# Analysis of the opening sequences of Austen’s adaptations

First published in 1918, Jane Austen’s novel of manners, *Pride and Prejudice*, explores the emotional development and maturity of the novel’s protagonist, Elizabeth Bennet, as she grapples with the issues of the landed gentry’s society of the British Regency. Due to its epic success, the novel has been rendered into numerous media versions, including film, television and theatrical adaptations. One of the most notable earliest adaptations of the novel is the 1995 television version; an equally notable but fairly recent adaptation of the novel is the 2005 film version. The 1995 version is a six-episode British television drama adapted to television by Andrew Davies and directed by Simon Langton; the film stars Jennifer Ehle as Elizabeth Bennet and Colin Firth as Mr. Darcy. The 2005 version, on the other hand, is a British-American romantic drama adapted to film by Debora Moggach and directed by Joe Wright; the film stars Keira Knightley as Elizabeth Bennet and Mathew Macfadyen as Mr. Darcy.

Different adaptations of well-known works such as Austen’s novels are likely to be inspired by varied intentions, partly because of divergent interpretations of the novel. For instance, both the 1995 and the 2005 adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* use extended tracking shots to introduce viewers to the protagonist, Elizabeth Bennet, and her surroundings; however, the manner in which the protagonist and her environment are portrayed in the two versions differ significantly. Thus, this essay will explore why the relatively similar movements result to extensively divergent expositions of the protagonist and her environment. Moreover, this essay will also analyze and offer plausible explanations of what each of the two pictures may divulge about the divergent filmic interpretations of Jane Austen.

The opening sequences of the two adaptations are embellished by extended tracking shots to introduce viewers to the character of the protagonist and her world; the 1995 version shows an extended opening sequence that is not in the source novel, of Mr Bingley and Mr Darcy looking at Netherfield and conversing about the former’s intent of owning it before riding away (Langton). Within the same sequence, Lizzy is shown watching the men from a hill, without any knowledge of their real identity; the sequence successfully captures Lizzy’s core character features, particularly her vitality (Austen 4), as she descends the hill. The creators of the 1995 version justified the inclusion of an additional scene that is not in Jane Austen’s novel as a way of offering their own interpretation of the source material, rather than merely depicting a series of dialogue-ridden images. Similarly, the creators of the 2005 version added an opening scene of Elizabeth walking around at dawn and reading a book before eventually entering her parental home where she overhears them talking about the new tenant of Netherfield (Wright). However, unlike the 1995 version, which introduces Mr. Bingley and Darcy very early on before the rest of the characters, the 2005 version introduces Lizzy first, thereby framing the story from her perspective.

The relatively analogous opening sequences of the two adaptations are markedly divergent because of the varied aims and intent of their creators as well as the manner in which they are depicted. The 1995 version deliberately introduces Mr. Bingley and Darcy ahead of the rest of the characters because its creators sought to frame the story from Darcy’s point of view as opposed from Lizzy’s (Langton). Thus, the opening sequence in the 1995 version was intended to reveal some of the personal sides of the characters, particularly Mr. Darcy’s personality and human side, and to contrast him with Lizzy and the rest of the characters. Introducing Darcy early on and depicting his personality and humane side was a deliberately calculated move by the creators of the 1995 version to get the viewers to know the character better early on so as to develop a liking of him. For that matter, the focus on Darcy is just as elaborate as that on Lizzy if not more, as the creators largely seek to compare their characters and to explore both their emotional development. Contrariwise, the 2005 version introduced Lizzy first because the creators of the adaptation intended to remain as honest as possible to their intention of telling the story from Lizzy’s point of view. Rendering Lizzy and her environment as truthfully as possible, according to the source novel, allows the viewers to gain knowledge of the Bennet’s family and the other characters through her eyes. Most importantly, the opening sequence of the 2005 version seeks to align viewers with Lizzy, to identify with her and her family, and particularly her way of seeing them (Wright).

Generally, the varied depictions of Elizabeth and her environment in the 1995 and the 2005 versions can be attributed to the varied interpretations of the source novel and the approaches used by the creators of the two versions respectively (Langton). The 1995 adaptation attempted as much as possible to achieve an accurate presentation of the source material, by adopting the tone and spirit of the original novel. Nevertheless, the creators of this version also sought to offer their own interpretation of the novel, rendered through the possibilities of visual story telling, and this resulted to some characteristic subtleties. For instance, while retaining the tone and spirit of the source novel, the creators of the 1995 version also made some slight alterations like shifting the story from primarily being about Elizabeth but also about Mr. Darcy. Unlike the creators of the 1995 version, the creators of the 2005 version intended to be as accurate as possible, not only to the source novel itself, but also to the realities of the 18th century landed gentry society of the British Regency. For that matter, the creators of the 2005 version opted to film the story in a manner that depicts British realism; unlike the 1995 version, which shifted the story from Elizabeth’s point of view to Darcy’s, the 2005 version is Elizabeth’s story (Wright). Thus, through Elizabeth’s eyes, the viewer sees everything, including Elizabeth’s character and environment as well as Darcy’s character features.

Overall, the purpose of this essay was to explore the manner in which the relatively similar and extended sequences of the 1995 and the 2005 versions of Austen’s novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, render divergent portrayals of the novel’s protagonist and her world. As indicated in the previous discussion, the opening sequences of the two Austen versions result to varied portrayals of Lizzy and her world, particularly because of the shift in their points of view as well as the different interpretations and intentions of their creators. While the creators of the 1995 version sought to remain as honest as possible to the source material, they also wanted to tell the story from Darcy’s point of view, and to portray their unique interpretation of Austen’s work. The creators of the 2005 version also wanted to be as accurate as possible, but not only to the source novel itself, but also to the realities of the 18th century landed gentry society of the British Regency. For that matter, the creators of the 2005 version opted to film the story in a manner that depicts British realism and to tell it from Lizzy’s point of view. Eventually, the different approaches adopted by the creators of the two Austen versions betray the conflicting intentions of the creators of those workers, which in turn were subsequently influenced by their divergent interpretations of the novel in the first place.

## Works Cited

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