The Making of Jane Austen

Devoney Looser

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Stage to Screen *Pride and Prejudice*

Hollywood's Austen and Its Unrealized Screenplays

Helen Jerome's Broadway hit dramatization of *Pride and Prejudice* (1935) was optioned for film for a staggering $50,000.[1] Over the next several years, Metro Goldwyn Meyer worked to create its own Hollywood version of Austen via Jerome. The film that emerged would bear only a passing resemblance to either. Still, the film advertised itself as "based on Helen Jerome's dramatization of the Jane Austen novel. Screen play by Aldous Huxley and Jane Murfin." It proclaimed that it would "be one of the most famous pictures ever filmed!" as we saw earlier. At Radio City Music Hall in New York City in August 1940, crowds lined up around the block to see *Pride and Prejudice* (1940), giving the film its greatest weekly attendance numbers that month.[2] The program featured the grand organ, the symphony orchestra, a Technicolor Walt Disney cartoon, and a musical stage revue with dancers, a life-sized automobile, and a towering lighthouse, followed by the screening of the film.[3] If Jerome's Broadway play left any lingering doubts about Austen's marketability, *Pride and Prejudice* at Radio City Music Hall chased them away. Jane Austen had experienced another encore as a hot property in a new medium.

Once again, the leap came after a lull. Austen's fiction was a late arrival to radio and film adaptation, just as it had been to book illustration and dramatization. Despite their popularity in print, Austen's novels were overlooked by filmmakers during the silent movie era, perhaps because her stories were "too static in terms of location, too reliant on conversations and lacking in grand narratives, like those of Shakespeare and Dickens," as one recent critic puts it.[4] Shakespeare's work was adapted in a feature-length talkie as early as 1929 (*Taming of the Shrew*, dir. Sam Taylor) and in a brief early film advertising a theatrical production of *King John* (1899).[5] The fiction of

Figure 7.1. *Pride and Prejudice,* publicity poster, Metro Goldwyn Mayer, 1940, loose clipping.

Dickens was, for a time, everywhere on film, silent and then talkie. Brontë's *Jane Eyre* was adapted for silent film in 1913, 1915, and 1921, with its first sound version in 1934.[6] Jane Austen's fiction moved from big-time stage to big-time film property in just a handful of remarkable, transformational years.

Even that road was not smooth. MGM's *Pride and Prejudice* went through a considerable number of versions and would-be screenwriters before being green-lighted for production. These draft scripts and their proposed

changes to Austen's original (and Jerome's play) offer us a chance to look not just at failures or false starts—although there were certainly those—but to investigate how leading screenwriters thought an Austen-inspired dramatic success ought to be rewritten to appeal to film audiences. These once-imagined but never-made film versions demonstrate the dangers of our arguing that Austen was being repurposed for some kind of Hollywood-initiated ideological plot.[7] For instance, recent critics have suggested the film was intended as loosely veiled war propaganda, setting out to make Britain appealing to an America hesitant to join forces with it against Germany. Surviving scripts show no such consistent political effort. Other critics describe *Pride and Prejudice* (1940) as an Austenization of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (1936) and the 1939 film based on the novel. A few even mistakenly suggest that *Pride and Prejudice* recycled *Gone with the Wind*'s Southern belle costumes to be economical.[8] Such arguments aren't supported by the surviving scripts either. (*Little Women*, as we'll see, is *Pride and Prejudice*'s more likely film progenitor.)

What a close examination of surviving drafts of the script shows is that there was never one Austen-inspired "message" being packaged by a Hollywood cabal of political conspirers, commercial opportunists, or hired hands. If one of these groups must be identified as the most influential among them, it would seem to be the commercial interests. Hollywood producers, as Harriet Margolis puts it, "think less in terms of ideology and aesthetics than of financial success," as much as those things can be separated.[9] But Hollywood also wanted to push its family friendliness, as well as its profits, in the wake of criticisms that its products appealed too often to the baser human instincts. Examining the dizzying number of MGM-commissioned scripts for *Pride and Prejudice* suggests that producers may have been guiding writers to "freshen up" Austen, to make the novel and Jerome's script more appealing to viewers of all tastes and ages—and both genders. Hollywood's top screenwriters continued to experiment with the path that Jerome had started audiences down: expanding the role and screen centrality of Mr. Darcy.

Many writers tried to infuse elements into their scripts to make Austen's story speak to present cinematic trends. Unfortunately, they often displayed little knowledge of history in the process. Turning to film genres and conventions of their own day, they incorporated stereotypes they thought audiences held about the nineteenth-century past (Bonnets! Horses! Sheep!). They mixed in elements of screwball comedies and Hollywood Westerns. They masculinized plot points to appeal more directly to boys and men. Most re-

tained Jerome's new visual and dramatic emphasis on the handsome, brooding Darcy, instead of presenting the story from the perspective of Elizabeth. They invented entirely new scenes to showcase his flawed but redeemable manliness. Some still flirted with the baser instincts. Yet who or what was responsible for the attempt to bring *Pride and Prejudice* to the screen remains subject to debate.

One improbable version of the story says that it was Harpo Marx. It's a stage-to-film fairy tale that's been repeated far and wide in recent Austen film criticism.[10] The story originated with film critic Kenneth Turan, who first wrote about it in 1989. Harpo Marx saw Helen Jerome's play in previews in Philadelphia in October 1935, Turan reports. Marx thought that Norma Shearer, the actress-wife of MGM cofounder and producer Irving Thalberg, would make a great Elizabeth Bennet. Marx reportedly sent the following telegram to Thalberg: "Just saw Pride and Prejudice. Stop. Swell show. Stop. Would be wonderful for Norma. Stop" (Turan 140). The interpretive leap made next is that, thanks to Marx's telegram suggestion, Thalberg had a lightbulb go on. It led him to snap up the play for Hollywood and for his wife. (Thalberg would, in fact, become the first Hollywood producer associated with the *Pride and Prejudice* film and Shearer the first actor entertained for the role of Elizabeth.) In a recent e-mail communication, Turan writes that he believes he never saw the telegram in question but rather saw it mentioned in another archival source, which remains presently unidentified.[11] But even if this telegram—or the source that quotes it—surfaces in the future, we should question the interpretive leap.

Jerome's *Pride and Prejudice* seems to have been headed to the stage for at least a year prior to its Broadway debut in 1935—a year prior to Harpo's telegram. The play was first optioned by producer Arthur Hopkins, who wanted Katharine Hepburn for his Elizabeth Bennet.[12] When Hopkins failed to lure Hepburn to Austen or back to the stage, Hopkins dropped the play. It was then picked up by producer Max Gordon, with "the backing of certain motion picture interests, which served reasonably to strengthen his normally gambling instincts," as we've seen.[13] It was Gordon who is said to have sent to England for his stage stars, Colin Keith-Johnston and Adrianne Allen. This much was reported at the time in reliable yearbooks of drama, as well as in the *Washington Post*.[14] Producer Gordon's stage efforts were supported by motion picture interests from the first, long before Marx's telegram in October 1935. Why, then, would Marx contact a Hollywood producer to whom he'd been under contract when the *Pride and Prejudice* play was in previews?

Perhaps it's because Marx, a close friend of Broadway producer Gordon, already knew of Hollywood's plans for *Pride and Prejudice*'s play-to-film transition. If so, then Marx may have simply been ratifying previously discussed casting ideas. (Thalberg and Marx were tight; Thalberg had just produced the Marx brothers' nationwide hit, *A Night at the Opera* [1935].) Or if Thalberg wasn't already on board with producing the *Pride and Prejudice* film, or was wavering about it as an MGM project, then perhaps Marx was working a stage-to-film angle on Max Gordon's behalf, to lock in producer Thalberg's involvement. Taken together, these connections make it highly unlikely that the first film version of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* originated with a suggestion in Harpo Marx's telegram. It's too bad, because it makes for a spectacular origin story.

A less fabulous version would begin by noting that MGM's interest in *Pride and Prejudice* dates back to 1933. MGM's files show that it had been trolling Austen for material for a couple of years before Jerome's play appeared. (Jerome herself is not mentioned in those first memos.) Initially, there was skepticism about an Austen film. As MGM's Edward Hogan wrote in his synopsis report early in 1933, "Since when have novels and comedies of manners been screen stuff? There has been talk, with some reason but to no purpose, of WHUTHERING [*sic*] HEIGHTS and JANE EYRE, roughly in this same period; they are dramatic and PRIDE AND PREJUDICE isn't."[15] "Roughly," indeed. Helen Jerome's play also obviously proved Hogan wrong. But several factors suggest that Hollywood had expressed some interest in *Pride and Prejudice* even before Jerome's play had proved a hit. Hopkins, who we saw above was the play's first would-be producer, had a track record of flipping scripts from stage to screen. His involvement itself might be said to signal the belief that a film would emerge from the play. In discussing Hopkins's role in another stage-to-screen deal, one scholar concludes, "A lot of flop plays were purchased by the movies and fell into the plus column when MGM purchased the rights."[16] Hopkins understood and capitalized on stage-screen commerce.

There are further details that add credibility to the idea that Jerome's *Pride and Prejudice* was intended all along to move from stage to film. In March 1934—a year and a half before the play debuted and before Harpo Marx's alleged telegram—the president of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America announced publicly that *Pride and Prejudice* would be an upcoming cinematic release. The Austen title was listed in a spate of literary classics said to be in the process of adaptation to film that would

be suitable for children and would be "pictures of the better kind."[17] The intention was to "raise standards of the industry," in the face of criticism of its immorality. The article doesn't name which studio was involved in moving forward with *Pride and Prejudice*, but MGM, of course, seems a likelihood. The motion picture industry was eager to publicize the release of more culturally weighty and family-oriented fare to shore up its credibility with critics. That Hollywood chose Jerome's version of *Pride and Prejudice* as its putative Austen text is amusing, because family friendliness is hardly the steamy play's calling card. But Hollywood's push to present screen offerings suitable for the young does explain a great deal about what would (and would not) happen to Jerome's play and Austen's novel during its dizzying five-year journey to the screen.

Some of the most skilled screenwriters in Hollywood took a stab at *Pride and Prejudice*. Today's critics find many things to deride in the 1940 film.[18] It is no longer a favorite with most Janeites, whether because of its erroneous Victorian costumes, its flibbertigibbet Elizabeth, or its making of Lady Catherine de Bourgh into a fairy godmother who's only out to test Elizabeth's love for Darcy. To comply with the Motion Picture Production Code, MGM also changed Mr. Collins from a clergyman to a librarian, so that there would be no whiff of criticism of men of the cloth.[19] But once you learn about the versions of the film that *weren't* made, the fact that the final cut of *Pride and Prejudice* hews as close to Austen's original as it does may seem a minor miracle.

From the outset, MGM's focus was on the would-be scripts and the would-be stars. Many possible actors were considered for *Pride and Prejudice*'s leads, and many scriptwriters were cycled in and out of the project. That was business as usual for this period. It was common Hollywood practice to assign a script to a number of different writers in succession, "in hopes each would improve and refine the earlier work."[20] Screenplays were regularly passed from one set of hands to the next until something stuck, just as possible stars came and went from a project, based on the studio's needs, desires, and whims.

A great number of stars were considered for Darcy and Elizabeth. The earliest MGM plan was to use as its Darcy a pre–*Gone with the Wind* (1939) Clark Gable, then in his midthirties. He was to star opposite Norma Shearer as Elizabeth, with her husband Thalberg producing. But when Thalberg tragically died of pneumonia in 1936, at only thirty-seven years old, the widowed Shearer's involvement in the film ended, too. The project stalled. Rumors of many possible new leads and directors followed, with an especially impressive list of possible Darcys, including American actor Melvyn Douglas

(who was, like Gable, in his late thirties), Robert Donat (a British actor in his early thirties, who would become an Oscar winner in *Goodbye Mr. Chips* [1939]), and American actor Robert Taylor, then in his late twenties. MGM ended up casting Taylor in its film *Waterloo Bridge* (1940) instead of *Pride and Prejudice*. All of these possible Darcys were swoon-worthy and box-office preapproved.

MGM wound up going with yet another actor who fit that bill: Englishman Laurence Olivier, then in his early thirties. He was pulled into the project on the heels of starring in MGM's *Wuthering Heights* (1939) and *Rebecca* (1940). Olivier hoped he was going to star in *Pride and Prejudice* opposite his then-lover, Vivien Leigh, and that they would be directed by George Cukor, who'd had success with *Little Women*. Instead, worries swirled about Olivier and Leigh's extramarital affair. The studio was apparently concerned that if audiences had knowledge of the stars' offscreen liaison, it would lead to the rejection of the film. So Olivier found himself starring opposite Greer Garson, then thirty-five. The new producer on the film was MGM's powerful, handsomely paid, proven Academy Award–winner Hunt Stromberg. Reliable MGM director Robert Z. "Pop" Leonard was brought in to see the film to the finish line.

While all of this jockeying and negotiating was going on over actors and directors, at least eight writers were paraded in and out of the film. The screenplay went through a staggering number of versions that, for a time, seemed to get successively more absurd with each new set of hands. "Everything about the making of *Pride and Prejudice*" meant "mounting a spectacle," as one critic argues.[21] The problem is that it took MGM quite a while to agree on what the spectacle should be. The earliest screenwriters involved were husband-wife team Sarah Mason (1896–1980) and Victor Heerman (1893–1977), who had a few years earlier won the Academy Award for their adaptation of Louisa May Alcott's novel *Little Women* (1933). MGM's notes on Jerome's play show that this was exactly how Hollywood was thinking about using Austen. It imagined a *Pride and Prejudice* film as "a sort of 'Little Women' of early nineteenth century English middle-class life."[22] Mason, who had been involved in the film industry's transition from silent film to talkies, had been its first "continuity girl," or script supervisor. Heerman had experience in comedy, having directed the Marx Brothers' *Animal Crackers* (1930). (Those Jane Austen connections to the Marx Brothers do keep popping up!)

The Mason-Heerman script offered several innovations. One was an early scene in which Elizabeth and Jane meet the newly arrived Bingley and Darcy in the Bennets' stables. There, the four have a rousing conversation about

dogs, especially Elizabeth's favorite dog, Kate. Darcy obnoxiously opines on Kate's inferior breeding, which he says means that her puppies will never amount to much. This is an idea from which Elizabeth naturally recoils, saying that her beloved dog's finer qualities are her work in the field, disposition, intelligence, and affection. "That may be so," says Darcy, "but I prefer a superior strain."[23] Despite the popularity of 1930s screen dogs, that inelegant bit did not make it to the screen. Perhaps it asked viewers to imagine Elizabeth as breeding material a bit too directly, making Darcy a bit too distasteful. Another Mason-Heerman version has Lizzy singing "Oh Dear, What Can the Matter Be" to Darcy, followed by the two of them singing it together, as if the film were veering toward a musical.[24] Finally, there is direct evidence that Mason and Heerman drew script ideas from Hugh Thomson's Austen illustrations, notably Bingley's chaise.[25] The film's title sequence shows that Thomson's influence endured from the play's stage designs to the final Hollywood screen cut. (One recent critic has compared the MGM *Pride and Prejudice* to Thomson's illustrations; it's a connection we can now identify as intentional.[26])

Hollywood wanted more hands on the *Pride and Prejudice* deck. In 1936, Tess Slesinger (1905–45) was briefly involved in revising Mason and Heerman's screenplay. Slesinger, known for publishing groundbreaking semi-autobiographical fiction about the experience of having an abortion, would also be involved in cowriting the screenplay of Pearl S. Buck's novel *The Good Earth* (1937). (That film was produced by Irving Thalberg, recipient of Harpo Marx's telegram.) Slesinger's innovation on *Pride and Prejudice* was to create a scene in which Elizabeth and Darcy first met in the "Misses Anderson's Book Shoppe," with its maxim posted on the wall: "Silence is golden."[27] Darcy and Elizabeth are shown standing back to back, browsing the shelves, as the female proprietors bring out their wares to each customer. Darcy asks for Macaulay's *Essays* (1843) and is brought instead essays by Charles Lamb and Thomas De Quincey. He is informed by the first Miss Anderson that these books are almost the same thing. Darcy expresses his surprise that the Misses Anderson do not keep the very latest books in their store, although today we might express our own surprise that the screenwriter doesn't know the difference among works of the 1810s, the 1820s, and the 1840s.

This sort of historical sloppiness, or perhaps ignorance, was a problem that MGM would continue to have in its *Pride and Prejudice* scripts and production department. It turns out star Greer Garson herself complained

about it on set. She once gently let the set decorator know that he'd made a historical error. He explained to her that for the set's bookshop illustrations, he'd chosen images by George Cruikshank, the illustrator of Dickens. She asked him, "Don't you think [Thomas] Rowlandson would be better for the period?"[28] In Slesinger's historically fast-and-loose script, when Elizabeth tries to guide Darcy to find his desired book in the Misses Anderson's Book Shoppe, he expresses surprise at her knowledge of literature. Young ladies, he arrogantly quips, generally prefer bonnets to books. The conceit of a bookshop made it to the final version of the film, but the action would ultimately revolve around Mary Bennet, not Darcy.

Although it is unclear why—perhaps it's related to Thalberg's death—Mason and Heerman ultimately exited the project. Playwright Zoe Akins was the next writer on board, starting in 1937. She'd recently adapted Edith Wharton's *The Old Maid* (1935) for the stage, winning the Pulitzer Prize. Akins was also fresh from having cowritten the screenplay adaptation of Alexandre Dumas's *Camille*, directed by Cukor and produced by Thalberg. This would seem a promising talent and a good MGM fit. But Akins's changes to *Pride and Prejudice* are among the most bizarre of the lot. One Akins version opens with an unidentified girl arriving to a dissolute tavern. There she finds a drunken Wickham, and she begs him to make good on his promise to marry her, lest her brother kill him in a duel.[29] When she gives him a gift of a lock of her hair, Wickham callously blows on his hand to scatter it. Beginning the story by immediately revealing its villain was a new tack, never before seen in Jane Austen adaptation. One imagines that the cast-off mistress was also not what Hollywood had in mind in cleaning up its act for children and the classics.

One version of Akins's draft screenplay ends with a mirror image of the Wickham tavern scene. Where the first scene was male centered and dissolute, the final scene is virginal and female centered. Both scenes are set at night, but the last features two women in bed together, talking about the men they love. In it, Jane and Elizabeth contemplate their respective future happiness in upcoming marriages to Bingley and Darcy. The final image, in contrast to Wickham's hurtfully blowing away a lock of his mistress's hair, is of the two women blowing out their candles and laughing. This proposed ending is the version most in keeping with the spirit of Hinkley's *Dear Jane* (1919; 1932). Perhaps unsurprisingly, it was soon scrapped. Two women in bed together may have sent the wrong kind of moral message, historically accurate as it was and as innocent as it may have been meant to seem. In

another version of the script, Akins depicts the two Bennet sisters sitting together alone on a hill, with Elizabeth reciting "Rule, Britannia" and Jane inexplicably sketching "the Castle of Edinbourgh [*sic*]."[30] It's hard to know what is more preposterous here—the caricatured exhibition of patriotism or the apparent ignorance of British geography.

Akins also toyed with adding elements of the melodrama and the Western. Another version of her script includes a scene in which the newly arrived Bingley orders a group of gypsies at Netherfield to get off of his land. The gypsies, however, are good guys, unbeknownst to Bingley. The head gypsy, Tony, pleads with his friend Elizabeth Bennet to provide a character reference for him. Elizabeth then pleads with Bingley, pressing him to let the gypsies stay. But the snobbish Darcy insists that Bingley must evict these beloved neighborhood gypsies. In another plot twist, Akins's Jane Bennet turns out not to have caught cold but to have come down with smallpox. It leads to the delicious line, delivered by Miss Bingley to Elizabeth, "Do you not realize this disease destroys the beauty of the complexion if one is so unfortunate as to live at all?"[31] Adding to the movie's Western flavor, Wickham teaches Lydia how to shoot a gun, a scene that is laughable but which may have been the genesis of the final film's famous Darcy-Elizabeth archery scene. In other innovations, Kitty and Lydia sing a dirty ditty at the pianoforte, and Mr. Collins proposes to Elizabeth while they are on horseback. Akins was, by the end of her many drafts, seemingly throwing things at the proverbial wall to see what might stick.

Akins also wrote a draft trying to make the film more directly appealing to men. She invented a series of scenes in which Darcy and Colonel Fitzwilliam transport the depressed and lovesick Bingley away from Jane and Netherfield to London for some male-bonding time. The three lads would experience together a male fantasy night of worldly adventures. First, they go to a masquerade ball, where they dress up as cavaliers of Charles II. There, Bingley flirts with a pearl-wearing sultana temptress. Then the men head to a cock fight to watch the wagering crowds. At the cock pit, they discover they're in for a real treat. There will be a fight featuring the celebrity monkey, Jacko Macacco, who takes on the best dogs in England. This leads Colonel Fitzwilliam to deliver such zingers as, "Wait and see. I bet on Jacko!" The colonel bets ten pounds on the monkey, but Darcy bets twenty on the dogs.[32] Perhaps meant to shore up the male characters' manliness, the scenes also give the heroes space to exhibit their good looks and attractiveness to women.

After Akins exited the project, there was a period of stasis, until screenwriter Elaine Ryan provided an outline of action in 1939. (She was involved in screenplay projects that featured Judy Garland and, later, Fred Astaire.) Ryan keeps much more strictly to the original novel, despite including a prodigious number of exclamation points. Finally, in summer 1939, screenwriter Jane Murfin was brought on board. Murfin was both a proven playwright and a proven screenwriter. She'd once been nominated for an Academy Award, but the film project she had just been involved in cowriting, George Cukor's *The Women* (1939), is likely what led MGM to tap her for the Austen adaptation. *The Women*, adapted from the Clare Boothe Luce play, is a female-centered film. There are no men in it, although the women talk about men. It might seem that, fresh from this screenwriting experience, Murfin would have tried to bring Elizabeth Bennet back to prominence in the Austen film. For some reason, Murfin did not work the material in that direction. She did, however, work to give Elizabeth and Darcy more dramatic episodes together.

Murfin had a number of inauspicious beginnings with her script, too, including a pathetic scene with Mr. Bennet on horseback feeding gruel to sheep, making him out to be a poor farmer. Another unforgettable version of Murfin's script has Elizabeth dressed up in a milkmaid's costume. She sits outdoors with her friend, the Scotch shepherd, old Jamie, feeding baby lambs and quoting Robert Burns. They are startled when the hunt rides past them.[33] It turns out to be Darcy and Bingley on horseback. The scene would seem to presage the one that opens the 1995 BBC *Pride and Prejudice*, with Elizabeth watching Darcy and Bingley riding from afar. But Murfin dialed it up by having Elizabeth actually encounter the two men on horseback. In one Murfin version, the encounter with Elizabeth throws Darcy off of his horse, and he must crawl out of a mud hole. In another version, it's Darcy's horse that splashes Elizabeth with mud. Because she's dressed up as a milkmaid, he treats her roughly and as a servant, tossing a shilling at her before he rides off.[34] If this was supposed to be comedy, it was an unpromising scenario. We seem to be back in Zoe Akins's Austen-Western territory.

By mid-1939, however, scenes begin emerge in the drafts that would make it to the final film. In October, Aldous Huxley was brought in to work with Murfin on the dialogue, at the rate of $1,500 a week.[35] That handsome sum is the equivalent about $25,000 in today's dollars. It was the satirical novelist's first foray into Hollywood. He was irreverent about the remunerative work in his private letters, telling his brother Julian that "Jane Austen's masterpiece" was referred to by MGM as "Pee and Pee." Some may be surprised that Hux-

ley, author of the futuristic, dystopian *Brave New World* (1932), would take on a Hollywood Austen, but there was a Janeite in his family. Huxley's father wrote an introductory essay to a book on Austen, in which he suggests that males who don't understand the power of her fiction have not yet matured as men.[36] Even so, Huxley's reluctance to take on the Austen film job is well documented. He changed his mind about joining the "lunatic industry" in part to use the money he would be paid to help those suffering in war-torn Europe.[37] His involvement improved the script, making the dialogue far more crisp. It also appears to have brought parts of the screenplay closer to the novel than either the previous screenwriters or, in some cases, playwright Jerome had done. For example, the character of Elizabeth returns to some semblance of her original reasonableness—hard to imagine given the flighty character that emerges in the film. Most of Jerome's weeping Elizabeth is removed. Working together, Murfin and Huxley returned many of the novel's original scenes to the script. Huxley and Murfin crafted some new material at this time, too, including the famous archery scene, in which the surprisingly skilled Elizabeth and her would-be teacher Darcy point, shoot, and converse, cheek to cheek.

The final film, like the earlier Jerome play, made Darcy-ogling a recreational activity for both Elizabeth and the audience from the very first. The film opens with Mrs. Bennet, Elizabeth, Jane, Aunt Phillips, and the Lucases gossiping in a dress shop. The most important shopping they do is out of the window, as they gaze on Darcy and Bingley's carriages in the street. They are, as Deborah Cartmell notes, set up as "consumers," first of clothes and then of men (*Adaptations*, 50). In a close-up from the vantage point of the women looking out the shop window, Darcy wordlessly rises in the carriage, walking stick in his hand, ostentatiously tipping his hat at Mr. and Miss Bingley. Then Darcy alone is seen making a graceful step out of the carriage. The camera cuts away to the ogling women. All thought of purchasing dresses is pushed aside in consideration of the novelty of the fashionable male commodities. Elizabeth's presence in this Darcy-gawking scene, and her expressed interest in learning more about the extent of his wealth, shifts the terms on which sparks first fly between them. Elizabeth may make leveling comments about class in the film, but she's repeatedly shown as a full and curious participant in scenes that involve sizing up Mr. Darcy's assets.

The Murfin-Huxley script did make Elizabeth less sentimental and perfectly clever. There are several scenes in which Elizabeth and Darcy quote Byron together. Darcy himself plays a Byronic hero. One scene direction

indicates that "Darcy is the center of all feminine attention."[38] The archery scene indicates that the actor playing Darcy should turn toward Elizabeth with a "surprisingly charming, almost boyish smile" (62). We can see most clearly what Murfin and Huxley were trying to get at with his character in a scene that was deleted from the final film. One script version reveals that Darcy was originally to have had a *second* archery scene that was either never shot or didn't make the cut. Part of that scene shows Darcy alone, at night, reliving his afternoon archery "lesson" with Elizabeth. He repeats their dialogue as a soliloquy, pining for her as he moves his lips. He then recites Byron's "She walks in beauty, like the night," in the dark. At the same time, he ineffectually shoots arrows, including one directly up into the night sky (79–80). If it had been included, this scene would have given Olivier even more space to demonstrate, alone with his audience, the depth of his passion for Elizabeth. The shades of Shakespeare here must certainly be intentional. The fact that Darcy, and not Elizabeth, gets a stand-alone scene to reminisce speaks volumes about how *Pride and Prejudice* was being more deeply reimagined in the 1930s as a story centered on Austen's hero, not her heroine.

The deleted scene would also have taken audiences even further inside Darcy's head and in a far darker direction. The plan was to make him turn Brontë-brutal. After his soliloquy, he was to bump into Miss Bingley on his night walk, still holding an arrow in his hand. The two of them were to have had a conversation, conspiring about how to break up Jane and Bingley, for Bingley's own good. This scene would have made directly visible one of Darcy's ugliest acts, described secondhand in the original novel. Darcy's nefarious plotting against his friend's happiness would have been made not only disturbingly visible but directly violent. Darcy was to have said to Caroline Bingley, "We're like a pair of conspirators, plotting a murder—the murder of a man's feelings. Well, seeing it has to be done, let's do it quickly." Then Darcy was to have raised the pointed half of the arrow in his hand and "driven it savagely into the bark on the tree under which they have been sitting, as though he were stabbing a man." He was then to have turned without a word and walked off (Murfin and Huxley 82). This episode is a darkly sexualized one, echoing a figurative rape as much as it does a figurative murder.

This scene's being omitted must have been equal parts disappointment and relief to Olivier. It echoes both Romeo and Heathcliff, at which he excelled as an actor, but it's decidedly un-Austen-like and makes Darcy even less admirable a figure. The scene was likely cut from the film for budgetary reasons, not because anyone had second thoughts about adding Shake-

spearean tragedy and Brontëan shock to Austen's iconic hero. As the script indicates, "NOTE: do not schedule the above scene and do not include it in the budget. We will wait until the picture is finished to determine whether or not the scene is needed" (Murfin and Huxley 82). There's no evidence the scene was ever shot. But this new knowledge of the full script makes evident the kind of sexy, brooding, boiling-just-below-the-surface Darcy that Huxley and Murfin were going for, as they built up those few retained aspects from Jerome's play. The film was scripted as Darcy's, not Elizabeth's, *Pride and Prejudice*.

Despite the film's moderate success, Olivier later disparaged it. He said, "I was very unhappy with the picture. It was difficult to make Darcy into anything more than an unattractive-looking prig, and darling Greer seemed all wrong as Elizabeth. To me, Jane Austen had made Elizabeth different from her affected, idiotic sisters; she was the only down-to-earth one. But Greer played her as the most affected and silly of the lot."[39] He's not wrong about Garson's Elizabeth, but he is wrong about his Darcy. The play's groundwork for an expressive, passionate Darcy, which Olivier echoed and amplified in the film, has been recycled in almost every script and acting performance after it. Garson's affected, silly Elizabeth has not.[40]

Jerome's play would prove even more lasting. A later stage version used her script as a springboard but did not prove a success: *First Impressions: A Musical Comedy* (1959). It was described as "adapted by Abe Burrows, from Helen Jerome's dramatization of Jane Austen's novel." Burrows (1910–85), who made his mark with *Guys and Dolls* (1950), claims critics panned his Austen-admiring, satirical stage musical because they thought, "Why would a guy who writes the hilarious stuff Burrows writes take on this tired costume drama?"[41] Some of Burrows's Austen is certainly hilarious, but his script takes odd turns.

The script reveals Burrows's Elizabeth (Polly Bergen) to be far more spirited and rebellious than Jerome's was, with lines such as, "Well, I don't like to do the things that are the things to do."[42] But Burrows's Darcy (Farley Granger) isn't written as Jerome-level passionate. He communicates his longing for Elizabeth primarily through lyrics and dance. His song "A Gentleman Never Falls Wildly in Love" is a horror. Mr. Collins has a brilliantly funny song, "Fragrant Flower," but it wilts under Elizabeth's repetitive chorus of "Nos."

One doesn't have to listen too far beyond Mrs. Bennet's whiny, half-spoken-word "Five Daughters," about her unsuccessfully having prayed to

give birth to sons, to see why the musical wasn't a smash hit. In the end, Elizabeth too easily capitulates to the "things that are the things to do," as Mrs. Bennet joins forces with her daughter to scheme and snag Darcy as a husband. The musical even gives Mrs. Bennet its last spoken line (Burrows, *First Impressions* 90). Mrs. Bennet (played by Hermione Gingold) wasn't destined to become the precursor female version of Tevye from *Fiddler on the Roof* (1964).

Despite the failure of *First Impressions*, Jerome's famous play was still having an indirect impact as late as forty years after it first opened on Broadway. In 1974, Universal TV went some distance toward a remake of the 1940 film, just a dozen years after MGM's widely publicized 1962 rerelease. (That rerelease is further discussed in chapter 11.) Although the 1974 version of *Pride and Prejudice* was never made, its strange screenplay/teleplay survives in the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Science's Margaret Herrick Library's unrealized scripts collection. It was cowritten by Jerome Lawrence (1915–2004) and Robert Edwin Lee (1918–94), and the project's producer was to have been Hunt Stromberg Jr. Stromberg was primarily a TV series guy, having worked on popular shows such as *The Beverly Hillbillies*, *Hogan's Heroes*, and *Gilligan's Island*. He is best known for having discovered Vampira and for producing the cult classic TV film *Frankenstein: The True Story* (1973). His follow-up to that movie was slated to include one Dickens and one Austen adaptation. The Austen project was on his plate for very specific reasons. It was clearly a son's nostalgia trip. Hunt Stromberg Jr.'s namesake father, Hunt Stromberg, had been the famed producer of the MGM *Pride and Prejudice* (1940).

Lawrence and Lee weren't the first screenwriters associated with Stromberg Jr.'s project. It was to have been written by novelist Christopher Isherwood (1904–86). Stromberg Jr.'s *Frankenstein: The True Story*'s teleplay had been cowritten by Isherwood and his partner Don Bachardy (1934–). That show was broadcast in two 90-minute episodes. Stromberg Jr. wanted to move forward with his Dickens and his Austen adaptations on the same model. He approached Isherwood about writing the script for *Pride and Prejudice*, Isherwood's diaries reveal, as early as November 1971.[43] But the experience on *Frankenstein* had so soured Isherwood on Stromberg Jr. that he refused. Isherwood writes, "Hunt Stromberg called from Texas, wanting us to do another script for him: *A Tale of Two Cities*. It is really unthinkable that we could work with him again. We can't trust him" (439).

Stromberg went with another pair of writers, Lawrence and Lee. They were highly experienced and poised for screen success. The two men would write thirty-nine plays together, the most famous being *Inherit the Wind* and *Auntie Mame*, the latter brought to film as *Mame*. Their *Pride and Prejudice* screenplay gives us a sense of what a popular Austen film adaptation of the 1970s—had one been made—might have looked like. The Lawrence and Lee *Pride and Prejudice* kept some elements and changed others from the MGM 1940 film. It calls its Elizabeth Bennet "Liz" through much of the script. It retains the carriage race between the Lucas and the Bennet women, but it moves it to the opening scene. Liz holds the reins of the horse, as her mother goads her to drive the carriage faster and faster. Then we learn that she's racing against Charlotte Lucas in the next carriage. The two women compete to see who can reach home first to send their fathers to meet the new eligible-bachelor neighbor, Mr. Bingley.[44] Liz and Charlotte's racing the family carriages was the film's attempt at a feminist back-formation, but it was used in a scene with equally sexist elements. The carriages next crash into each other. When no one is discovered hurt, the farce continues. Now carriage-less, the two mothers engage in a footrace across the fields, jumping stiles, to their homes and husbands.[45]

Far more ought to be said about this script, which involves a red-hot, love-hate Elizabeth and Darcy. In one scene, Darcy forces himself into Elizabeth's carriage. In another, he broodingly skips rocks in a stream. The film was to have featured a masquerade ball. Its Lady Catherine de Bourgh was to travel everywhere in a sedan chair. In the concluding scene, Lady Catherine was to dance with Sir William Lucas in what's described in the script as an eighteenth-century precursor to the twist. The two- to three-hour TV film was to have ended with Mr. and Mrs. Bennet happily dancing together, very much in love. Mr. Bennet gets the last word, declaring his garrulous wife's unusual silence on the dance floor to be "heaven."

A surviving casting memo makes clear the collective vision for the movie. Lawrence and Lee wrote to Stromberg with their ideas as to who would play what role. They wanted Peter Sellers as Mr. Collins and John Gielgud as Sir William Lucas. They hoped for Margaret Leighton as Lady Catherine de Bourgh. Their ideal Darcy was Peter O'Toole. For Elizabeth Bennet, the screenwriters had no one in particular in mind, which is itself telling. They inserted a question mark for her. Their suggested alternatives for the above actors, if these first choices were not available, included James Mason for

Mr. Bennet, Ralph Richardson or Michael Redgrave as Sir William Lucas, and Peter Cook as Rev. Collins. What is most remarkable however, are the actors they sought for their Mr. and Mrs. Bennet: Laurence Olivier and Greer Garson.[46]

To imagine Darcy and Elizabeth transformed into Mr. and Mrs. Bennet might seem anathema to some. But for those generations who had grown up seeing Austen on stage and screen—who might remember these plays and films from their youth—what could be better than a movie that ended with an aging Mrs. Bennet, played by a one-time Elizabeth Bennet, giddily dancing with her once-Darcy-husband? The Bennets' marriage never looked better. It was turned into the story's most enduring happy ending. This unrealized 1974 *Pride and Prejudice* would have been a movie pitched to the conservative middle-aged nostalgic, at a time of cultural revolution, hence its few requisite nods to the contemporary women's movement.

From the time of its origin at the end of the nineteenth century, *Pride and Prejudice* on stage had gone from being a text that revolved around a strong heroine's admirable rebellion, to one in which she steps aside to let the hero exhibit his smoldering passion, to a story about her devolving into a Mrs. Bennet herself, as either she or her once-hot (still hot?) husband gets the last word. (It involved laughs at her expense in either case.) By 1974, Elizabeth Bennet could even become a witty question mark, an everywoman "Liz." Thanks to Helen Jerome's hit Broadway play, and MGM's enduring film, *Pride and Prejudice* would become less and less a story centered on the self-actualization of a "not for sale" heroine, gradually falling in love with her intellectual equal. Instead, Jerome's innovations accelerated opportunities to identify with, or just gaze longingly at, Austen's once less-conspicuous hero. In that sense, Jerome's *Pride and Prejudice* is still with us, serving to suppress other possibilities for reimagining Austen's multilayered masterpiece of a novel.