

**Jane Austen from Page to Screen: How Current Society and *Pride and Prejudice* have  
Shaped *Northanger Abbey*, *Persuasion*, and *Mansfield Park* on Film**

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**Stephanie Reese**

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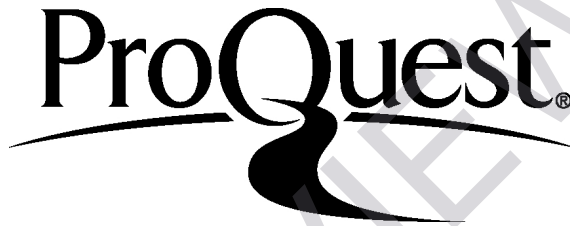
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PREVIEW

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We, the thesis committee for the above candidate for the  
Master of Arts degree, hereby recommend  
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Abstract of the Thesis

**Jane Austen from Page to Screen: How Current Society and *Pride and Prejudice* have  
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While Jane Austen's novels were published over two hundred years ago, her stories continue to captivate audiences through print and the screen. There seems to be a growing tradition of adapting certain novels, such as *Pride and Prejudice*, over other ones like, *Northanger Abbey*, *Persuasion*, and *Mansfield Park*. In this paper I explore how the former three novels differ from *Pride and Prejudice* from their heroines and heroes to the romantic relationships between the two protagonists. Then I take into consideration the large impact of Colin Firth's Mr. Darcy in influencing Austen's other heroes such as Captain Wentworth, Henry Tilney and Edward Bertram, by giving them more emotions and love speeches. All of these elements help prove why these three novels are often adapted less frequently than the forever popular *Pride and Prejudice*.

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And very special thank you to my family, who can now take a break from hearing me talk about Jane Austen...maybe. Thanks for always being a second pair of eyes, ears, or just being someone to rant to. Love you guys!

PREVIEW

## **Jane Austen from Page to Screen: How Current Society and *Pride and Prejudice* have Shaped *Northanger Abbey*, *Persuasion*, and *Mansfield Park* on Film**

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that at least once a decade, a Jane Austen novel will be made into a film and more importantly that the novel chosen will be her most popular, *Pride and Prejudice*. Although Austen's novels were published some two hundred years ago, they continue to find an appeal with today's audience. Men and women alike wish they could travel back in time to Jane Austen's era, where people appeared more polite and life more orderly. Filmmakers have found a way to profit from this dream by using the screen and transporting its viewers to the Regency era.

The films created within the past twenty years range from costume dramas to modern adaptations of Austen's narratives. There have even been films that immerse modern-day women into Austen's universe. One of these is Dan Zeff's 2008, *Lost in Austen*, which shows what can happen when an overly enthusiastic Jane Austen fan finds herself face to face with Elizabeth Bennet and trades places with her. A similar film is Jerusha Hess' 2013 *Austenland*, based on Shannon Hale's novel, which follows a young American woman who attends an Austen resort in England where she dresses up as if she were a character in one of the novels. Both of these protagonists are obsessed with Andrew Davies' 1995 version of *Pride and Prejudice*, chiefly because of Colin Firth's portrayal of Mr. Darcy. This iconic version of *Pride and Prejudice* is what put Austen on the map in the 90s and several directors have tried to emulate it, whether by another *Pride and Prejudice* film or an adaptation of another Austen novel. These films show Austen fans what they dream of doing, which is escape into the world of Austen's characters and walk among them.

Jane Austen's novels have become so popular over the last hundred years that people



dedicate their lives to the study of her stories, whether they do so in academia or at home for pleasure. Even those unfamiliar with Jane Austen's work recognize the title *Pride and Prejudice* and the name of Mr. Darcy. While *Pride and Prejudice* is one of Austen's most popular novels, it is not her only one. There seems to be a growing tradition of adapting some of Austen's works, while pushing others to the side. The question is why does this continue to happen and why does it happen at all.

Jane Austen wrote six novels in her lifetime, though two of them, *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey*, were only published after her death. *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility*, and *Emma* are currently adapted repeatedly on screen and in print. Her three other novels, *Northanger Abbey*, *Persuasion*, and *Mansfield Park*, however, are not as popular and have been adapted for the screen only a few times. All three have captivating stories about maturing, finding love, and being happy, just like their predecessors, but they have not been given a chance to prove themselves because spectators are expecting another version of Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy, despite the many versions in existence. In this paper I intend to explore why these three novels often become altered when made into film, specifically in the romantic relationship between the hero and the heroine and in the portrayal of the new "emotional" hero in order to resemble *Pride and Prejudice*. To do this I will first analyze each text looking at the heroines, heroes and forms of love used in the narratives as well as their endings. In order to fully appreciate and analyze the films spectators must be familiar with the texts to see how different they are from the more successful model of Austen's fiction, *Pride and Prejudice*. Spectators should begin with *Northanger Abbey* and be aware of the controversy about whether Austen would have wanted her early Gothic satire published. They need to understand how this piece of fiction is a satire on the Gothic novel, which differs drastically from the plot and

characters of *Pride and Prejudice*. The romantic relationship between the innocent Catherine Morland and the literate Henry Tilney shows young love and how an Austen hero does not need to embody Darcy's seriousness. *Persuasion* and *Pride and Prejudice* contain several similarities in their texts, one specifically is how both Elizabeth and Anne refuse two marriage proposals. *Persuasion* shows how friendship and time can make the heart grow fonder. The specific sections from Captain Wentworth's point of view foreshadow filmmakers' attention to the male character's perspective. *Mansfield Park* differs the most from *Pride and Prejudice*, and yet directors continually make Fanny Price an outspoken heroine so that she resembles Elizabeth Bennet. Readers who are familiar with the text will recall how Mary Crawford embodies characteristics of the stereotypical Austen heroines such as Elizabeth Bennet or Emma Woodhouse. A close reading of the beginning of the novel reminds readers of the types of marriages that occur at this time and how unromantic they are. The lack of romance between Fanny and Edmund does not look promising for the central couple, forcing filmmakers to make some changes. After a thorough discussion of these elements in the novels, I will discuss what is considered an accurate novel-to-screen adaptation and how modern society plays a big part in the way the novel gets changed. Then I will look at the iconic portrayal of Colin Firth's Mr. Darcy and compare how filmmakers try to give his attributes to other Austen heroes by creating additional scenes of manly emotion as well as professions of love.