The novel of manners, following and adapting the conventions of the comedy of manners of the Restoration and the eighteenth century, reaches its apex in Jane Austen's works. A. C. Bradley's comment in the early twentieth century is quite well-known in historicizing Austen and her novels:

She belongs . . . to the period commonly entitled that of the Romantic Revival, or the Revival of Imagination. And yet these titles do not suit her in the least. The Waverley Novels are “romantic” in this special sense, but hers are not. They might even be called anti-romantic. . . . She was, indeed, intensely fond of the country; but scenery plays no great part in her novels, and we find scarcely a trace of the distinctively new modes of feeling towards nature. . . . Essentially, it appears to me, her novels belong to the age of Johnson and Cowper. (339)

Bradley concludes that Jane Austen is a “moralist,” influenced by Samuel Johnson, and a “humorist,” observing the tradition of the comedy of manners. Her novels “produce sometimes matter fit for a comedy, a play in which people’s lives fall into an entanglement of errors, misunderstandings, and cross-purposes” (340). Richard Simpson, a Victorian critic, points out the incongruity of Austen’s genius and style: “Perhaps there is no author in existence in whom so marvelous a power of exhibiting characters in formation and action is combined with so total a want of the poetical imagination” (331). Because of the didactic intention and prevalent irony in Austen’s works, Simpson regards her as an ironist and moralist, whose “pervading critical judgment, which never allows her feelings to run away with her, qualifies her humour, and couples her with such writers as Lamb and Thackeray, rather than with the novelists of the type of Scott” (335). Charlotte Brontë’s harsh criticism of Austen is probably more provocative because it comes from a sister novelist. She complains in a letter (January 24, 1848) to George Henry Lewes,

Why do you like Miss Austen so very much? I am puzzled on that point. What induced you to say that you would have rather written “Pride and Prejudice,” or “Tom Jones,” than any of the “Waverley Novels”? I had not seen “Pride and Prejudice” till I read that sentence of yours, and then I got the book. And what
did I find? An accurate, daguerreotyped portrait of a commonplace face; a carefully-fenced, highly-cultivated garden, with neat borders and delicate flowers; but no glance of a bright, vivid physiognomy, no open country, no fresh air, no blue hill, no bonny beck. I should hardly like to live with her ladies and gentlemen, in their elegant but confined houses. These observations will probably irritate you, but I shall run the risk. (Gaskell 274)

She further compares George Sand (1804-1876) with Jane Austen (1775-1817), praising the former as being “sagacious and profound” while disparaging the latter as being “only shrewd and observant” (Gaskell 274). Brontë’s censure of Austen’s lack of feeling is perhaps severest in the following comment:

She ruffles her reader by nothing vehement, disturbs him by nothing profound. The passions are perfectly unknown to her: she rejects even a speaking acquaintance with that stormy sisterhood. . . . What sees keenly, speaks aptly, moves flexibly, it suits her to study: but what throbs fast and full, though hidden, what the blood rushes through, what is the unseen seat of life and the sentient target of death that Miss Austen ignores. (qtd. in Allen, 117)

All these observations may testify to the common notion that Austen belongs more to the eighteenth century, with its dominant ideas of rationality, restraint, didacticism, and the comic tradition, than to the Romantic period, with its emphasis on sensibility, emotional spontaneity, imagination, and the romantic tradition. Anne Crippen Ruderman’s observation is certainly quite valid in qualifying Austen: “she never portrays love as irrational. . . . [S]he can always account for it” (77). Or as Roger Gard puts it in a plainer way, behind Austen “there’s always Charlotte Brontë with her tactless high Romantic scorn and demands for blood and passion” (100).

If this is the generally accepted idea to the academic readers, what transforms this notion? As Ellen Belton argues, “even the most putatively faithful adaptation involves a reinterpretation of the original, each version is also shaped by the particular concerns of its own time (175); “the value of the prior text is in part generated by and therefore dependent upon the meanings revealed by the adaptation” (177). A study of the history of the adaptation of Pride and Prejudice may thus give us an answer to the

---

1 Ruderman uses Charlotte Lucas’s decision to marry Mr. Collins to show how prudence should play a role in marriage. She argues that “Charlotte’s action is prudent rather than mercenary because she is not led by avarice to forget all other considerations. . . . The friendship between them begins in utility, but they both have reliable virtues. . . . Her marriage is not presented as dishonorable” (76). Apparently romantic love or sexual attraction is not the only or the most important criterion of marriage. In this respect, Austen does not live up to the Romantic sensibilities in her lifetime.
power of cinema in the interpretation of a classic novel. This essay aims to discuss four film adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice* and trace the development of its transformation from a novel of manners into a romantic novel of “love and misunderstanding that sparkles with romance, wit and emotional force” (2005 production notes). The films I will focus on are Robert Z. Leonard’s 1940 adaptation, Cyril Coke’s 1980 BBC adaptation, Simon Langton’s 1995 BBC adaptation, and Joe Wright’s 2005 Hollywood adaptation. By probing into three major proposal scenes in the novel and their cinematic representations in these four films, we may get an insightful and interesting perspective, which is not to be obtained by reading the novel per se.

I. The First Proposal

Let’s examine what happens in the novel first. The first proposal scene in the novel occurs in Volume I, Chapter XIX. Before the proposal scene, Austen has already given a very negative portrayal of Mr. Collins: “his veneration for her [Lady Catherine de Bourgh] as his patroness, mingling with a very good opinion of himself, of his authority as a clergyman, and his rights as a rector, made him altogether a mixture of pride and obsequiousness, self-importance and humility” (PP 48). Therefore, the reader is prepared in advance to foresee the unfavorable result of his proposal to Elizabeth Bennet. Collins, after being informed that Jane Bennet is no longer available, immediately decides to propose to Elizabeth. The proposal scene is on the one hand comical because of Collins’s self-indulgence and overconfidence; on the other hand, the procedure is also quite formal in its observation of the conventions. Collins, “with all his solemn composure,” almost makes Elizabeth burst into laughter even though she is in a very distrestful situation. Austen’s choice of words makes the whole scene ritual-like. First Collins makes his declaration “in form” and “in a very orderly manner.” He tries to treat the whole process as “a regular part of the business.” He first states his “reasons” for marrying, and then he gives voice to his “motive” for choosing Elizabeth, and finally he tries to express “the violence of [his] affection.” Though being declined, he still views the refusal as “consistent with the

---

2 Up to 2006, there have been ten films based on Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*. Aside from a modern version (2003) and an Indian version (2004), only four of them are available on VHS tapes or DVDs. See Appendix 1.

3 One would argue that there are five proposals in the novel. Aside from the three proposal scenes discussed in this essay, two other proposals — Collins’s proposal to Charlotte Lucas and Bingley’s proposal to Jane Bennet at the end — are not described in the novel and acted out in the film (except Bingley-Jane proposal scene in Leonard’s 1940 adaptation). Therefore, these two will not be discussed in my essay, though they will be referred to occasionally.
true delicacy of the female character” and “according to the usual practice of elegant females” (76). The solemn scene soon turns comical because of Collins’s “perseverance in willful self-deception” makes him believe that Elizabeth’s rejection is simply “the affectation and coquetry of an elegant female” (76-77). As Meenakshi Mukherjee notes, this proposal is “a comic rendering of an essentially serious confrontation between two ideologies of marriage and two opposing images of women”: women are created “particularly for the delight and pleasure of man,” as Rousseau argues, and women possess the same rationality and autonomy as men, as Mary Wollstonecraft maintains (3). Thus, in Elizabeth’s reply, she emphasizes herself “as a rational creature” (PP 76). However, what Collins points out about her economic dependence and her slim hope of receiving another proposal is also apparently true at that moment. Later in the novel, in her self-reflection of her decline of Darcy’s first proposal, Elizabeth has to admit that, though in a different context, “A man who has once been refused! How could I ever be foolish enough to expect a renewal of his love? Is there one among the sex, who would not protest against such a weakness as a second proposal to the same woman? There is no indignity so abhorred to their feelings!” (PP 234). Therefore, though the scene is obviously comical, there lurks underneath an ominous reality because Elizabeth has already forgone the chance of keeping Longbourn to her family by marrying Collins, who is to inherit by entail the estate after the death of Mr. Bennet.

In the 1940 adaptation, Robert Z. Leonard adds a prelude to the proposal scene. In a garden party held by Charles Bingley (Bruce Lester) at Netherfield Park, Elizabeth (Greer Garson) is running through the garden, with Collins (Melville Cooper) chasing behind. Fitzwilliam Darcy (Laurence Olivier) appears in time to misdirect Collins about Elizabeth’s whereabouts and rescue her from embarrassment (fig. 1.1).

---

4 In his study of the plot frequencies in the Lady’s Magazine, 1793-1815 (Austen’s writing years), Edward Copeland comes to an interesting conclusion, which may not support the commonly-held opinion about the economic desperation of many of Austen’s heroines. He points out that, in all stories in the magazine, while in the 1790s there is a high percentage of heroines forced to marry by parental pressure and impoverished heroines saved by marriage, such occurrences almost disappear entirely in the 1810s. Thus Collins’s threat may not sound so menacing if compared with what happen in the stories of Lady’s Magazine, which are supposed to reflect some of the social truths.
A comic effect is thus heightened by the addition of this pursuit scene, which may also serve as a humorous and ironical contrast to the persecuted heroines in Gothic fiction. The actual proposal scene in the film takes a much shorter time than is supposed to happen in the novel. Collins first spells out his motives for marrying Elizabeth (or any other woman) in a self-engrossing way without even looking at Elizabeth (fig. 1.2). As John Wiltshire remarks, “The young women he courts have no real existence for him: what matters is how they suit his schemes. . . . Without reflection, Collins attributes to poor young women what Mrs. Bennet attributes to rich young men: desire for what he wants” (101). Collins’s change of proposal target from Jane, to Elizabeth, and to Charlotte Lucas within twenty-four hours undoubtedly exhibits such kind of personality. He then becomes more aggressive when he points out to Elizabeth about her own luck of being chosen (fig. 1.3). Afterwards, he shows the “violence” of his passion by kissing Elizabeth’s hand eagerly (fig. 1.4). After Elizabeth’s refusal, he is still trying to demonstrate his passion by kneeling down and pleading to her (fig. 1.5), instead of assuring himself self-confidently of his success because of his own illusion of Elizabeth’s female modesty as in the novel. The scene
Fig. 1.4 Elizabeth is shocked at the “violence” of Collins’s “affection.”

finally ends with Elizabeth’s running angrily away from the drawing room. The comic effect in the film does not come from the ridiculous itemized motives of Collins’s intention to marry as in the novel. Instead it builds upon the exaggerated stage performance of physical interactions between Collins and Elizabeth. In the novel, we may assume that both of them are sitting or standing apart from each other. However, in this film intimate whispering, fervent kissing, and escaping in a disgusted manner are used to accelerate the dramatic tension of the proposal scene.

After forty years, with three more adaptations in-between, Cyril Coke’s 1980 BBC adaptation of Pride and Prejudice is the first commercially successful production. With the five-part miniseries (265 minutes), Coke obviously has more time and space than Leonard to develop Austen’s novel in a more detailed and faithful way. As in most BBC costume dramas in the 1970s and 1980s, this film is shot mainly in studio and thus shows some marked contrasts to the 1940 adaptation. Mr. Collins (Malcolm Rennie) is shown as a larger-than-life figure because of his height and weight. He is more comical than self-complacent. In the Netherfield ball, he dances in a monkeyish way (fig. 2.1) with Elizabeth (Elizabeth Garvie, whose figure is much smaller), and his clumsiness certainly serves as a contrast to Elizabeth’s elegant and formal dance with Darcy (David Rintoul) later. In fact, Elizabeth regards her two dances with Collins as “dances of mortification” (fig. 2.2), though, at the insinuation of Charlotte that her dances with Darcy must be “very agreeable,” she is also “determined to hate” Darcy and treats her dances with Darcy “an evil” (PP 63).

5 A. Walton Litz argues that “The first half of Pride and Prejudice has indeed been a dramatic performance, but in he second half a mixture of narrative, summary, and scene carries the plot toward its conclusion” (446). This is quite true in the original novel. However, in the 1940 adaptation, the whole movie relies heavily upon dramatic performance (as is also manifested in the two other proposals discussed in this essay later). Such presentation clearly shows Austen’s debt to the earlier comedy of manners.

6 See Appendix 1.
This dancing scene, like the pursuit scene in the 1940 adaptation, serves as a preambule to the first proposal. The proposal scene follows the original text quite closely and the dialogue is almost a verbatim reproduction of the novel. It is quite formal though comic, and Collins appears more sincere than obnoxious as in the novel. Devoid of the fervent hand-kissing scene of the 1940 production, the scene does not give an wholly absurd portrait of Collins. Instead, he is smiling all the time (fig. 2.3), and after being refused somewhat mildly by Elizabeth, they part in a quite amiable way (fig. 2.4). Though Collins is still quite self-indulgent and overconfident, he is less an object of mockery than in the Leonard’s film. Therefore, the comic element is apparently toned down. As Gard maintains in his discussion of the novel, “he’s as much a part of the normal marriage subject as are Darcy and Bingley. He is

---

7 Such portrait of Collins probably represents Austen’s own attitude toward clergymen in general. She simply wants to ridicule the absurd side of Collins. Austen herself is the daughter of a clergyman and “she could accept that young men of good family could enter the Church without training or dedication, and almost without belief” (Nicolson 148). Such ideas would not surprise us if we keep in mind the positive depictions of Edmund Bertram in Mansfield Park and Edward Ferrars in Sense and Sensibility.
respectable. There’s nothing overtly wrong, let alone villainous, in his behaviour. He starts off as a purely comic figure, verging on caricature... I suppose even Darcy’s first proposal is a grander version of the same structure” (109-10). This argument is apparently reinforced by the representation of Collins in the proposal scene in this adaptation.

With a runtime of 310 minutes, Simon Langton’s 1995 adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* is considered most faithful to the original novel and most popular of all adaptations. Colin Firth’s role as Mr. Darcy has become a legend and almost a myth to the Austen fans. It is not surprising that Firth plays the role of a modern Darcy again in *Bridget Jones’s Diary* (2001) and *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* (2004). Though faithful to the original novel in the main, Langton’s film also deals with the novel in some innovative ways as to give the audience and the reader an insight into the sinister aspect of the generally comic novel. The first proposal scene is rendered quite ominous and different from all other adaptations. Collins (David Bamber) is no longer so self-confident and clownish as he appears in the previous two films. He is sly and even malevolent in his proposal to Elizabeth (Jennifer Ehle). Apparently he cannot be so sure of Elizabeth’s acceptance beforehand; therefore, he wants to apply to the parental authority of Mrs. Bennet (Alison Steadman) first to pressure Elizabeth. He smirks as Mrs. Bennet forces Elizabeth to stay in the drawing room to be alone with him (fig. 3.1). Such representation of a furtive and hideous Collins probably justifies Gard’s assertion that “In English fiction only Uriah Heep [in Charles Dickens’s *David Copperfield*] can really vie with Collins for sheer physical repulsiveness” (107). In his statement of reasons for marrying Elizabeth, Collins is full of self-consequence, which can be interpreted either as expression of self-complacency because of his prepossessed idea of doing a great service to the
Bennet family or as exhibition of lack of confidence owing to a total avoidance of eye contact (fig. 3.2). Collins’s proposal becomes more sinister and menacing when he reminds Elizabeth that she may not receive another proposal of equal advantages. More importantly, he also reminds Elizabeth, immediately after his declaration of the violence of his feeling, of her own small fortune of one thousand pounds, which can be obtained only after her mother’s death, and of his eventual inheritance of Longbourn in the future (fig. 3.3). In other words, aside from his physical repugnance, “he’s also gruesome because he’s a sexual threat and a lively embodiment of a system” (Gard 108). The entail system, which even Lady Catherine de Bourgh is opposed to, and primogeniture make him representative of the patriarchal system. Such intimidation is overtly omitted in other three adaptations and thus makes Collins’s proposal in this film rings a stark bleak reality many of Austen’s heroines must face. Moreover, unlike in the novel and in previous two films, Collins is quite sensible of his mortification after Elizabeth’s rejection. His eyebrows knit together in an unpleasant frown to show his humiliation and resentment (fig. 3.4). Such reaction would appear more conspicuous if we remember that after Elizabeth’s departure, Collins is left “to the silent contemplation of his successful love” in the novel. To Mrs. Bennet’s initial congratulations, he “received and returned these felicitations with equal pleasure” and firmly believed that Elizabeth’s refusal “would naturally flow from her bashful modesty and the genuine delicacy of her character” (PP 77). Such treatment evidently conveys an ideology of patriarchal dominance and female dilemma. As Moll Flanders realizes a century before,

the Women has lost the Privilege of saying No, that it was a Favour now for a Woman to have THE QUESTION ask’d, and if any young Lady had so much Arrogance as to Counterfeit a Negative, she never had the Opportunity given her
of denying twice; much less of recovering that false step, and accepting what she had but seem’d to decline: The men had such choice every where, that the case of the women was very unhappy; for they seem’d to plie at every door, and if the man was by great chance refus’d at one house, he was sure to be receiv’d at the next. (67-68)

Collin’s dismay and resentment indubitably originate from such belief, which is further confirmed in his success with Charlotte Lucas the next day.

Joe Wright’s 2005 adaptation transforms *Pride and Prejudice* almost entirely from a novel of manners to a romantic novel. With the time span of 127 minutes, Wright does not have the luxurious scope of Coke’s (1980) and Langton’s (1995) much longer films. Therefore, truthfulness to the original novel is not his major concern. Instead, Wright tries to add a new kind of sensibility to Austen’s novel to meet the commercial market and the yearning for sentimentality in the modern cinematic world of fantasy and action, as monumentalized by *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter*. The portrayal of Collins (Tom Hollander) in his proposal to Elizabeth (Keira Knightley) is thus quite different from the previous three films. Collins is no longer so self-confident and self-complacent. The moment he chooses for his request to talk to Elizabeth occurs when the whole Bennet family are having lunch together (fig. 4.1), certainly an embarrassing occasion for both Elizabeth and other family members, except of course Mrs. Bennet (Brenda Blethyn). Therefore,

Collins is presented more as a man who knows little about the etiquette of the world than a man of absurdity or malice. During the proposal scene, which begins somewhat comically with Collins presenting one single little flower to Elizabeth (fig. 4.2), he is most of the time nervous and fidgety and even stammering. In effect, the scene constitutes a parody of a passionate and romantic proposal, in which the viewer may...
expect a bouquet of roses rather than a single flower. In his statement of reasons for

Fig. 4.2 Collins presents a single flower to Elizabeth as the prelude to his proposal.

marriage, he simply tries to get the whole thing over as soon as possible because he
does not anticipate a rejection from Elizabeth. There is no eye contact (fig. 4.3) in his
recital-like proposal until he finally kneels down to get through the performance of a
perfunctory job. Aside from the single flower, the proposal scene is made more
unromantic or even anti-romantic by its taking place in the dining room, with all kinds

Fig. 4.3 Collins proposes in a nervous manner.

of food in front of them. Unlike the amiable responses in the 1980 and 1995 films,
Elizabeth becomes indignant, angry, and even unnecessarily harsh as she is listening
to his proposal. After Collins’s failed attempt, Wright adds one more scene to show
his helplessness (instead of his wondering to Mrs. Bennet about Elizabeth’s
headstrong and stubborn disposition). After leaving the dining room, Collins
encounters the other daughters and his discomfiture makes Lydia (Jena Malone) and
Kitty (Carey Mulligan) burst into laughter but somehow earns the sympathy of Mary
(Talulah Riley) (fig. 4.4). It makes the viewer wonder whether Mary would not be a
more suitable choice for the unlucky Collins. He is obviously more pitiable than arrogant.

In these four films, the first proposal scene thus is presented as the comic (1940), the absurd (1980), the sinister (1995), and finally the anti-romantic (2005). These features will form an almost parallel development to the second proposal and a stark contrast to the third.

II. The Second Proposal

The second proposal Elizabeth receives is from Mr. Darcy (Volume II, Chapter XI). Just before the proposal Elizabeth learns with great indignation from Colonel Fitzwilliam that Darcy intervenes and separates Bingley and Jane. From the onset, this proposal is doomed to fail as Elizabeth cries out to Darcy, “do you think that any consideration would tempt me to accept the man, who has been the means of ruining, perhaps for ever, the happiness of a most beloved sister?” (PP 132). The proposal takes place at Collins’s house at Hunsford. It starts with a similar scenario to the first proposal scene at Longbourn, though with a reverse process. Just like Collins’s self-confident offer, Darcy “had no doubt of a favourable answer. He spoke of apprehension and anxiety, but his continence expressed real security” (PP 131). Whereas Collins begins with some practical reasons (his position, his happiness, and Lady Catherine’s advice) for his proposal, Darcy commences with an emotional outburst: “My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you” (PP 130). After stating his reasons and motives for

---

8 Nigel Nicolson raises an interesting argument that “If her [Austen’s] revision had been extensive, she would surely have noticed in her maturity that Darcy, given the fundamental excellence of his character, could never have behaved so discourteously to his host’s guests or tried to ruin Jane Bennet’s romance with his closes friend, Bingley, on the grounds that the Bennets had inferior connections” (161). Such argument would not sustain if we take into Elizabeth’s own reflection after she reads Darcy’s letter, “she grew absolutely ashamed of herself” (PP 143) and begins to see all the improprieties of her family.
marrying Elizabeth, Collins tries to show “the violence of [his] affection” (PP 75). However, after his emotional eruption, Darcy points out the reasons which may well hinder his admiration and love for Elizabeth. His main concerns are Elizabeth’s inferior social position and the vulgarity of her family connections. Under such circumstances and with the preconceived prejudice against Darcy because of his supposed cruel treatment of Wickham, it is inconceivable for Elizabeth to accept Darcy’s proposal. The proposal scene ends with Elizabeth declaring to Darcy: “you were the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed on to marry” (PP 133). After Darcy’s departure, what Elizabeth can think of in her agitated reflection is Darcy’s “abominable pride,” “his shameless avowal,” “his unpardonable assurance,” and “his cruelty” (PP 134). As Claudia L. Johnson maintains, “Like Collins, Darcy also parades hollow gallantries that do not veil his assurance of immediate success and that tax Elizabeth with her unfavorable fortune and connections. So little is Darcy concerned for Elizabeth’s happiness that he does not hesitate to inform her of the damage he is doing to his own self-consequence by proposing marriage to her” (82). There is nothing romantic here, and, soon after Darcy’s profession of affection for Elizabeth, what remains is only bitter repartee with intentions to hurt each other: Darcy exasperated particularly at Elizabeth’s “eager interest” in Wickham’s welfare and Elizabeth wounded deeply by Darcy’s ungentleman-like manner. Their mutual grievances will only be alleviated later by their own inner reflections and further consideration of each other. As Michael Giffin remarks, “Both heroine and hero retreat from this emotional confrontation, to lick their wounds, to reason, and to reflect on this experience and past experiences in order to arrive at a better understanding” (104). Therefore, this proposal is different from Elizabeth’s conception of Collins’s proposal, in which she responds with similar indignation and detestation but without any personal reflection.

As in his treatment of the first proposal, Leonard also adds a prelude to the second proposal scene in his 1940 adaptation. After hearing from Colonel Fitzwilliam the horrible news that Darcy is the actual agent who separates Jane (Maureen O’Sullivan) and Bingley, she comes back to Hunsford and is informed by Charlotte (Karen Morley) that Darcy is waiting for her in the drawing room. (In the novel, Elizabeth is alone in bitter reflection of Darcy’s cruel intervention.) Elizabeth first refuses to see Darcy, but agrees reluctantly for the sake of her hostess (Charlotte).9

---

9 The addition of this scene may apparently indicate that Charlotte is already quite at ease with her life at Hunsford. As Claudia L. Johnson argues, “no specifically authorial moral opprobrium is ever attached to Charlotte’s frankly mercenary marriage to Collins. . . . Charlotte’s choice of an apparently successful adjustment to Mr. Collins as a husband indicates where she rates the exigencies of physical maintenance relative to the pleasures of rational society” (81). While John Gregory advised to young ladies that “I know nothing that renders a woman more despicable, than her thinking it essential to
Therefore, the dramatic tension is intensified before the proposal scene. Throughout the proposal scene in the film, Elizabeth shows not a single trace of affection towards Darcy’s declaration of love (fig. 5.1) and instead expresses her indignation at Darcy’s role in estranging Bingley from Jane. The proposal scene indeed reminds the viewers of Collins’s proposal when Darcy kneels down and kisses Elizabeth’s hand fervently (fig. 5.2). However, as Wiltshire points out, “Just as it was taken for granted that a young man in possession of a fortune would seek a wife, Darcy assumes that a young lady in want of a fortune would accept a husband with one” (105). Thus, as in Collins’s proposal, Darcy is not really addressing to Elizabeth, he is in reality “conducting an inner dialogue with himself” (105). Wiltshire calls this proposal scene “a classic instance of love as domination” (106), a master-slave relationship without the master’s recognition of the other’s individual identity. As Samuel Johnson said in *Rambler* 98: “it is scarcely possible to find any man who does not frequently . . . indulge his own pride by forcing others into a comparison with himself, when he knows the advantage is on his side, without considering that unnecessarily to obtrude unpleasing ideas is a species of oppression” (82-83). Darcy’s total lack of concern about Elizabeth’s feelings obviously manifests such bias against women’s supposed role of submission. In the film Elizabeth turns her back against Darcy much of the time (fig. 5.3). Their expressions show neither the comic effect of the first proposal by Collins nor the emotional agitations of a romantic proposal. In fact, as Roger Sales maintains, “The way in which actors were encouraged to stand and deliver their lines often led to static, or at least stagey, productions” (17). Such presentations certainly remind the stage performance of the comedy of manners. However, as D. A. Miller argues, “what ‘roused’ Darcy . . . was her refusal to court him, to be like the despised happiness to be married” (qtd. in Waldron 42), Mary Waldron maintains that “Charlotte the sensible is in fact defying conventional pieties; Elizabeth . . . is still locked into this one, revolted by the idea of marrying merely to survive economically” (46).
women ‘who were always speaking and look, and thinking for [his] approbation alone’” (44-45). This melodramatic scene can be indeed viewed as a kind of “seduction.” 10 At the end, Darcy hurries away in great disappointment (fig. 5.4), 11 and Elizabeth, instead of crying for half an hour as in the novel, is stunned into inaction and completely at a loss.

In Coke’s 1980 adaptation, the second proposal scene begins with Elizabeth sitting alone in Collins’s house. She is having a headache and does not want to go to Rosings with the Collinses. Darcy enters the parlor abruptly and after walking to and fro for a while suddenly begins his proposal. Elizabeth is first astounded at his confession but more shocked by his subsequent abuse of her family connections. In this scene, Elizabeth is sitting in indignation while Darcy is standing or walking in quite a confused way (fig. 6.1). It is interesting that they seldom appear together in the same

10 Michael Giffin makes a similar observation: “Darcy is attracted to something in Elizabeth’s nature that is lacking in his own: and, because he is who he is – that is, because everyone around him wants something from him – he probably finds her disinterest in him refreshing” (94). Or as John Hardy remarks, “her words prevent Darcy from taking refuge in arrogance and force him to engage with real questions about himself. . . . Elizabeth’s lively and challenging remarks arouse his interest in a special way; and in demanding an immediate return, they put him on his mettle” (43).

11 Claudia L. Johnson’s argument that when Darcy first proposes, “he does not dream that Elizabeth’s loyalty to her disappointed sister could possible prevent Elizabeth from jumping gratefully at the chance to marry him” is somewhat faulty (91). Obviously Darcy did not know before the proposal that Elizabeth has already learned from Colonel Fitzwilliam about his role in the separation of Jane and Bingley.
Frame (fig. 6.2), not to mention a kissing scene as in the 1940 adaptation. Moreover, most of the time in this scene, half of Elizabeth’s and Darcy’s face is obscured by darkness; such employment of chiaroscuro certainly reflects their inner struggle, especially that of Darcy’s. As Mary Waldron argues, Darcy shows his “curiously inexperienced” and “insecure” personality though he is already twenty-eight and the owner of a large estate (49) (fig. 6.4). Moreover, Elizabeth’s reaction (or overreaction) in this adaptation may also support Wiltshire’s argument that “Her anger at his words about her family’s behaviour enables her to forget or displace her own sense of shame, or rather it converts that shame into anger against him” (105) (fig. 6.3). In other words, it is typical of the manifestation of a defense mechanism. Again like Leonard’s film, Coke chooses not to make Elizabeth burst into tears after Darcy’s departure. She is presented as sitting and smiling (fig. 6.5) because finds the proposal incredible but quite gratifying (PP 134). The confrontation is thus not so theatrical and intense as in
Leonard’s 1940 adaptation. There is not any trace of what is described in the novel: “She knew not how to support herself, and from actual weakness sat down and cried for half an hour” (PP 134).

Langton’s treatment of the second proposal in his 1995 adaptation is considered most faithful to the original novel. Most of the dialogue is almost a verbatim reproduction of the novel. The estrangement between Elizabeth and Darcy (Colin Firth) is expressed in the film through the mutual exclusiveness of their faces on the frame. Most of the time Darcy is either standing or walking to and fro to show first his uneasiness and later his anger, especially at Elizabeth’s accusation of his maltreatment of Wickham (fig. 7.1). Elizabeth on the other hand is sitting and getting more and more indignant as she realizes that Darcy is simply condescending in his proposal to her and would not admit that he has done any harm to either Jane or Bingley in separating them (fig. 7.2). In other words, Darcy does not show any kind of remorse as is perhaps manifested by Coke’s 1980 Darcy (fig. 6.4). Whey they finally appear

---

12 Mary Waldron holds a different opinion concerning Darcy’s intervention. She argues that Darcy in fact tries to keep Bingley for his own sister Georgiana, especially after the miscarriage of her intended elopement with Wickham. “He needs to feel in control, and Bingley is eminently controllable. Safely married to Bingley, Georgiana would also remain under his surveillance.” After their arrival at Meryton and Longbourn, “the whole safety network starts to disintegrate” (50). Such conjecture (there is not much evidence in the novel except in Caroline Bingley’s wishful thinking) might certainly give an entirely different motive to Darcy’s role in the separation of Bingley from Jane. However, this observation is somewhat far-fetched and does not accord with later development of the plot.
the same frame, there is still no eye contact: Elizabeth is facing away from Darcy and Darcy is almost in frenzy because of Elizabeth’s accusation (fig. 7.3). Such a picture is certainly not in harmony with a proposal scene. Wiltshire’s argument that this proposal scene “betrays the confusion into which he has been led” because he has already tried to make the separation of Bingley and Jane as “his own internal system of defense” in order to avoid Elizabeth’s attraction certainly rings true in this presentation (102). When the defense system collapses, Darcy becomes relentless and almost snarls at Elizabeth. Elizabeth in this proposal scene is rather sad than angry, defeated than triumphant in her refusal because she is also building up a defense mechanism in which she realizes what Darcy says about her family is quite undeniable. However, she is more in control of herself than the previous two films’ depictions (fig. 7.4). In a sense she is probably conscious of her own defeat in this confrontation, because, as Anne Crippen Ruderman maintains, Darcy has shown his “worst transgression of manners”: “he commits a sin akin to the one Emma commits with Miss Bates: he calls Elizabeth’s attention to her inferiority to himself” (106).
Conscious of her own inferior social positions and family connections, as pointed out bluntly and inexorably by Darcy, Elizabeth is psychologically subdued, though verbally defiant.

Wright’s 2005 representation of the second proposal is quite different from the first three films and from the novel. The proposal scene has been moved to the outside instead of Collins’s house. A scene has been added to mark the contrast between the mundane world and the emotionally charged world of love and hate. While attending a dull sermon preached by Collins, Colonel Fitzwilliam (Cornelius Booth) tells Elizabeth about Darcy’s “kind” intervention in his friend Bingley’s (Simon Woods) affair with a young woman. The scene is a medley of feelings: many of the parishioners become sleepy under the bombardment of Collins’s monotonous and dreary preaching while Elizabeth becomes increasingly incensed, accompanied by the threatening thunderstorm outside, as she is listening to Colonel Fitzwilliam. The next scene the spectator is directed to is Elizabeth running alone through the bridge in the rain with the large expanse of darkened background (fig. 8.1). After sheltering herself in an old temple, Elizabeth is surprised by the sudden appearance and proposal of Darcy in the rain (fig. 8.2). Again like Coke and Langton, Wright uses alternate

![Fig. 8.1 Elizabeth runs through the rain in a distracted state.](image)

13 Giffin’s argument is at odds with the addition of this scene. Giffin argues that “Mr. Collins and Lady Catherine may be objects of satire, but even Austen suggests that both of them are functioning quite well in their respective clerical and secular roles. . . . Mr. Collins is hospitable and kind to his quests, . . . and is assiduous in performing his clerical duties. . . . Clearly, Mr. Collins is not intended to be a sympathetic character; however, he is not as unsympathetic as Austen’s more mischievous or evil characters” (107). We may use Collins’s unfeeling letter to Mr. Bennet about Lydia’s elopement with Wickham (“The death of your daughter would have been a blessing in comparison of this” [PP 203.]) to refute this argument; however, Collins is in a way simply representative of the society as a whole.
shots, in which Darcy and Elizabeth do not appear on the same frame, to show the
tension caused by Darcy’s abuse of Elizabeth’s family connections and her resentment
of his intervention in Jane’s affair and his supposedly cruel treatment of George
Wickham (Rupert Friend) (fig. 8.3). Such mutual exclusiveness in the same frame not
only exhibits a one-sided perspective (we either see from Elizabeth’s viewpoint or
from Darcy’s stance), but also their blindness to the other’s perception. Darcy can
“only see himself as generously stooping to Elizabeth’s level and fondly imagines her
grateful for his condescension” (Waldron 54), whereas Elizabeth is clouded by her
anger to realize Darcy’s inner struggle, which is only fully shown in her humiliating

self-reflection later. However, though the scene ends with the separation of Elizabeth
and Darcy, Wright’s treatment of their mutual (especially Elizabeth’s) attraction in an
entirely different approach from previous films and the novel. Elizabeth is
unconsciously drawn to Darcy and almost kisses him (fig. 8.4) before her own pride
Fig. 8.4 Elizabeth is unconsciously attracted to Darcy.

and deep-rooted prejudice prevent her. Such treatment is not only consistent with the romantic atmosphere throughout the film but also makes way for the final union of the couple. As in the beginning of the scene in which the loneliness and helplessness of Elizabeth is emphasized, the proposal scene ends with Elizabeth’s solitude in the central position of the wide expanse of scenery (fig. 8.5). This isolation is further intensified after she returns to the parsonage, where she is enshrouded in darkness without showing her facial expression (fig. 8.6). Thus, a heavy atmosphere of

Fig. 8.5 Elizabeth’s loneliness and helplessness are highlighted by her smallness in a wide spatial backdrop.

14 It is interesting that while most critics believe that Darcy’s attraction to Elizabeth is physical and sexual (though Austen presents it in an undertone), which overcomes his abhorrence of her inferior social position and vulgar family connections, Wright chooses to show that Elizabeth’s attraction to Darcy is also based on sexual attraction in this scene.

15 James Thompson’s observation is quite helpful in explaining the heroine’s solitude with intense feeling: “Even after the heroines have been proposed to, they customarily withdraw into private to examine and absorb what they have just experienced. . . . Austen will not even provide them with a confidant to speak with” (54-55).
melancholy, as consistent with the romantic tone, is achieved by such contrastive arrangement. There is no need to smile or to cry for Elizabeth to show her gratitude or regret. The sense of vulnerability, humility, and confusion communicated by this frame is probably more powerful than the one conveyed in the novel.16

III. The Third Proposal

The last proposal in the novel is of course a successful one. Various propitious elements pave the way to the final reunion of Elizabeth and Darcy.17 Darcy’s explanatory letter about Wickham’s true character, Elizabeth’s pleasant visit to Pemberley, Darcy’s kind intervention in Lydia’s case, Bingley’s union with Jane, and Lady Catherine’s rude interrogation of Elizabeth, all these factors help facilitate the final confession of gratitude and love between Darcy and Elizabeth. As Ruderman maintains, in Austen novels, gratitude combined with esteem “are put forth as a way of falling in love that is not just prudent or sensible but is also more natural than the more romantic mode of immediate sexual attraction” (113). It is interesting that this proposal is presented in description rather than in dialogue as in the first two proposals. It may justify those critics who argue that Austen is not able to depict an emotional scene. James Thompson regards it as “the bankruptcy of the language of strong emotion” (52). Or as Mukherjee argues, Austen’s conception of marriage is “uneasy and double-edged”: “The conventional closure is achieved with some

---

16 Such loneliness may also be interpreted in a positive way. Considering the limited social space in Austen’s time, Mukherjee maintains that “Solitary reflection . . . is a luxury that can be indulged only sparingly. . . . Retiring to one’s room becomes analogous to recovering one’s wholeness, which is constantly whittled away by the inquisitive glances and queries of society” (77-78). Such argument may sound quite valid in the novel; nevertheless, what the film presents here is quite incongruous with this view.

17 These propitious elements have much to do with Darcy’s mental development. As Gard suggests, “After his initial offensiveness . . . the novel gets busy with placing and dramatizing him as a Grandison figure: a re-writing by Jane Austen, that is to say, of the perfect hero, perfect lover and perfect landlord of eighteenth-century fiction” (80).
abruptness, fore-shortening narrative development. There is an embarrassed avoidance of detail at the climatic moment” (47-48). The first proposal is represented as Collins’s pompous self-indulgence in doing a “favor” to Elizabeth and her family. The second proposal is mainly a repartee of bitter accusations between Elizabeth and Darcy. Therefore, it is quite logical for these scenes to be presented in self-complacent monologue or vivid dialogue. However, in the third proposal, after Darcy’s expression of his unchanged “affections and wishes” and his intention to have a final and absolute answer on this subject, we are given the following passage:

Elizabeth feeling all the more than common awkwardness and anxiety of his situation, now forced herself to speak; and immediately, though not very fluently, gave him to understand, that her sentiments had undergone so material a change, since the period to which he alluded, as to make her receive with gratitude and pleasure, his present assurance. The happiness which this reply produced, was such as he had probably never felt before; and he expressed himself on the occasion as sensibly and as warmly as a man violently in love can be supposed to do. (PP 252)

In a description of few lines, the difficulty of the third proposal scene is carried through. The scene is of course not comic, but is it romantic? This scene seems to justify Charlotte Brontë’s criticism of Austen, as cited at the beginning of the essay. As Thompson notes, “anger, resentment, and humiliation can be expressed or described in full, and it is respect, affection, and love that cannot” (54). Or as Claudio’s reply to the request to profess his love for Hero in Shakespeare’s Much Ado about Nothing, “Silence is the perfectest herald of joy; I were but little happy, if I could say how much” (II.i. 282-83). Joy undoubtedly it is, but romantic atmosphere does not seem to be able to cast anchor in these descriptions.

Leonard’s treatment of the last proposal follows the pattern of the first two proposals. He uses Lady Catherine’s (Edna May Oliver) unexpected visit to Elizabeth as the prelude. She wants Elizabeth to deny the rumor of her engagement with Darcy (fig. 9.1) and tells her about Darcy’s role in the marriage of Lydia and Wickham.
Fig. 9.1 Lady Catherine interrogates Elizabeth about her engagement with Darcy.

(different from what occurs in the novel, of course). Therefore, a symmetrical though contrastive structure is formed with the second proposal, just before which Elizabeth learns about Darcy’s role in separating Jane from Bingley. Unlike what happens in the novel, Lady Catherine, though still arrogant and overbearing, actually acts as Darcy’s ambassador to probe into Elizabeth’s feeling for him. After her meeting with Elizabeth, she departs in a seeming rage, but she meets Darcy just outside the house and assures him of Elizabeth’s affection. She says: “She’s right for you, Darcy.” A viewer who does not allow any tempering with Austen’s works may certainly find this scene somewhat absurd and unacceptable. Moreover, the comic effect is achieved especially with Lady Catherine having to wade through the messy ground of the Bennets’ drawing room. 18 Such arrangement may also conform to Claudia L. Johnson’s argument that Lady Catherine is a “parody of male authority”: “they defend and collude in the interests of the patriarchal family, they themselves obviously are not the most formidable embodiments of it” (88). Then we have a proposal scene as short as that in the novel. After Darcy speaks of his not being ashamed of having loved Elizabeth, he says to her, “Dare I ask you again?” (fig. 9.2). Elizabeth makes no

Fig. 9.2 “Dare I ask again?”

Fig. 9.3 They kiss each other.

18 Such comic effect also conveys a murky aspect of the Bennet household. As Michel Giffin argues, compared with Rosings and Hunsford (representing good oikonomia), not to mention Pemberley, “the world of Longbourn is antithetical to an Anglican sense of propriety, decency, and good order” (120).
reply and the next frame we see them kissing each other (fig. 9.3), with the elated Mrs. Bennet (Mary Boland) and Mr. Bennet (Edmund Gwenn) watching from a window (fig. 9.4). Before the end of the film, the viewer is given one more scene, in which the Bennet parents find two suitable gentlemen having intimate interactions with Mary (Marsha Hunt) and Kitty (Heather Angel) (fig. 9.5). This scene, not in the novel, obviously gives an appropriate conclusion to the comedy. It also confirms Wiltshire’s argument that “Pride and Prejudice would seem to insist that selves relate not just to other selves but within a historical situation matrix of communicative interaction that is not of their own making” (118).19 In a marriage of love and mutual respect, personal qualities, family connections, and social positions must be taken into account.

Lady Catherine’s (Judy Parfitt) entrance into the Bennet house in Coke’s 1980 adaptation is no longer in a comic manner as in Leonard’s film, and she is, as in the novel, not an ambassador for Darcy to test Elizabeth’s feeling. She is stern and haughty but never comic or absurd. In effect, she considers, as Johnson observes, “it a matter of public importance that ancient families such as hers not be sacrificed to the ‘upstart pretensions of a young woman without family, connections, or fortune’” (86). Such attitude is held just somewhat less obliquely by Darcy himself in his first proposal to Elizabeth. Moreover, Mr. Bennet (Moray Watson) also receives a letter from Collins, congratulating him of Elizabeth’s supposed engagement with Darcy, which Mr. Bennet finds rather absurd and diverting, considering Elizabeth’s longtime declaration of her antipathy toward Darcy. Thus these two scenes seem to predict an

19 However, we must also realize that, as Claudia L. Johnson and other critics point out, “Austen . . . typically removes her heroines from the parental abode altogether precisely in order to free them from this necessity [filial obedience] and to oblige them to think and act for themselves” (84).
unfavorable result of the last proposal. As in the novel, the last proposal scene is not really romantic. Elizabeth is walking outside in the nearby park or woodland. Darcy joins her and after a short confession they walk hand in hand (fig. 10.1). It seems that Coke does not know how to deal with the proposal scene, which Austen herself

![Fig. 10.1 They walk hand in hand.](image1)

Likewise may also find difficult. Therefore, long shots, in which they are walking under the trees, are used alternatively with medium shots, in which they are walking hand in hand, to make the proposal seem somewhat smoother (fig. 10.2 and fig. 10.4). There is seldom a close-up of their interactions, not to mention a kissing scene as in the 1940 adaptation. Their most intimate physical contact is walking hand in hand. The viewer may even feel guilty for either Coke or Austen herself because of the lack of emotion in this scene. The exhibition of emotions is static, and the feeling is entirely toned down. Their exchange of look shows it all. (This may of course appear romantic enough for some viewers.) Such viewers may certainly agree with Gard’s argument that “the reason, incidentally, why Jane Austen’s final brief proposals are so

![Fig. 10.2 Long shots are used to avoid emotional close-ups.](image2)

20 James Thompson has a different view concerning the “economy” of this proposal scene. He argues that “the event itself can take so little space because it has been prepared for so well. . . . To dwell further on this scene risks boring the reader” (56). However, he also defends Austen by maintaining that “the expression of strong emotion is not something to be taught or learned. Rather, it is as impossible for them as for the narrator and perhaps even for Austen herself” (56). Such arguments (choosing not to describe vs. inability to depict) are somewhat self-contradictory. Moreover, the fact that all the film adaptations choose to add some kind of romantic scenes (the embracing kisses or wedding) further testify to the “bankruptcy” of narrative language, but not the deficiency of visual representations in films.

21 Does gratitude play a more important part in this scene? Waldron’s explanation of the power of money may give an alarming blow to the romantic-inclined reader or viewer. She maintains that money “often had strong sexual overtones in that it could be used by its normal possessors – men – as a displaced form of seduction. A girl in hock to a man might be regarded as having as good as lost her virginity. A common cliché was for a young woman inadvertently to become indebted to a man, and thus be obliged to marry him if that is what he wants” (59). Such observation may probably explain away the lack of romantic feeling at this scene. What is Elizabeth to do to pay back Darcy’s generosity in Lydia-Wickham affair?
moving is that they typically involve recognition and respect for past emotions – and the vindication of the other person’s conduct in that stuffy and contingent world” (111). In a sense, one may also assert that the proposal scene has already been enacted in Elizabeth’s own projection of Darcy’s intention to her after her visit to Pemberley. She wonders why Darcy still treats her and the Gardiners with respect and warmth, and she analyzes her own feelings and comes to a conclusion: “It was gratitude. – Gratitude, not merely for having once loved her, but for loving her still well enough, to forgive all the petulance and acrimony of her manner in rejecting him, and all the unjust accusations accompanying her rejection” (PP 181). In realizing her own respect of and gratitude toward Darcy, Elizabeth is also trying to confirm in her own mind that Darcy is “loving her still.” Therefore, the short final proposal scene can be regarded as an extension of this reflection (fig. 10.3).

Admirers of Langton’s 1995 adaptation of Pride and Prejudice would argue that his handling of the last proposal captures the essence and spirit of Austen’s time and world. However, this proposal is so mundane that some viewers may cry for more emotions and actions. On the way to Meryton, with Jane and Bingley walking ahead of them, Elizabeth and Darcy finally reach a mutual understanding. The scene is set on a road in an open field, with a farmer loading some cargoes in the background (fig. 11.1). Even after their confession to each other, there is not any physical contact between them. Only Darcy’s sense of suppressed satisfaction on his face tells about what kind of happiest man he is now (fig. 11.2). As Tony Tanner insightfully observes, “Intimate physical contacts and experiences, while not denied, are minimized. Hands may meet, though it’s more likely to be the eyes which come together across a distinct social space” (131). A viewer with modern sensibility might think such confession too
emotionless and too affected. But apparently Langton has Austen’s description in
mind: “Had Elizabeth been able to encounter his eye, she might have seen how well
the expression of heart-felt delight, diffused over his face, became him” (PP 252) (fig.
11.3). In effect, as Maaja Stewart observes, Elizabeth has transformed from a young
girl of “lively and playful disposition” into a “sentimental and vulnerable one, bashful
before Darcy like a Burney heroine” (qtd. in Wiltshire 119).22 Or, as Roger Sales
remarks (in his describing the cover of an edition of the novel), “It is Darcy who is
given the power of direct address, in other words of looking directly at the camera and
therefore at the reader. Elizabeth is demurely looking down and is thus different from
the female figures who appear on most academic, as opposed to popular romance,
editions of Austen’s texts who have a form of direct address” (21-22). In a sense,
Elizabeth is subdued and deprived of her voice. Besides, there is no walking hand in

22 John Wiltshire summarized this kind of politically “radical” reading as follows: “They see this
[Elizabeth’s subjugation by or surrender to Darcy’s wealth, authority and superior judgement], and the
happy marriage with which the novel ends, as registering Austen’s own, if temporary, capitulation to
that patriarchal system which invests all males with more power than females. They see Elizabeth as
dwindling into a wife” (119). Such interpretation is quite applicable to Langton’s presentation of the
final proposal scene.
hand as in Coke’s adaptation, not to mention a passionate kissing scene as in Leonard’s 1940 film. Most surprisingly, the proposal scene ends with the pairs walking to Meryton without showing more emotions. However, as if to make it up for the reader about the lack of ostentatious feelings, Langton at the end of the film adds a scene of double weddings, which is not described in the novel, in an otherwise faithful adaptation (fig. 11.5). Finally the film ends with a still frame of an ardent kissing scene of Darcy and Elizabeth (fig. 11.6). Therefore, this film is deprived of almost all its comic tone (not even in the first proposal) and making its way to the direction of the romantic. Particularly the ending scene also includes a sobbing Anne de Bourgh (Nadia Chambers) and fuming Lady Catherine de Bourgh (Barbara Leigh-Hunt). A romantic love in defiance of the objection of Darcy’s relatives is thus achieved.

Elizabeth succeeds in gaining her happiness because of “her efforts to do right, usually in opposition to traditional authority figures, at the same time as endorsing supposed external norms of proper submission” (Waldron 41). Such scene may also be attributed to an attempt to conform to the didactic purpose of the novel. Marriage of this stamp is quite different from those of Wickham-Lydia and Collins-Charlotte; it is not only a wish fulfillment but also a moral triumph. In fact, as early as Chapter VIII of Volume III, in her own reflection Elizabeth has already realized that “It was an union that must have been to the advantage of both” (PP 214, emphasis added).

As Myra Stokes points out, “romance and romantic are often

Fig. 11.5 Double weddings take place at the end. Fig. 11.6 The film ends with a still frame of kissing.

Such scenes may also be attributed to an attempt to conform to the didactic purpose of the novel. Marriage of this stamp is quite different from those of Wickham-Lydia and Collins-Charlotte; it is not only a wish fulfillment but also a moral triumph. In fact, as early as Chapter VIII of Volume III, in her own reflection Elizabeth has already realized that “It was an union that must have been to the advantage of both” (PP 214, emphasis added).

Tony Tanner also points out that in this proposal, “love follows calculations and reflections” (134). However, he also argues that there is a difference between Charlotte’s prudence and Elizabeth’s, because the latter’s choice “is based on more awareness, knowledge, and intelligence” instead of “instant capitulation” because of economic pressure. One may argue that in her mature development, Elizabeth finally realizes what Charlotte upholds in her view of marriage, though perhaps such idea is brought up in a too realistic and practical way. It will appear more prominent that Elizabeth’s union with Darcy is regarded by Mrs. Bennet as “for the advantage of her family” (PP 261) and also to Kitty’s
found as antonyms of *prudence* and *prudent*. In such contexts the former words imply a sentimental idealism (usually based on an absolute value for such things as disinterested love and generosity) that refuses to be compromised by realities and practicalities” (157). Elizabeth’s “submission” in the final proposal is not a simple romantic inclination; it is a prudent decision based on gratitude and mutual advantage.

Wright’s dealing with the last proposal scene is much bolder than the previous three films. The time is changed from the broad daylight to the early dawn and the scene is moved from a walk to Meryton to a field shrouded in mist. Sleepless Elizabeth walks to the field, waiting for the sunrise. At the break of dawn, Darcy also

![Fig. 12.1 Darcy appears almost mysteriously in the field.](image)

Sleepless appears almost mysteriously with the first ray of the day in his background (fig. 12.1). The otherworldly and Turner-like ambiance and color certainly build up a romantic mood, which is again accompanied by the predominant piano theme music. Apparently Wright tries to solve the problem of a subdued and somewhat lukewarm proposal as in the other three films and in the original novel. To Darcy’s proposal – “My affections and wishes are unchanged, but one word from you will silence me on this subject forever” (PP 252) – Elizabeth responds with a kiss on his hand to show her gratitude and affection (fig. 12.2). Thus a gesture solves successfully all the

“very material advantage” (PP 266).
awkwardness of explanation in the novel. And instead of walking “without knowing in what direction” (PP 255), an intimate scene is presented with the full sunray in the background (fig. 12.3).

Such arrangement, though conventional and even old-fashioned, certainly serves as a stark contrast to the end of the second proposal scene, in which a lonely and helpless Elizabeth is shrouded in darkness. However, the three scenes added after the romantic encounter at the early dawn somewhat make the film too sentimental and melodramatic, though they increase and sustain the mood of romantic love. First of all, a scene is added where Darcy is waiting anxiously outside the Bennet house for the decision of Mr. Bennet, while Mrs. Bennet and Jane are wondering about the progress of the whole matter behind the window. Such anxiety serves to heighten the suspense of the final union of Elizabeth and Darcy. More importantly, if the viewer remembers the splendor and grandeur of Pemberley, s/he may notice its drastic contrast here. Sitting on some kind of trough with a background of a common and even dilapidated country gentleman’s lodging, with chickens pecking around, Darcy apparently can now compromise himself with Elizabeth’s “inferior” social position. The presentation
of this scene (and also the somewhat chaotic scene of the household at the beginning of the film) may well support Giffin’s argument that “The Longbourn estate lives under the sign of the fall, has been suffering from a bad oikonomia that has been long borne, and the estate is need of soteria” (97).

But the addition of two other scenes seems to make the movie fall into some kind of bathos. Mr. Bennet is no longer a cynical recluse in the novel. After being assured of Elizabeth’s real feeling for Darcy, he is so moved that he almost bursts into tears with joy (fig. 12.5). With this scene, one may be reminded of Gard’s argument that “Feeling – frustration and sheer joy – is what finally marks Pride and Prejudice off from the kind of comedy you described. It is what makes the book so often read and re-read – read often in times of crisis, in times of grief” (119). Mr. Bennet – who is “a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice” (PP 3) – finally is capable of feeling the emotion of ecstasy and joy. Moreover, the last scene of the film, in which Elizabeth and Darcy have an intimate and highly romantic moment, surrounded on the two sides by torches and in the far background by the well-lit mansion, though consistent with the romantic ambiance and with Elizabeth’s playful and lively character, is somewhat overdone and no longer Austenian (fig. 12.6). Such
ending may cater to modern sensibilities, especially with its somewhat exotic background (torches and other arrangements). However, this addition of intimate scene, in which Elizabeth’s “lively and playful disposition” still plays a prominent part, may also challenge those interpretations of Elizabeth’s “dwindling into a wife.” As John Hardy points out, “The very thing that attracts Darcy to Elizabeth is what gives the lie to the suggestion that she needs to abandon her individual ‘consciousness’ in order to find happiness with him” (56).

24 A perfect union of equal minds and dispositions seem to be achieved at the end.

Is Pride and Prejudice a comedy of manners, in which human follies and personal deficiencies are posed as satirical butts? Is it a romantic love story, in which love conquers all obstacles? Or would it be better to call it conveniently a romantic comedy? Each reader/viewer may of course have his/her own answer. The comedy of Pride and Prejudice is strengthened by the fact that there is no actual disastrous event in the novel. Even the potentially tragic affair of Lydia’s elopement with Wickham is granted a happy ending. Mary Lascelles calls their relationship a kind of “mutual seduction” because Wickham, with “the vanity of his petty intrigues, . . . does not break the comic mood of the whole. . . . And Lydia, who is to share this crisis with him, also belongs to the world of comedy” (74-75). However, in my discussion of the history of film adaptations of Pride and Prejudice, there is apparently a trend of reshaping the novel from a comedy to a romantic love story. Such tendency occurs even within the same film. Thus, a tentative conclusion can be made by arguing that

---

24 Such arrangement would undoubtedly disappoint feminism-inclined critics. For instance, Meenakshi Mukherjee remarks, marriage “intensifies the setting of boundaries and imposition of socially determined roles. The metamorphosis of the impudent and spirited Elizabeth Bennet into a grateful and acquiescent Mrs. Darcy evokes a similar sense of disappointment” (31). However, Johnson’s argument is also quite convincing: “it is marriage that at all times confirms and reproduces established social arrangements, and marriage that, at his particular time, was seen as the best possible arrangement in an imperfect world” (89).
the three proposals also form a development from the comic to the romantic.

John Halperin points out in *The Life of Jane Austen* that the publisher pays Austen £110 for *Pride and Prejudice*, whereas Sir Walter Scott receives £1,000 for his *Marmion* and Thomas Moore £3,000 for *Lalla Rookh* (280), both of which have become obscure and faded into history. However, Austen’s works have not only continued in their popularity in print but also, as James Monaco points out, inspired “the strange Jane Austen craze of the mid-nineties” in the film industry (377). In view of the popularity of *Pride of Prejudice* since its publication and the fervent reception of its adaptation into films, Austen would probably not mind whether her novel is considered comic or romantic if she is able to get the supposedly enormous amount of revenues from copyright.
Works Cited