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BEYOND BALLROOMS: THE EVER-EVOLVING TAPESTRY OF *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE* IN EVOLVING TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLINGS

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Abstract: This article discusses the evolving narratives and shifting perspectives in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* with the dawn of transmedia storytelling. Its principal focus is to outline in all its contours the novel's Romantic Classicism and first, second, and third-wave and postcolonial Feminist readings, which made their way to digital popular culture in cinematic adaptations and modern retellings. An elaboration of the question of evolving narratives forces us unavoidably to confront issues of intersectionality arising from these digital adaptations. The amalgamation of media with marketing and entertainment strategies has developed recently, enabling the predigital barriers to break into young audience captivation. However, postmodern transmedia storytelling has been cluttered with 'semantic chaos' (Scolari 2009). Popular adaptations like "Bridget Jones's Diary" (2001), "Bride and Prejudice" (2004), "Lost in Austen" (2008 TV Series), "Death Comes to Pemberley" (2013 Drama), and "Pride and Prejudice and Zombies" (2016) are thoroughly analysed in the paper. This constellation of issues will be explored through reader-response theory, adaptation studies, queer theory, and intersectionality. The influence of digital media on evolving narratives is essential to assist in uncovering and understanding the changing landscape of popular culture. Shifting perspectives contribute to the ongoing vitality of this classic work, ensuring its relevance or continuity in future generations. However, more importantly, it pays close attention to inclusivity, discussing aspects the classical text might not have encountered. The absence or presence of complex socio-political commentary in the digital space, which is prevalent in the classical text, can be subjected to interpretation and debate.

Keywords: *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen, Transmedia Storytelling, Evolving Narratives.

Adaptations of Jane Austen's novels, particularly *Pride and Prejudice*, satisfy the desire for sameness while offering something new with each adaptation. Adaptation involves change and is akin to a familiar road that has changed but ultimately leads to the same destination. But, the persistence of fidelity criticism is ascribed to the academic emphasis on adaptations of literary novels, especially The Canons; however, when a literary text has already captivated a substantial audience likely to consume the adaptation, the high cultural importance for adaptations to have textual faithfulness diminishes. In cases like these, the film's approval by the audience often replaces the rigid language of fidelity. Fidelity criticism restricts critics as well as encloses adaptations to a mere compare-and-contrast analysis (Haskell 2001). Most canonical and popular transmedia storytelling resist such a straightforward and unfabricated assessment. Adopting a different perspective lets a more sophisticated understanding of how an adaptation can be critically analyzed beyond only the fidelity to the source text.

"Diary of Bridget Jones" is a 2001 movie directed by Sharon Maguire and produced by Universal Pictures, Little Bird, StudioCanal, and Working Title Films. It is originally adapted from Helen Fielding's novel *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996), a modern exploration of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. "Bridget Jones's Diary" is a projection of Bridget Jones, a 32-year-old single woman's life who works as a publicity assistant in London. Bridget is infatuated with her boss, Daniel Cleaver, but is constantly concerned about her weight. However, she is introduced to Mark Darcy, a childhood acquaintance, after a New Year's party. Since then, she has resolved to turn her life around and begins documenting her attempts to quit smoking, lose weight, and find herself the Mr. Right. Bridget and Daniel begin to date. However, their relationship goes sideways when Bridget catches Daniel with another woman. She makes up her mind to end the relationship with him and starts pursuing a new television career. However, she reencounters Mark. He starts showing genuine interest in her, irrespective of her imperfections. A series of events start unfolding as Bridget develops feelings for Mark, which includes a chaotic dinner party and Mark and Daniel's past revelation. Bridget confesses to Mark her feelings but soon finds out that Mark is about to get engaged to another woman and move to New York.

Meanwhile, Bridget's friends plan a surprise Paris trip to help her heal. However, only before she leaves Mark arrives at her flat. The potential kiss gets interrupted when Bridget rushes to change into sexier underwear, and Mark reads her diary. Her unflattering opinions about him initially hurt Mark, and he leaves to buy her a new diary for a fresh start. Ultimately, they reconcile and share a kiss in the snow-covered street. The story ends on an optimistic note as they embark on a new chapter in the book of their relationship.

In her review of the film adaptation of *Bridget Jones's Diary*, Molly Haskell highlights the film's intertextuality and clever manipulation of audience knowledge about the novel, the author, and the creators of the film. This approach welcomes a more broadened consideration of intertextuality's impact on the expectations in adaptation studies. The contemporary trend in the criticism of adaptations mainly focuses on a film's fidelity to its source text, evaluating its value solely based on how faithfully and close-to-original it reproduces the primary text. Scholars have repeatedly pointed out the need for a shift of adaptations from this criterion, arguing that this only limits criticism by prioritizing the literary solely over the cinematic. This is applicable, particularly for adaptations of popular novels.

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Helen Fielding's novel *Bridget Jones's Diary* received immense appreciation for its authentic emotional voice (Marsh 2004, 52). The subjective perception of the world through Bridget gives the readers an insight into her emotional life. In an article by Alison Case, called "Authenticity, Convention, and Bridget Jones's Diary", she drawn on research on the 19th-century British literature to argue that feminine narration during the Victorian era was highly lacking agency for female narrators.

In Fielding's novel, the narrative lays an emphasis on Bridget's whimsical nature and the genuineness it adds to her character. The diary format, in highlighting Bridget as the author of events that are unfolding, creates a quite interesting dynamic between a self-conscious retrospective accounts and directed experiences. The film adaptation keeps the diary format intact but additionally employs cinematic techniques, character narration, and visual cues for depicting the relationship shared by retrospection and directness.

The title sequence of the cinematic adaptation introduces Bridget's character narration, blending it with visual cues and subjective alterations of the diegetic world. Initially, Bridget's self-aware introduction has an undertone of her recognition of an unfavourable situation, drawing a comparison to Glenn Close in *Fatal Attraction* (Adrian Lyne, 1987). This further points out her acknowledgement of societal expectations and the pressure of society to conform to certain behaviour, even in her private life. A divide between Bridget's self-conscious representation and her direct experiences is highlighted in the film. It uses music, visuals, and

character narration which contribute to the self-conscious retrospective diary format. It also echoes Case's ideas, adding cinematic dimensions. In the film, Bridget unwrapping a new diary reflect self-conscious retrospective evaluation, which is supported by non-diegetic visual cues, portraying her personal 'guilt-statistics' such as weight, cigarette consumption, and alcohol consumption. The formal construction of the diary format in the film, makes an amalgamation of various cinematic techniques to portray Bridget's innermost embarrassing moments in a manner that is self-conscious.

Indian cinema is well-known for using film as sources which later become controversial. A notable example is its adaptation of classic 18th and 19th-century European novels that are centered around the thriving themes such as romance, inheritance, and feminine frustration. Films such as "Kandukondain Kandukondain" (Sense and Sensibility, 2000) and "Maya" (Madame Bovary, 1992) retell these novels, with new interpretations. They incorporate Indian cultural elements into the mis-en-scene. However, the film "Bride and Prejudice" (2004), directed by Gurinder Chadha takes intertextuality to an extreme. This film was produced in three continents and was supported by the British Film Council and Miramax. It showcases a hybrid procedure where elements from Jane Austen's novel are entangled with attributes from Indian, British cinema, and television, portraying the dynamic nature of intertextuality.

The film "Bride and Prejudice" intricately follows the plot of *Pride and Prejudice*. It emphasizes the romance narrative and incorporates features and elements from Bollywood, simultaneously addressing a diverse range of audience, including those in India and the Indian diaspora. The barrier between the protagonist couple is not their class difference but national identity. The film's Elizabeth (Lalita) representing and defending India against the pre-conceived ignorance and discord of the American Darcy. The film presents itself as a hybrid by bringing together Bollywood and Hollywood with a sensibility that is mostly British (DVD commentary).

The film brings in Bollywood conventions which evolved in the 1990s. These conventions made an appeal to the middle-class audience and Non-Resident Indians (NRIs), rejoicing Indian-specific national identity, blended with traditional values and modern consumerism (Chaudhuri 159). Lalita's character is a modern and independent-minded woman who is influenced by British as well as Bollywood stereotypes of young Asian women, being resistant to parental expectations (Steadman 1985). The film's diverse elements along with family emphasis, characterizations, and musical numbers, give rise to a unique amalgamation which reflects the evolving nature of Bollywood and brings in influences from other sources (Stam).

The usage of costume, setting, and dance in "Bride and Prejudice" mirrors classic adaptations, utilizing a plethora of colours, traditional dances, and prominent locations by Bollywood, also bringing in Western elements, highlighting and challenging social relationships reorganizing the conventions while mashing up styles, leading to some hurdles to reconcile various acting approaches (DVD commentary). Critics have praised as well as criticized the film's intertextual referencing and hybridity. Some of them view it as a bold celebration of cultural hybridity, while others recognize it as unsettling and question if it is a parody or pastiche. The film's deliberate use of intertextuality makes critics question the director's intentions and the barriers of adapting traditional and cultural traditions for a more widened horizon of audience. Some critics draw its parallels adversely to Mira Nair's "Monsoon Wedding". Nevertheless, "Bride and Prejudice" prompts reflections on the facets of intertextuality and hybridity in popular cinema (Stuart).

The film's self-conscious intertextuality serves to indulge the audience in the filmmaking process as well as rewards viewers who appreciate the hard work behind the scenes of the film. The final credits characteristic outtakes and off-guard moments which creates a communal experience, embracing the audience while they exit the cinema. It highlights how the film is dependent on breaching the boundaries of traditional storytelling (Stam).

Laurie Kaplan argues against the classification of whether "Lost in Austen" TV Series (2018) should be considered as a true adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*. She cites the introduction of a new protagonist and significant differences in plot. However, Paige Pinto views it as an adaptation about adaptation, highlighting its self-awareness as a postmodern outcome. The broader phenomenon of mass-marketing Jane Austen and the requirement for introducing new perspectives is also touched by the text. Julie Sanders' take on adaptation as a transpositional practice is brought to light which suggests that transmedia storytelling should offer

commentary on the original source text by contributing new elements or perspectives. The text offers the conclusion by cautioning against excessive fidelity to the original, pointing out the significance of introducing new elements in the process of adaptation.

Pastiche, according to Fredric Jameson, includes the neutral mimicry of multiple styles without the satirical motives of parody. In the television series, pastiche is predominant in the coexistence of various genres like sci-fi, classic novel, and romantic comedy. Jean Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality blurs the distinction between reality and fiction which can be applied to the series where the two worlds merge - the world of fantasy of the original *Pride and Prejudice* book and the real world where lives Amanda.

The meta-narrative and pastiche in "Lost in Austen" create a successful mix, captivating a 21st-century audience to the works of Jane Austen. By placing a modern character like Amanda into the 18th-century setting, this version of transmedia storytelling becomes more relatable. Laurie Kaplan understands and points out the series' departure from fidelity to the original. But, she also appreciates its use of postmodern elements for updating and actualizing the plot.

The television series targets a plethora of audiences, which include twenty-somethings familiar with the culture of contemporary times, viewers smitten with previous adaptations like Colin Firth's wet shirt scene, and devoted Janeites. In spite of the purists' potential resistance, "Lost in Austen" successfully blends the postmodern elements to make Austen's classic narrative relevant to a broader audience of the present times.

The miniseries explores the disparity between the modern contemporary world and the period of Regency, focusing in women's conditions. The protagonist, Amanda Price, expresses her desire to live in a world where there is fewer rights for women in spite of the feminist achievements during her time. Her resolution to stay in Austen's world and get married to Mr. Darcy raises questions about the romanticized perspective of her in the past and potential criticisms of feminism. This series brings to light the major differences, specifically in sexuality, breaking the curtain of puritanism and staunch patriarchal norms. Amanda's presence also reveals certain new aspects of the other characters. In spite of evident progress, the series highlights that certain social expectations and constraints on women are prevalent in the postmodern world, mirroring between Regency period and contemporary society.

In "Death Comes to Pemberley", the TV Series, directed by Daniel Percival, the denouement scenes are characterized by an enriched sense of irony. Unlike the renowned 'wet, white shirt scene' that features Darcy, it is Henry Alveston who takes the spotlight as the central character, alluding to the other adaptations. The series comes to an end with Darcy and Elizabeth by the ponds. They are seen reflecting on the early moments of love. There is an extension of the analysis thereby to the representation of Elizabeth in various *Pride and Prejudice* adaptations and transmedia storytelling, emphasizing her agency and contemporary essence in recent series, which contrasts the trend of prominence gained by male characters. The adaptation repositions Elizabeth as a pivotal character who is empowered, thereby challenging the traditional age-old gothic narrative constraints on heroines. Despite the historical anachronisms, the female characters are allowed greater independence. The gratification derived from the text is in the identification of the improbable or politically suspect features rather than adherence to historical accuracy. There is a conscious decision to look at the past for pleasure rather than being limited to its historical constraints, perhaps signalling a desire to escape patriarchal histories through the adaptations of Austen's works that are gothic in nature (Nelson 2016).

Including zombies and violence in "Pride and Prejudice and Zombies" (2016), directed by Burt Steers presents the readers with an alternative perspective on Austen's original novel. This adaptation makes a more enriched exploration of the prevalent societal fears during Austen's time: violence, revolution, and upheaval. By deviating from the traditional classic 'Austen brand', the novel (Seth Grahame-Smith) as well as the adapted film offers a feminist reinterpretation of Austen's society using the lens of violence. This new addition provides the readers and audience with novel ways to walk through and comprehend Austen's work, presenting a valid and distinct perception of the characters and the text.

Moreover, it encourages greater gender equality within the narrative. It reflects the contemporary issues faced by women. Lastly, the zombies and violence being incorporated in the adaptation provides a fresh and diverse view point on Austen's work, offering the readers and the audience new way to appreciate and get

hold of both the novel and the historical context where Austen lived.

There is a more egalitarian analysis being suggested by the analysis of "Pride and Prejudice and Zombies" (Chretien 2011) in terms of gender relations in relation to the traditional Austen brand. This offers a contemporary perspective on shared responsibility of marriage and equality in relationships. The adapted book as well as the film challenges the stereotypical expectations for genteel behaviour by highlighting the importance of weapon use, especially for women, making a distinction with Austen's conventional norms. The language in the book contains terms such as 'unmentionables' replacing 'zombies, parodying Austen's elevated language. Characters too engage in combat with genteel manners which satirizes societal norms. This parody welcomes readers of the adapted book and audience of the film to reconsider Austen's works in a new consideration, scrutinising the expectations and offering an alternative interpretation of her narrative and characters.

In conclusion, the nuanced evolving narratives and shifting perspectives within Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, adapted through a myriad of transmedia storytelling, not only preserves the classic's timeless allure but also propels it into contemporary discourse. The evolution from classic literature to digital popular culture has stimulated transformations that traverse Romantic Classicism, different waves of feminism, and postcolonial interpretations. Examining these themes through the lens of adaptation studies, reader-response theory, queer theory, and intersectionality, brings to light the integral layers which contribute to the present vitality of this literary classic that is ongoing.

A rich tapestry of intertextuality and hybridity is revealed through the analysis of "Diary of Bridget Jones," "Bride and Prejudice," "Lost in Austen," "Death Comes to Pemberley," and "Pride and Prejudice and Zombies". These transmedia storytelling not only bring fidelity to the source text but also poses a challenge to the traditional norms and introduce unique elements that meet the expectations of the diverse audience.

There is a fusion of cinematic techniques with the diary format in "Bridget Jones's Diary" that adds depth to Bridget's character and experiences. The clever manipulation of the film's intertextuality distorts the audience's knowledge about the novel, the author, and the creators, broadening considerations in adaptation studies. The film provides a more sophisticated comprehension of how adaptation can be analyzed critically beyond restricted adherence to the source text. This is done by detaching from fidelity criticism.

"Bride and Prejudice" serves as a unique specimen, seamlessly making an amalgamation of Bollywood and Hollywood elements. The adaptation transcends the existing cultural barriers, emphasizing the significance of national identity. Lalita, the film's Elizabeth becomes a representation of India, defending it against preconceived notions held by the American Darcy. The deliberate use of intertextuality in this adaptation prompts reflection on the director's intentions and the boundaries of adapting traditional and cultural traditions for a broader audience.

"Lost in Austen," the television series, poses challenge to the conventional classification of adaptation. Some argue against its fidelity to the original *Pride and Prejudice*, others view it as an adaptation about adaptation, offering a postmodern perspective. The series introduces a new protagonist and exclusive and significant plot differences, contributing to the broader phenomenon of mass-marketing Jane Austen. Pastiche and hyperreality are prevalent in this series, creating a successful blend that resonates with a 21st-century audience.

"Death Comes to Pemberley" redirects the spotlight to Elizabeth as a pivotal character, distorting traditional gothic narrative constraints laid on heroines. The series concludes with Darcy and Elizabeth who reflect on early moments of love, emphasizing Elizabeth's agency and contemporary essence. Despite historical anachronisms, the series allows female characters greater independence. It offers a conscious departure from strict historical accuracy for the pleasure of introspecting the past.

"Pride and Prejudice and Zombies," both a book and film adaptation, introduces an alternative perspective by incorporating zombies and violence. There is an exploration of societal fears through this feminist reinterpretation during Austen's time and challenges traditional expectations for genteel behaviour. By parodying Austen's language and engaging the characters in combat with genteel manners, this version

encourages readers and viewers to reconsider Austen's works through a new lens, thereby offering a contemporary viewpoint on shared responsibility in relationships.

In essence, these transmedia storytelling transcend mere fidelity criticism and engage with *Pride and Prejudice* in some ways that reflect the ever-evolving landscape of popular culture. As the novel progresses to be reimagined, its adaptability ensures not only its longevity but also its continued relevance in contemporary times, contributing meaningfully to broader conversations on inclusivity and the exploration of themes beyond the classical text's original boundaries.

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