

## Austen, Adapted

By Amy King

The 2003 film *Adaptation* begins with a voiceover provided by one of the film's central characters, the screenwriter Charlie Kaufman: "Do I have an original thought in my head? my bald head?" Here the screenwriter, and the act of adaptation itself, become part of the filmic narrative. Kaufman's habit of self-loathing combines with his high standards to produce a fatal writer's block; thirteen weeks into his contract to adapt Susan Orlean's *The Orchid Thief*, he sits in his agent's office and blurts out the following: "I don't know how to adapt this! I mean, I should have just stuck with my own stuff... I don't know why I thought I could write this." Sigh: if only the screenwriter of this season's film version of *Pride and Prejudice* had had a similar epiphany, and left it to someone else to do. Charlie Kaufman, for instance. At least Kaufman, whose post-modern sensibility is about as far from Austen's Regency world as one can get, would have left a knowing trace of adaptation on his version, while this film— well, suffice it to say that it adapts the novel badly, but it thinks it adapts it faithfully and well. Fatal. Kaufman certainly would not have been as frustrated with the material as he is by *The Orchid Thief*; *Pride and Prejudice*, habitually considered to be a perfectly structured novel, a Parthenon of fiction, has plot and structure and dialogue in excess. As David Miller writes in his 2003 *Jane Austen, or The Secret of Style*, "Austen Style elects to express itself in, of all things, a *narrative form*" (40). Kaufman, continuing his breakdown in his agent's office, reads a review of Orlean's book aloud: "no narrative really unites these passages. New York Times Book Review. I can't structure this; it's that sprawling New Yorker shit... The book has no story, there's NO STORY!" When the agent suggests that he make up a plot, Kaufman responds with a degree of earnestness that could make the most pedantic English professor weep in gratitude: "no— I didn't want to do that this time. It's someone else's material. I have a responsibility to Susan..."

Whatever responsibility the producers, director, and screenwriter of production of *Pride and Prejudice* may have felt to Jane, or to the idea that "it's someone else's material," is for the most part inconspicuous. The production notes reveal, however, that the filmmakers at least thought they were being what, in our flabby film vernacular, we call "true to the novel"; the notes assert that the film is "faithful to the setting and period of the beloved novel," and the screenwriter Deborah Moggach says that "I tried to be truthful to the book." Keira Knightley, cast in the role of Elizabeth Bennet, likewise cites a reverence for the text when reflecting upon her method: "It was great being directed by Joe because he's got a very clear vision of what he wants the entire piece to be like. So he can also say, 'you can stray a little bit, that's all right.' And I think you have to do that to really own a character, to possess the role. It's a different process to do a film based on a book, because the inner dialogue of your character is all written down. So if there was ever a scene where I was having problems, we would go back to the book and in some way or another it was right there." Knightley goes on to suggest that invention is necessary for the interpreter of a role, which she takes to mean a betrayal of what to her is a fixed set of meanings in the text: "But, equally, you have to take a stand and say 'OK, I know it says this in the book, but you know what? I can't do it like that because it doesn't make sense as far as this goes, so I'm going to have to change that slightly.' And then you to be brave and just do it." Knightley's stated reverence to Austen's novel and

what she oddly thinks she finds there—“the inner dialogue of your character”—sets up, of course, her admitted straying from it. Only in thinking that the text is inert—approaching it as constructionist jurists do the constitution—does one think of interpretation as rebellion. This is clearly what Knightley’s pert reaction to her feigned reverence to the novel produces; anyone who has read Austen is aware there is no inner dialogue in *Pride and Prejudice*. Such quibbling with a young actor aside, it is more misguided to believe that “it says this in the book” and that meaning “was right there,” waiting in the novel for those breaks between takes. In contrast, Amy Heckerling’s 1995 film *Clueless*, a witty modern retelling of *Emma*, is irreverent about details of setting and period—it adapts the novel to the contemporary setting of Beverly Hills and the mores of the 90210 crowd—while it rigorously maintains the novel’s themes and ethical positions.

The act of adaptation is by necessity an act of interpretation, as are all acts of reading. It is in the stated reverence for the static novel that the makers of the current film go awry, for they not only believe that they can reproduce it faithfully but that their own (in this case uninformed and ignorant) reading of the novel is a seamless reflection of its content. Unfortunately the ignorance abounds, which the production notes not only reveal but seem to celebrate. This is Joe Wright, the director: “I had never read *Pride and Prejudice*, nor seen a television version. I come from a background of television social realist drama, and so I was a bit prejudiced against this material, regarding it as posh. But as I read the screen adaptation, I became emotionally involved and by the end I was weeping. So I read the book, and discovered that what Jane Austen had written was a very acute character study of a particular social group.” Several of the producers of the film are quoted hewing to the line about faithfulness to the novel—“we wanted to present the story as it was written”—even as they chose a director with an admitted ignorance of and stated hostility for the novel of manners. And so it is with trepidation that one sees the film in the wake of reading about Knightley’s faith in Wright’s “very clear vision.” Not to give it away—but perhaps to prepare you, dear reader—it is a vision that includes barnyard animals casually walking through the back entrance of Longbourn, the Bennets’s house.

Pigs, to be exact. The director, in a bid to realize his vision of making *Pride and Prejudice* (as he says) “real and gritty,” twice allows a large male pig to roam freely through the kitchen and sitting rooms. The filmic vocabulary of the close-up leaves no doubt to the pig’s sex, or the director’s symbolism. Other oddities in this film’s universe include Mrs. Bennet’s proclivity towards alcohol, and her need for hangover cures in the morning (raw eggs figure in the potion), as well as Bingley’s free access to Jane’s bedroom while she convalesces at Netherfield. The film’s misunderstanding of class, a more serious charge, will be discussed later. But what can be said succinctly is what Anthony Lane, in his recent *New Yorker* review of the film, has already piquantly voiced: “What has happened is perfectly clear: Jane Austen has been Brontëfied.” Indeed when I saw the film I kept having the recurring thought that the three-minute pitch of the film must have included the line “*Pride and Prejudice* meets Laurence Olivier’s *Wuthering Heights*.” The first proposal scene inexplicably is transferred from an indoor setting (the drawing room at Mr. Collins’s parsonage) to an angry storm-soaked meeting at a classical temple on Lady Catherine de Bourgh’s grounds; the pair is so wet, the suggestion of near sexual capitulation so strong, that it seems to draw as much from the idiom of soft-core pornography as the passion of Vivien Leigh and Laurence Olivier. The final “proposal” occurs at dawn, both Elizabeth and Darcy inexplicably drawn out into a

dew-soaked field; it is as if the gothic mechanics of *Jane Eyre*—Rochester’s phantom cry, “Jane! Jane! Jane!”—have been imported to serve the filmmakers’ idea of true romance.

The Brontëfication of the novel extends to some aspects of the dialogue as well. An analysis of the ratio of analysis to action in the novel quickly yields one page of action to ten pages of analysis, and yet none of this reasoned quietude enters the film. The conversational style of characters reveals their character: rational people are subject to correction (Darcy, Elizabeth), while silly characters are given to soliloquy (Mrs. Bennet, Mary, Mr. Collins) and are uncorrectable. The novel trains the reader to judge someone by their conversation, with the dictum that good conversation is reciprocal, while characters who display other conversational attributes are less admirable: Mr. Collins speaks in interminable clichés and is a monologist; Lydia spews; Mrs. Bennet is self-indulgently incoherent; Mr. Bennet speaks with too much irony; Wickham’s conversation is too intimate, and captivatingly mendacious. The ethic of *Pride and Prejudice* is conversation, which is to suggest that the central dramas of the novel are conversational, not interior; this is not a novel that takes place in the interiors of characters’ minds. Obviously this mannered genre puts pressure on social acts: morning visits, who sits next to whom in a carriage, a letter between two people, a dance, and conversation. These are the very things the current film seeks to repress. Wright says that he “tried to cut out carriage shots. In a modern-day film, it’s not very interesting to see people simply get in a car and drive away, so why should it be more interesting to see people arriving and leaving in carriages?”

The greatest error in the film’s adaptation of the conversational and social ethic is its ill-advised creation of a kind of speech discordant with the novel’s ethics. An example: at one point in the film Elizabeth petulantly and loudly voices to her mother what Austen more decorously leaves implied through her heroine’s blushes: “I’ll perish with the shame of having such a mother!” (See Mary Ann O’Farrell’s wonderful *Telling Complexions: The Nineteenth-Century English Novel and the Blush*, 1997) The violation of the spirit of Austen’s novel would be almost laughable, if it were not for the more serious implication of what it would have meant to have voiced such a sentiment. That the film version has Elizabeth voicing that shame and lack of respect to her mother makes her a participant in the affect and ethics that the novel eventually teaches us to deplore. That Mrs. Bennet is silly, almost fatally silly, is crucial to the novel’s meditation on marriage, but Elizabeth’s mortification at her silliness and her father’s subsequent impropriety is precisely what cannot be voiced, so the violation of it is actually more serious than Mrs. Bennet’s flaws. The reader can only learn of it through narration: “Elizabeth had never been blind to the impropriety of her father’s behavior as a husband. She had always seen it with pain... that continual breach of conjugal obligation and decorum which, in exposing his wife to the contempt of her own children, was so highly reprehensible” (209-210). One of the things that Elizabeth needs to learn in the course of the fiction is the importance of character, even more than love, to marriage. Mr. Bennet, worried that Elizabeth has accepted Mr. Darcy for pecuniary reasons and does not respect him, sets aside his habitual irony in warning his Lizzy about the dangers of a marriage based more on physical affection than an evaluation of character:

“I have given him my consent. He is the kind of man, indeed, to whom I should never dare refuse any thing, which he condescended to ask. I now give it to *you*, if you are resolved on having him. But let me advise you to think better of it. I know your disposition, Lizzy. I know that you could be neither happy nor respectable, unless you truly esteemed your husband; unless you looked up to him as a superior. Your lively talents would place you in the greatest danger in an unequal marriage. You could scarcely escape discredit and misery. My child, let me not have the grief of seeing *you* unable to respect your partner in life.” (335)

The film version transcribes this monologue quite faithfully, but its import will be lost on the viewer who has been trained by Elizabeth’s habitual recourse in the film to hyperbolic language; the teenage outburst that her mother “shames” her leads the viewer to think that Mrs. Bennet’s affect is more at fault than her character. It is precisely the contrast (in the novel) between Elizabeth’s rational restraint and her forbearance in the face of her mother’s antics that distinguish Elizabeth’s character. That this distinguishes her even from her father is a subtle but important claim at the novel’s close; the language of his lecture could not be stronger— it warns of the danger to her respectability, which suggests sexual morality— but Mr. Bennet’s moral authority is diluted by the fact that his respectability is lessened by his lack of forbearance towards his wife. This subtlety is lost in the film, while it is not in the critically-acclaimed 1995 BBC/A&E television mini-series; it is not, in other words, an effect of adaptation into the medium of film or television. In the mini-series Jennifer Ehle’s marvelous Elizabeth suggests her embarrassment at her mother’s forwardness through blushing, slight but noticeable physical tension and (following the novel) quickness in changing the conversation. The recent film instead chooses to depict Elizabeth as a headstrong teenager rather than a woman whose forbearance in key moral issues— here, respect for one’s mother— is established.

The Brontëfication of the novel by the new film version is especially odd in relation to the landscapes it films. That the film decides to stick with its “real and gritty” aesthetic in depicting Longbourn would have been fine if it was not so uninformed. That it seems to confuse a gentleman’s estate with a farm is generally amusing, though jarring to anyone who knows and understands the landed gentry that Austen depicts. Mr. Bennet’s £2000 pound a year income from his estate would have placed him in the category of squires, along with about three-thousand other landowners of the 1790s who would have enjoyed a rental income of some £1,000 to £3,000 a year. The manure-inflected mud surrounding Keira Knightley’s Elizabeth as she walks out her back door is at best a mistake, though the production notes claim to have researched the late eighteenth century. Wright certainly is not the first interpreter of Austen to want to flesh out the background to Austen’s novels, but the film imports strange notions about the social effects of the French Revolution, seeing in the fear of the spread of revolution to England a conscious decision on the part of the upper classes to mix with a range of classes. The director is quoted as saying that “the upper classes were frightened, and made the decision to assimilate more with the lower classes. Hence the Assembly Rooms dances in village halls, which people of Darcy and Bingley’s class would now attend. There, they would mingle with people they wouldn’t previously have ever met socially. It was a whole new era for society. For young women, this was very exciting— like, say, Prince William turning up at a High Street disco. Suddenly, marriage prospects were widened. Bingley handles all this well, whereas his sister Caroline does not readily embrace the ideas of these new associations.”

That contemporary royals are celebrities, that Prince William's job precisely is to turn up at discos and to mingle with commoners, makes this a poor comparison for the upper classes in Austen's time. Moreover, the filmmakers have a mistaken sense of history and understanding of class in the novel; Mr. Bingley has £5000 a year, but this is money that his father acquired from trade, which his sister tries to forget or perhaps cover with a metropolitan disdain for country manners. Bingley is buying his way into the landed classes; he rents Netherfield, a distinction that the film forgets in its flattening of the monied characters into the upper-class. Mr. Darcy is a great landlord, of which there were only some four-hundred in England in the 1790s; his income of £10,000 comes from investments and rents of his land in Derbyshire. (His class owned some 20-25% of all the land in England.) The film is particularly mistaken in the class distinctions it would imply between the Bennets and Mr. Bingley; although he has more money than Jane, her status as the daughter of landed gentry and a gentleman would have been her own form of capital. The depiction of the assembly room dance in the film is thus its most egregious historical mistake; a much more accurate depiction of the assembly and dance can be viewed in the BBC/A&E mini-series production. In that production Bingley, eager to be pleased, refers to the pleasure he has in a "country dance," which is a sound adaptation of the distinctions Austen is drawing between the sophisticated Londoners and the provincial gentry. The film depicts the assembly as a drunken chaotic dance hall, more Dickensian in spirit than anything else; the idea that the Bennet sisters had the opportunity to meet the "upper class" Bingley and Darcy because of their decision to "assimilate more with the lower classes" is patently wrong.

The visual impact of the film is at times quite powerful, especially in its attention to landscape. The film opens with bird-song, and an exceptionally beautiful rural scene. It is all the more surprising, then, that the production opted to change certain key landscapes from the novel. When in the film version Elizabeth travels with the Gardiners, her London aunt and uncle, to Derbyshire, she is not pictured at Blenheim or Chatsworth—celebrated places that the novel names as substitutes for the planned trip to the Lake District—but rather standing at the edge of a cliff in a wild scene meant, I suppose, to reference the Peaks district. But its real purpose is signification: the shot is pure Brontë, as substitution of the sublime for the picturesque. The sublime that is referenced visually in the scene is an aesthetic that seems at odds with Elizabeth's evolved understanding of Darcy: does the filmmaker wish us to think that she is embracing his irresistible power? That she is full of awe, even fear or reverence, for the man? The aesthetic that the film chooses at that moment—the camera captures her standing at the very edge, and pulls back for an epic shot of the vast landscape—would suggest this. I suspect that what is being referenced instead is the 1939 Oscar-winning film of *Wuthering Heights*, or at least the visual shorthand that equates standing at the edge of a cliff, wind blowing one's hair, as a signifier of building romantic passion.

The visual logic is then further confused by the scene that follows, when Pemberley comes into sight and the accidental meeting between Darcy and Elizabeth takes place. Elizabeth does not suffer, as the scene at the edge of the cliff would suggest, from being overawed by either Pemberley or its owner, but rather from an emotion more in keeping with the novel of manners: embarrassment. If the film-makers wished to "Brontëify" Austen, they should

have followed through on their reading. As it is they change the visual key once again; at Pemberley Elizabeth, when not indoors staring at the paintings, is walking amidst formal French gardens. A classical statuary of a female figure wrapped in a gauzy fabric extends but perhaps complicates the garden imagery; are we to understand the veiled statuary as metonymic of Elizabeth? Certainly the landscape of Pemberley in the novel is meant to be understood as an extension of Mr. Darcy, but in the film that extension (to the formal French garden) would imply his authoritarianism and rigidity. Again the viewer of the film is unnecessarily confused by the film's visual logic. Here is the novel's description of the landscape of Pemberley, and Elizabeth's reaction to it:

"Elizabeth's mind was too full for conversation, but she saw and admired every remarkable spot and point of view. They gradually ascended for half a mile, and then found themselves at the top of a considerable eminence, where the wood ceased, and the eye was instantly caught by Pemberley House, situated on the opposite side of the valley, into which the road with some abruptness wound. It was a large, handsome, stone building, standing well on rising ground, and backed by a ridge of high woody hills;— and in front, a stream of some natural importance was swelled into greater, but without any artificial appearance. Its banks were neither formal, nor falsely adorned. Elizabeth was delighted. She had never seen a place for which nature had done more, or where natural beauty had been so little counteracted by an awkward taste. They were all of them warm in their admiration; and at that moment she felt, that to be mistress of Pemberley might be something!" (215)

The aesthetic that the novel is referencing is the picturesque. It is a vocabulary that the film resists because it equates what it calls the "picturesque tradition" with an "idealized version of English heritage as some kind of Heaven on Earth." The visual vocabulary that the filmmakers reject is actually quite useful in forwarding the courtship narrative and the suggestion of sexual attraction between Elizabeth and Darcy. The serpentine line that the novel describes is sensual; it is a vocabulary easily translatable into the visual vocabulary of film, which is what the BBC/A&E production exploits. The winding line is the line of picturesque landscape theory, which thought of the serpentine line as sensuous, a line that visually elicited pleasure. In the passage above, Elizabeth's experience of the landscape produces "delight," which is a much stronger emotion than the "admiration" that the others experience. The delights of Pemberley, far from simply inspiring a mercenary gaze, emanate from the landscape's lines: the winding lines that her body in the carriage and then her eyes follow are part of a beauty that she registers as unprecedented in its attractiveness. Is it surprising that "delight" in Darcy follows?

That Darcy owns this particular landscape and property is, in the novel, a key way that the novel asserts its conservative ethos. The picturesque landscape, which affords Elizabeth such pleasure, also signifies that the owner of the estate does not wish to dominate with authoritarian display, but rather delight with the more winning lines of a landscape that at times hides its power behind obstructed sightlines. The politics of this are of course conservative; it gratifies the fantasy that there is such a thing as a strong, loving, attentive, and even— this is really where the fantasy kicks in— submissive authority figure. Darcy, the person who both Elizabeth and the reader depend upon for their happy ending, is an authority figure par excellence; he is always depicted in relation to others, as a "master,"

“brother,” or “landlord,” and as such he epitomizes authority. That he learns through his relation to Elizabeth to extend the benign authority he had practiced as a landlord to his friendships is key to the novel’s ideals: his is an approved paternalistic authority, and one that is submissive to the not only softening but ethical influences of a woman. Elizabeth sums up the novel’s celebration of a deserving, hence natural, aristocracy:

“The commendation bestowed on him by Mrs. Reynolds was of no trifling nature. What praise is more valuable than the praise of an intelligent servant? As a brother, a landlord, a master, she considered how many people’s happiness were in his guardianship!— How much of pleasure or pain it was in his power to bestow!— How much of good or evil must be done by him! Every idea that had been brought forward by the housekeeper was favourable to his character, and as she stood before the canvas, on which he was represented, and fixed his eyes upon herself, she thought of his regard with a deeper sentiment of gratitude than it had ever raised before.” (220)

Darcy is the one who secures the happy ending upon which the reader’s pleasure is based; he is the one who solves the problem of Lydia’s wanton elopement, who endures the unhappiness of relatives, and who accepts Elizabeth without an equivalent level of rank or dowry. He does this not out of passion, which is what his first proposal to Elizabeth is based upon, but rather— we are taught to believe—because he learns to submit to her; he reforms himself after being rejected by Elizabeth, who correctly accuses him of not behaving “in a more gentleman-like manner” (171). The current film version reduces the complexity of these politics to the emotional tug-of-war between two stubborn and passionate people who fail initially to “get” each other, intersubjective difficulties (what we might now call a “failure to communicate”) standing in for the complex battle of authority and independence the novel stages.

In later Austen novels figures of authority— landowners especially— will not be as free, as Darcy is, from faults. In *Persuasion*, Sir Eliot is a profligate fool who is forced to rent out his patrimony to the meritocratic class of the navy because he has bungled his finances; in *Mansfield Park* only the second son seems deserving of the status of master and landowner, while the merits of the system are strained by the fact that Sir Thomas leaves the estate to attend to his West-Indian sugar plantations worked by slaves. Unlike these novels, which rather broadly if incompletely question the conflation between moral worth and class prerogative, *Pride and Prejudice* seems to show that class distinctions that the novel’s ending maintains are natural. Whether the ending is politically suspect has been a critical concern for some time; the aesthetically satisfying ending in particular has been understood as obscuring the deep social problems that the novel invokes only to cancel: the problem of the entail, the unfairness of the system of primogeniture, the lack of respectable options besides marriage for gentlewomen. The novel’s ending, in this reading, is more than a fudge; it is said to perpetuate a fantasy that the traditional social arrangement works, that individuals of merit— Jane, Elizabeth— find their way to their “natural” social place. Jane is as good as Bingley, and Elizabeth is as rational and deserving of authority as Darcy, and thus they naturally belong in the caste into which they marry. Certainly the novel is in many respects a fantastic narrative about the naturalness of a pre-existing hierarchy/authority. But there

are other ways to understand Austen's achievement in terms other than those of submission to the fairytale.

Consider that the novel imagines versions of authority—Darcy, and the class position he inhabits— that are subject to criticism and capable of transformation. Austen has an exceptionally argumentative young woman engage in rational, extensive, and mutually improving arguments; she turns down two marriage proposals (Collins and Darcy) even though both would have been financially advantageous to both her and her family. Those disinterested decisions combine with the novel's representation of the rational female to produce what might be viewed as constructive political commentary. Even if the novel's conclusion corroborates conservative mythologies, the novel as a whole does not evade social criticism out of some fond wish to uphold the established social order; think of the portrait of Mr. Collins, and how the choice her friend Charlotte Lucas makes in marrying him is portrayed. Elizabeth argues with the established social order, choosing to marry not only because it is financially advantageous. If *Pride and Prejudice* is in part conciliatory— Austen herself later critiqued the novel as being altogether “too light & bright & sparkling”— it also establishes a social critique from which in closure it conciliates.

Perhaps the least conciliatory scene in the novel, the one that least participates in what some critics would call Austen's conservative program, is the scene in which Lady Catherine de Bough arrives at Longbourn to confront Elizabeth with the rumor that she is to be married to Darcy. And so we arrive at yet another, more damaging, change in the visual landscape that this production makes. In the film Lady Catherine arrives unexpectedly at Longbourn at night; in the novel she arrives before normal visiting hours, but it is clearly day-time. The change perhaps reflects the screenwriter's desire to more intelligibly express to a modern audience the exceptionalism and impropriety of the time of her visit; the night-time setting also makes for more dramatic footage. What the film loses is the setting of the conversation— slash-argument between Lady Catherine and Elizabeth: the formal gardens behind Longbourn, which Lady Catherine singles out as “a prettyish kind of a little wilderness on one side of your lawn” (312-3). Of course the film version of Longbourn has changed these formal gardens to manure and mud, which is one of the ways it seeks to make more oppositional the class differences between “poor” Elizabeth and “wealthy” Mr. Darcy. (The BBC/A&E adaptation maintains the novel's time of day and the setting of the argument in the “wilderness” portion of the Bennet's grounds.) The novel explicitly creates a visual backdrop— the wilderness portion of the formal garden— to Elizabeth's “declaration of independence” from the conventional and conservative values urged so forcibly by Lady Catherine. One way of understanding the scene in the novel is as a vindication of personal happiness as a liberal moral category. How so? In the conversation with Lady Catherine she refuses to defer to rank, instead arguing heatedly and persistently that they are equals: “In marrying your nephew, I should not consider myself as quitting that sphere. He is a gentleman; I am a gentleman's daughter; so far we are equal” (316). That Lady Catherine expresses her disapprobation— “Are the shades of Pemberley to be thus polluted?”— is unimportant to Elizabeth. She refuses Lady Catherine's demands, choosing instead to consult what is clearly a vindication of the liberal political value of happiness: “I am only resolved to act in that manner, which will, in my own opinion, constitute my happiness, without reference to you, or to any person so wholly unconnected with me” (318). The speech privileges personal happiness over general social approbation and the authority of rank. That the film chooses to edit this scene, and displace it from the visual aesthetic that the



novel had established, speaks to the fundamental misunderstandings that this adaptation reflects.

The film's final scene is a David O. Selznick vision: a torch-lit scene of romance, Darcy in an open shirt, barefoot, uttering "Lizzie, my pearl, my goddess divine." This melancholic, Byronic Darcy, created by Matthew Macfadyen, has now been lightened and brightened by his marriage; suddenly he just seems like a complex guy who needs to be understood, prone to man-silences and sudden outbursts, a hero for the intellectual girls's clique. "You can only call me Mrs. Darcy when you are incandescently happy," Knightley's Elizabeth decrees. "Mrs. Darcy... Mrs. Darcy... Mrs. Darcy." At which Janeite filmgoers risk proclaiming their own shame at having such a heroine.

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