawford frequently and ostentatiously models prototypes of that classic pillar of fashion, the little black dress. But where fashion plates are absent, other equally contrived visual aids are employed. As in the revival productions of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility,* we are treated to an extravagant ball scene, this time one that shows the dancers in slow motion in order to emphasize the women's grace and sensuality, and to panoramic views that emphasise the beauty of nature, this time from helicopters. And for sensational effect, images of The Beautiful are

juxtaposed with The Ugly (food alive with bugs) and The Immoral (an exposé of slavery). Rozema's numerous and varied visual displays are spectacular and captivating, but such images do not reveal the complexities of Austen's social-political agenda, or even of Rozema's post-colonial agenda. Instead, they elicit a strong emotional response to dramatic plot developments, with the result that even when these displays nominally support Rozema's political content, their limitations work to undermine it. In her review, Johnson says that Rozema's austere images of Mansfield Park give the impression of a mansion "corrupted by the moral crime on which it subsists and on which account it cannot thrive" (16), but such praise itself creates a rather idealist vision of evil defeated. Austen gives her readers less sensational ideas of Mansfield Park's moral decay and, under Fanny's influence, a more modest but realistic victory of a reforming female spirit at work.

Johnson praises Rozema's self-reflexive interventions—the self-conscious manner in which Fanny disrupts the flow of images, sometimes by commenting on the action and sometimes by drawing attention to the fact that these images are a fiction (17). Austen herself was an expert at intervention, invariably interrupting the flow of realism in her novel through a narrator who laced her commentary with irony. Rozema clearly intends the same effect, but she cannot seem to resist the camera's ability to create powerful images, and those images dilute the spoken commentary. For example, in Austen's novel the narrator offers an ironic analysis of Maria Bertram's wedding that forcefully brings home the unreliable nature of the romantic image:

> It was a very proper wedding. The bride was elegantly dressed—the two bridemaids were duly inferior—her father gave her away—her mother stood with salts in her hand, expecting to be agitated—her aunt tried to cry—and the service was impressively read by Dr. Grant. Nothing could be objected to when it came under the discussion of the neighbourhood,

> except that the carriage which conveyed the bride and bridegroom and Julia from the church door to Sotherton, was the same chaise which Mr. Rushworth had used for a twelvemonth before. In every thing else the etiquette of the day might stand the strictest investigation." (163)

Austen's intervention, which is in direct opposition to the ultra-romantic wedding scenes in the revival films of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility,* is enacted in Rozema's film, and to some degree makes Austen's point. But Rozema's intervention is rendered in farcical images of the wedding—Lady Bertram in particular generates much laughter—and the result is that instead of foregrounding ironic analysis (which deconstructs ubiquitous romantic wedding imagery in order to show how false it can be), the film's wedding devolves into a simple comic scene. Another example is Austen's final intervention in the novel, which occurs at the exact moment when Fanny's romantic happy ending is accomplished. Austen's narrator records with ironic detachment how Edmund fell out of love with Mary Crawford and in love with Fanny, and the narrator also draws attention to the fictionality of this ending by saying,

> I purposely abstain from dates on this occasion, that every one may be at liberty to fix their own, aware that the cure of unconquerable passions, and the transfer of unchanging attachments, must vary much as to time in different people.—I only entreat every body to believe that exactly at the time when it was quite natural that it should be so, and not a week earlier, Edmund did cease to care about Miss Crawford, and became as anxious to marry Fanny, as Fanny herself could desire (383).

Rozema, too, makes a final intervention as Edmund declares his love for Fanny, but Rozema's intervention is her own creation and although her observation is clever it is not as profound as Austen's, nor nearly as powerful as the image that accompanies it. Fanny (who wears a red dress that exposes a good deal of cleavage) draws attention to the film's fictionality by remarking "it could have turned out differently I suppose," and Edmund proposes, saying he loves her "as a hero loves a heroine." These comments certainly point to the film's fictionality, but unlike Austen's intervention the words do not cut romantic

love down to size—in fact the words, along with the eroticization of Fanny's body and the romantic images of Fanny and Edmund in hot embrace, reinforce rather than deflate the notion of a happily-ever-after ending (see Fig 13).

Conclusion

The conventional elements of Rozema's film thus absorb her political agenda to a troubling degree. In regard to Rozema's post-colonial concerns, her inventions allow for a limited re-appraisal of the sins of late-eighteenth-century English gentry, but as the film ends we are told that Sir Thomas repents and gives up his slaves, and so the slavery issue dissolves—into a dash of post-modern irony on the subject of tobacco, as if today's first-world exploitation of third-world populations has no direct or indirect historical connection. In regard to Rozema's feminist concerns, her plot resolution ends up serving the status quo, and in a way not so very different from Emma Thompson's version of *Sense and Sensibility.* The feminist content of Rozema's film corresponds with the limited number of feminist demands adopted by mainstream society: convention now requires that a physically weak, introverted Fanny be fashioned into a robust extrovert; images of strong, capable, "liberated" women are welcomed—when they do not threaten traditional institutions and business as usual. Moreover, the new Fanny may be a successful writer but she is also a traditional wife—that is, a happily domesticated woman. Rozema has made radical changes to Austen's characters and plot, but because Rozema chooses not to tamper with Austen's romantic pairings she serves up a heroine who could stand as a prototype for the "post-feminist" woman of the 1990s, a woman whose "liberation" is accommodated to patriarchy. Austen's Fanny endured hardships and hard negotiations in

Fig. 13. Patricia Rozema's *Mansfield Park.* Fanny Price (Frances O'Connor) and Edmund Bertram (Jonny Lee Miller). *Macleans's* 22 Nov. 1999: 107.

order to achieve her goal of marriage to the man she loved—as ideal a conclusion as an imperfect world could allow. Rozema's film, like the mini-series *Pride and Prejudice,* gives us a utopian ending (albeit with a post-modern ironic edge rather than wedding imagery) when she awards Fanny a publisher as well as a husband. In this regard, the quip from Holden's review in *The New York Times* (and printed large in newspaper advertisements all over North America) is quite accurate: Rozema's film is indeed "a smart fable about women, power & money" (*Times Colonist*).

Images and words on Miramax's *Mansfield Park* web site capture the opposing viewpoints that are such a troubling mix in Rozema's film. The introduction is a romantic one—a white dove flutters upwards across the screen to the opening chords of the film's theme music. The dove, which disappears and re-appears, refers to an invention of Rozema's: in the film Henry Crawford makes Fanny a romantic courtship offering of a wagon full of fireworks, followed by the release of a bevy of white doves. Henry's gift is symbolic; it refers back to an earlier (invented) scene in the library at Mansfield Park where Henry took up Fanny's book and read out loud a story about a trapped starling (from Laurence Sterne's 1768 publication *Sentimental Journey*). The caged bird cries, "I can't get out, I can't get out." Claudia Johnson writes that Rozema uses Sterne's tale "to protest and to connect the institution of slavery and the confinement of women" (17). However, in both of these scenes Henry is romancing Fanny and as a result the birds become symbols of trapped women seeking the freedom of ardent courtship as their escape route—thus, in yet another motif, the romantic image compromises the feminist message.

On the web site the image of the dove is followed by a series of quotations and

phrases that appear and disappear along with images of Fanny Price: it is a combination that promotes old-fashioned romance in a brand-new form. The first quotation appears to belong to Fanny, as a reincarnation of Jane Austen ("I often think it odd that history should be so dull for a great deal of it must be invention"). The second promotes "Jane Austen's third and most controversial novel in an entirely new style" (an image of part of a woman's body in a red dress appears on the screen). Finally, the phrase "a deliciously reluctant romance" is superimposed over another image of Fanny, and when that disappears the words "a dizzying image of marriage and social status" yield up an image of a great mansion, and over it the words "Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park.*" Finally, and despite Miramax's promise of a new, post-feminist heroine, the web site promises a result that could not be more traditional:

> Fanny Price—the newly envisioned heroine of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* —is a spirited, witty reflection of Austen herself. An extremely intelligent, wildly creative young woman, she desperately believes in the rightness of one true love no matter what the cost.

These words and images are conventional, and hyperbolic, romantic rhetoric which counters Claudia Johnson's argument that viewers will not find "the easy stuff of Harlequin" romances in this film. Such opposing viewpoints match the opposing forces of romantic melodrama and political critique in Rozema's film, and are just as irreconcilable.

Conclusion

Austen critiqued her society from the point of view of a middle-class woman, but these revival films emphasise romance and minimize, distort or disrupt that critique. Austen does not invest in romance as ideology; instead, her success rests on her shrewd use of the romantic plot, along with sound intellectual content voiced by a witty narrator. Her own words define her work:

> [novels] have afforded more extensive and unaffected pleasure than those of any other literary corporation in the world... in short,...[the novel is a] work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language (*Northanger Abbey* 58)

Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice,* so spare of description, has been re-fashioned into highly descriptive television images of beautiful people, places and things. This is romantic spectacle that, in terms of gender politics, supports rather than challenges the status quo, and that, by displaying material goods as an integral part of the entertainment, also supports the status quo of consumer culture. The mini-series endorses much of what Austen ridiculed—in particular the excesses of romance and material desires. Austen's novel becomes romantic costume-drama: a camera-perfect heroine and hero are filmed on elegant sets and in pastoral locations—Elizabeth Bennet is voluptuous in her low-cut gowns, and Mr. Darcy is her male equal in sensuous scenes of bathing, swimming, and swordplay. In addition, Regency homes are finely furnished, and vast estate or lesser mansion, their landscaped gardens are of glossy-magazine quality. These charming interiors and exteriors are alluring images of a middle-class material utopia, just as the handsome young men riding splendid horses across a pastoral panorama are nostalgic images of a past utopia. The happily-ever-after wedding celebrations of the grand finale

are romantic images that promise a future utopia.

Thompson and Lee, in their adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility,* reject *Pride and Prejudice*'s conspicuous display of material goods. Instead, Lee's elegant images support Regency romance and Thompson's new dialogue voices late-twentieth-century feminist protest. Where Austen's novel pitted reason against feeling and had reason emerge victorious, this film version lets romantic love win out. The novel's end has Elinor and Marianne achieve good marriages with good, but rather dull and unheroic husbands; the film gives us Marianne's fabulously romantic wedding, with a heroic bridegroom for her, and a winsome new husband for Elinor. The film's final image of Marianne as a subdued and beautiful bride and Brandon as a triumphant groom overturns Austen's pragmatic ending and resolves feminist protest. This happily-ever-after wedding celebration is as intensely romantic as the grand finale of the television mini-series.

Patricia Rozema, in her adaptation of *Mansfield Park,* rejects the gaudy displays of wealth that permeate the television mini-series *Pride and Prejudice,* and she also rejects what Claudia Johnson defines as "the suffering of love" in the Emma Thompson/Ang Lee adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility* (16). Yet, in order to insert her own feminist and post-colonial agenda into Austen's domestic political critique, Rozema invents a new sub-plot that results in melodrama and sensational images of drug taking, alcohol abuse, clandestine sex, rape and torture—innovations that take away from, rather than reinforce, Austen's more subtle commentary on the moral failings of her own society. But because Rozema leaves intact the romantic ending of Austen's plot, her revisions uphold the romantic traditions so brazenly flaunted in the *Pride and Prejudice* mini-series, and also reflect the post-feminist stance of the film *Sense and Sensibility,* a position that supports

rather than challenges the status quo.

One way viewers respond to these films is to visit their locations—the tourist magazine *In Britain* reports that the sites for the *Pride and Prejudice* mini-series "have found a huge upsurge of visitor interest in its wake" (3) (see Fig. 14). These tourists do not re-experience the social fictions Austen wrote for her own time; instead, they revisit romantic fictions adapted for the present day. Austen's fictions engage, question and finally present a reforming vision; these revival productions divert, and with their revised narratives and images of a fictional past they reveal and uphold the dominant social and economic ideologies of the 1990s.

in BRITAIN

THE MAGAZINE OF THE *BTA*

JANUARY 1997

TREASURE TRAIL
Antiques fairs in Sussex

THE RIGHT TRACK
Exploring Britain by train

HAPPY NEW YEAR
Northumberland style

Jane Austen
on location

£2.75 US$4.25 C$5.30

Fig.14. BBC's *Pride and Prejudice*. Mr Darcy (Colin Firth) and Elizabeth Bennet (Jennifer Ehle). *In Britain*. Jan. 1997: Cover

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VITA

Surname: Atkinson Given Names: Lois Dawn

Place of Birth: Gladstone, Manitoba, Canada

Educational Institutions Attended:

University of Victoria	1996 to 2001
Camosun College	1994 to 1996

Degrees Awarded:

B.A. (Honours)	University of Victoria	1998

Honours and Awards:

University of Victoria Graduate Fellowship	1998 to 2000
Purves-Cordonier Prize, University of Victoria	1997
President's Regional Entrance Scholarship, University of Victoria	1996
English Essay Award, Camosun College	1996
Creative Writing Award, Camosun College	1996
MacGill Memorial Scholarship, Camosun College	1995

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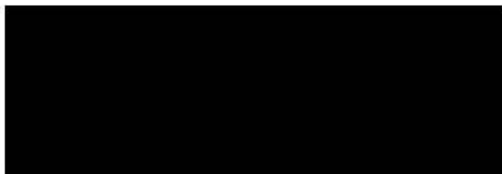
Author 

Lois Dawn Atkinson

June 7, 2001