

Adaptations of Austen:  
How Does Multimedia Impact Our Ability  
to Read Between the Lines  
of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*?

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## Introduction

“We’ve all seen it at least once,” says Devoney Looser, in The Making of Jane Austen, “A purist complains that Jane Austen’s fiction is being cheapened or even destroyed by film and television adaptations, [and by] vlogs” (13).<sup>1</sup> Some readers of Austen feel that onscreen adaptations are ruining the novels. The characters, the story, the novels do not necessarily translate the way these readers imagined them, and this makes these adaptations undesirable to them, not giving them the experience that they want. Are these purists correct? Are modern adaptations destroying the authentic experience of a Jane Austen novel? Or is there something to be gained from a multimedia adaptation of Austen’s works?

To begin to understand these questions, we must explore others. First, we must understand: What *is* the experience of an Austen novel? Second, we must discuss: How is this experience translated into a screen adaptation? What is different? These are questions that this paper will answer in order to understand the above complaints and prove them partially right-- and partially wrong.

An Austen novel’s appeal lies heavily in its narrative voice, its narrator and style, as will be discussed, and this is what we will consider the Austen experience. While it is difficult to translate this narrative voice to screen, it is not impossible, as will be shown through a close reading of Austen’s most adapted-to-the-big-screen works,<sup>2</sup> Pride and Prejudice and Emma. In these novels, we are engaged in the stories of heroines Elizabeth

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<sup>1</sup> Vlogs are also known as video blogs, described by Silke Jandl as “video blogs, primarily focusing on personal experiences or opinions usually delivered by one person to the camera” (Jandl 167)

<sup>2</sup> This statistic is taken from the Jane Austen Society of North America (JASNA)’s website <http://jasna.org/austen/screen/>

Bennet and Emma Woodhouse, respectively. These novels are ideal for the purposes of this research due to their strong narrative voices, which work to align the reader with Elizabeth's and with Emma's perspectives, while convincing the reader of the former's ability to judge people and to doubt the ability of the latter, giving the reader the opportunity in each novel to learn to read the text in a different way. The close reading of these novels will be complemented with analysis of their television and film adaptations, the 1995 BBC/A&E miniseries of *Pride and Prejudice* and the 1996 Miramax feature film *Emma*, as well as vlog adaptations, Pemberley Digital's YouTube series *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* and *Emma Approved*.

This paper will explore the experience of reading an Austen novel, specifically the effects of narrative style, including Austen's narrator and free indirect discourse, and study the original novels, followed by the listed onscreen adaptations, to explain the ways the camera can but does not always properly translate Austen's narratives while preserving the experience of the novel; this paper will illustrate the ways that each adaptation succeeds or fails to replicate the Austen experience. It will argue that BBC/A&E's *Pride and Prejudice* does not align us as entirely with Elizabeth as the novel because it spends too much time on Mr. Darcy's perspective. It will show that Miramax's *Emma* does not focus on Emma's individual perspective enough, as it is often shot from a far lens, but properly aligns us with her perspective through voiceovers and the times it does close in on her facial expressions. The paper will discuss the shortcomings of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* in establishing Elizabeth's reliability and *Emma Approved*'s success with that same lack of credibility. Overall, this paper will prove that onscreen adaptation can evoke the Austen experience, it just does not always do so.

## Understanding Jane Austen's Narrative Style

The experience of an Austen novel is embedded in the fact that it is a complex narrative. What is narrative? It is the art of telling a story, says H. Porter Abbott, in The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative, Second Edition (1). It is simple, he elaborates; a mere child can do it. "I fell down," Abbott explains, is a narrative in and of itself. It tells a story. The complexity of narrative, however, as generations of English teachers have imbued in their students, is the art of showing, not telling. It is in what is known as narrativity, which involves instilling the *experience* of reading a story, not just being told of an event, such as "I fell down" in Abbott's example. The reader or viewer of a story, the audience, needs to be a part of the experience of the narrative, steeped in understanding the inner thoughts and feelings of the characters (or, as Abbott might call them, the "entities that act and react more or less like human beings" (19)), for a story to be immersive, creating an intricate narrative, or narrativity.

Austen accomplishes narrativity through her narrative style, which utilizes the approach of free indirect discourse. Free indirect discourse, also known as free indirect style, is when a narrative is told from a third person's external voice but sometimes slips into the characters' thoughts or feelings without transitional warning. The narrator is omniscient, or at least limited omniscient, knowing the inner thoughts and feelings of some or all characters, and includes the perspective of one or more characters in the narration. This enables the reader to understand more than what the characters say, or what a bystander could see happening. Utilizing free indirect discourse as a narrative style is an essential component to the depth of many novels. Through the combination of objective and subjective narrator, a reader can experience the story through different, layered lenses.

To further understand Austen's narrative style, one must understand her narrator more clearly. A novel is told through a narrator, whose involvement can be broken down into three defining terms: voice, focalization, and distance.<sup>3</sup> Abbott explains, "Voice in narration is a question of who it is we 'hear' doing the narrating... The simple distinction is grammatical, that of 'person'" (70). This refers to the narrative being written in the first person "I" or the third person "s/he" and such. (Second person "you" is rarely used in narration. Additionally, first person narration often includes some third person: I spoke to her yesterday, and **she said** she was going to the store.) In Austen's case, and in the case of free indirect discourse in general, the narrative is told in the third person; the voice of the narrator is external, and the narrator is not a character in the story or telling the narrative from an "I" perspective. Austen introduces the characters from a removed, outsider's voice: "Mr. Weston was a native of Highbury, and born of a respectable family..." (Austen, Emma, 12); the narrator is not one of their ranks. As touched upon earlier, some third person narrators are omniscient, knowing the thoughts and feelings of all characters, while some are limited omniscient, exposed to the inner world of some but not all characters, and some are not omniscient at all, only able to share the stories from an external point of view, as a constant bystander might be able to. Jane Austen gives us an omniscient narrator, and she tells the narratives of Pride and Prejudice and Emma with different characters' views: "Mrs. Collins did not think it right to press the subject" (Austen, Pride and Prejudice, 172). While Austen does focus more specifically on the thoughts and feelings of her heroines, and, as will be discussed later, manipulates the reader to align with those perspectives, leading her novels to sometimes be considered as having a limited omniscient narrator, she can and does include the inner worlds

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<sup>3</sup> These categories are found in Chapter Six of The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative, Second Edition

of other, smaller characters at various points throughout the novels, showing that hers is a fully omniscient narrator. This applies more so to Pride and Prejudice than to Emma, which is written even more from the heroine's perspective, but overall insignificant in comparison to the amount of time spent through the heroines' voices.

This leads to focalization, most simply defined (though not precisely) as point of view. While a narrative can be entirely in third person, it can still align the reader with a certain perspective by telling it from a certain character's point of view, though often the narrator acts as the "focalizer" (Abbott 73). This means that sometimes, a character or situation is seen through a character's lens, while sometimes the narrator gives descriptions from his/her own point of view. Free indirect discourse gives the reader a taste of both of these focalizations: the narrator describes characters and events from his/her own point of view, as well as the characters'. For example, when introducing Emma, the narrator describes her as "handsome, clever, and rich" (Austen, Emma, 3), focalizing the narrative from the narrator's own point of view, or describing Emma as the external narrator sees her. On the other hand, Austen describes Bingley's sisters from Elizabeth's point of view at the end of the night of the assembly where they meet, writing, "Elizabeth listened [to Jane] in silence, but was not convinced: their behavior at the assembly had not been calculated to please in general... They were, in fact, very fine ladies... but proud and conceited" (Austen, Pride and Prejudice, 16). Here, it is clear that the point of view the sisters are being seen from is Elizabeth's. However, there are other times when it is unclear whose view is being portrayed: the objective narrator or the subjective character. This is the intricacy of free indirect discourse. The voice of the narrator and the thoughts of the character blend together, to a point where the focalization is blurry. For example, a later interaction with Caroline Bingley,

one of Bingley's sisters that Elizabeth has already categorized as haughty and above humoring those in their company (in the scene quoted above), Miss Bingley comes to warn Elizabeth of Mr. Wickham's reputation, and is described as coming towards Elizabeth "with an expression of civil disdain" (Austen, Pride and Prejudice, 91). The reader does not know if this is the objective voice of the narrator, telling him/her that Miss Bingley is actually coming to "accost" Elizabeth, or if this is actually Elizabeth's own perception of Caroline Bingley's expression and manner based on her previous assumptions of Miss Bingley's character. In Emma, even more than in Pride and Prejudice, the novel uses the heroine as the focalizer, which means that there is less objectivity in its narration, as we are seeing through Emma's eyes more often.

Examples such as in the preceding paragraph evoke the question of distance. "The extent to which a narrator plays a part in the story has an impact in our assessment of the information she gives us," says Abbott (74). Knowing that Austen's is a third person narrator with no involvement in the story being told lends to the reliability we place on the narrator's shoulders, the extent to which we trust the voice of the narrator. However, with free indirect discourse, this sense of distance can be quite deceiving. This is because, as seen in the example with Miss Bingley in the paragraph above, many descriptions may not be given from the narrator's own, removed voice, but from the voices of the characters themselves, without warning that it is so. A sense of distance due to the narrator's objectivity is therefore wrongfully trusting in a story told through free indirect discourse. One cannot read an Austen novel with a sense of distance, but rather with the idea that the views of the heroine are so strongly interwoven that there is not always a possibility of distinguishing whose perspective is being highlighted. As the reader progresses throughout the novel, s/he must learn to judge

much for him/herself: to learn not to rely on what s/he is told, but to look for clues in the text.

As Emma progresses, we see her mistakes time and time again, and we are able to see that she is flawed, though we are aligned with her perspective still enough to make the same mistakes she does, on first read. Emma is the focalizer for the novel, but we realize that there is no distance because of it. There is an alignment with Emma, even if there is no trust in her. Similarly, Pride and Prejudice aligns us with Elizabeth's perspectives by blurring the lines between the narrator's voice and her own, but contrastingly, this narrative leads us to believe that Elizabeth is a proper judge of character and circumstances, and we do trust her, until the climax of the novel, when we must reevaluate all we have assumed. There is a confusing sense of distance, where we think we are getting a detached narrator, but we are often slipping into Elizabeth's biased thoughts, but we are also focused on her point of view, as our focalizer.

### **Perspective on Perspectives in Pride and Prejudice and Emma**

The narrator sets us up to trust Elizabeth's perspective. The heroine is first introduced to us by her father, with praise; even as he declares his daughters all "silly and ignorant like other girls" (Austen, Pride and Prejudice, 7), Mr. Bennet says he will put in a good word for Elizabeth with Mr. Bingley because "Lizzy has something more of quickness than her sisters." Before even meeting Elizabeth, we understand her to be sharp, intelligent. We also learn early on from the narrator that Elizabeth tells her friends about being insulted by Mr. Darcy playfully because she has a spirit that "delight[s] in any thing ridiculous" (Austen, Pride and Prejudice 13), implying that Elizabeth herself is not ridiculous, and in fact laughs

at what is so. Until the middle of the novel, we are not shown the extent of Elizabeth's lack of proper judgement, her propensity to be blinded by prejudice based on first impressions, and therefore, we trust her implicitly.

Emma's mistakes are more evenly scattered throughout the novel, and we therefore do not have the same confidence in her ability to judge as we do with Elizabeth. While we are told by our faithful narrator that Emma is "clever" in the first line of the novel (Austen, Emma, 3), we are also told immediately that our heroine is flawed: "The real evils indeed of Emma's situation were the power of having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself" (ibid). We are still aligned with her perspective, though, therefore giving us some level of coalition with Emma's judgements of people and situations; however, her reliability is not thoroughly spelled out by our narrator, so what trust we do have in her perspective is often shaken, as she makes error after error in her determinations.

In Carol Howard's introduction to or in the Barnes & Noble Classics edition of Pride and Prejudice, when explaining the original title for the novel of "First Impressions", she writes, "One's first impressions of character should be mistrusted or at least managed with caution" (Austen, Pride and Prejudice, xxi). This lesson applies heavily to both Pride and Prejudice and Emma: First impressions cannot be trusted. This includes our own perspective on Elizabeth Bennet, Emma Woodhouse, and people they encounter. We, the readers, trust Elizabeth to be a proper judge of character and circumstances. When Elizabeth deems a person or event to be good or bad, we assume it must be so. We must learn, all at once, at Pride and Prejudice's turning point of Elizabeth getting Mr. Darcy's letter and reevaluating everything, that Elizabeth is fallible. Because we make Elizabeth's mistakes, our impressions of Mr. Darcy and Mr. Wickham are not managed with caution. While we learn early on that

Emma is flawed as a judge of character, we are still aligned with her perspective, and we make many of the same mistakes as she does. We therefore misread the feelings of Mr. Elton, Jane Fairfax, Frank Churchill, Harriet Smith, Mr. Knightley, and even Emma herself. It follows that we cannot trust our own first impressions in either novel. We must learn to become better readers in both Pride and Prejudice and Emma.

The experience of an Austen novel, then, to answer our first sub-question, lies in the immersivity of the narrative: the way the reader learns to read and understand people and situations along with the heroine; the reader grows along and gains perspective with the heroine, and s/he is thus included in the narrative. Misreading characters, being corrected, rereading the novels after understanding them properly-- this is all part of the Austen experience.

### **What's the Difference? From Novel to Multimedia**

Before even addressing the difficulties in translating the narrative, there are more general difficulties to adapting an Austen novel. Rebecca Dickson in "Misrepresenting Jane Austen's Ladies" points out that "selling an Austen-derived film-- to producers, production houses, and audiences-- is a daunting project for today's screenwriters and directors. Austen's early nineteenth-century culture and our own contemporary Western world are separated by nearly two centuries of continuous social and technological change, which makes her world downright foreign to our own" (Troost and Greenfield 44).

It would seem, then, that the most logical way to adapt an Austen novel would be to convert it to modern day, as the wildly successful film *Clueless* does. However, "Therein lies the danger," Dickson argues. "Shift an element from Austen's novel and screenplay writer

may lose a vital portion of the text's meaning. The strength of the recent Austen adaptations is that, for the most part, they follow her texts carefully" (Troost and Greenfield 45). While this can be argued (see "As If!" By Nora Nachumi and "Emma Becomes Clueless" by Suzanne Ferriss later in Jane Austen in Hollywood), there is certainly some advantage to retaining as much of the text as possible if one's purpose in adaptation is to invoke the sense of the original work. However, as to Dickson's claim that the world of Austen is "foreign to our own," I would like to argue that it is not so. While we do not live in a society defined by the same manners and culture as Austen's heroines, we too can relate to the struggles of pride, vanity, prejudice, misjudgment, social standings, and expectations that Elizabeth and Emma are affected by. While this paper is focusing on films and television that depict Pride and Prejudice and Emma in the time they were set, the vlogs *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* and *Emma Approved* are certainly anachronistic to the original setting, yet they retain the core of the lessons Austen intended to teach. The point pertains more to the emotions and lessons, the experience of the Austen novel, not the costuming and the background.

Another difficulty that Dickson brings up is that "while Austen takes some 300 to 450 pages to unfold her story, the typical screenplay is only about 100 pages long; a screenwriter must do a lot of squishing to fit an Austen tale into a two-hour film" (Troost and Greenfield 44). This problem is somewhat circumvented by BBC/A&E by splitting *Pride and Prejudice* into six episodes, each about an hour long, as well as the vlogs, which each have so many episodes that they altogether are far longer than a feature film, but it pertains to Miramax's *Emma*, and to film adaptation in general. To this, my answer is the same as in the previous conflict: The point of the novels, the experience, can be retained, even if the whole of it is

not. While a film adaptation, with exception, usually cannot exactly replicate the dialogue of the text, it can still be a faithful adaptation by translating properly what is important.

Having addressed these concerns, let us return to the main issue at hand. The experience of the Austen novel is interwoven with the narrativity, with the voice of the narrator and use of free indirect discourse specifically. Through the combination of objective and subjective narration, a reader can experience the story through different, layered lenses. Can the loss of Austen's narrator and free indirect discourse be compensated for? While Austen's novels can expose the characters' consciousness and emotions through narration, to include the audience in the narrative a film has only the sensory tools of audio and visual stimuli. This question of adaptation applies to media based on all types of novels, however they are narrated, but especially challenging with Austen's novels, as these narratives are told partially from the subjective perspective of the characters, in addition to from an objective, third person, external perspective. In contrast, the "camera is resolutely externalizing" (Hutcheon 4). How can film and other multimedia depict these inner thoughts and feelings? How can they translate the narrator's voice? How can free indirect discourse be replaced or accounted for in a screen adaptation? Is there something to be gained from a multimedia adaptation of Austen's works, particularly in terms of appreciating the narrative from a new perspective? Do the different tools of film, the camera work, the visual and auditory stimuli, the external perspective, lend or add to the work in any way?

Films show multiple perspectives, all from an external lens, almost the opposite of free indirect discourse focusing on one character and dipping into her internal world. Is there an advantage to this method of adaptation? What about through vlog, where the story is in a way more narrow than with free indirect discourse, as it is told mostly from the main

character's perspective, as she is the one who narrates events; however, the audience still cannot see inside her head, and one only knows what the vlogger is choosing to share? Can there be improvements to the story when it is told through vlog, or are there only detriments?

“Movies<sup>4</sup> are fundamentally visual, with the images recorded by a camera or created through computer imagining being their single, essential feature,” says Linda Cahir (Cahir 45). As touched upon earlier, film uses external tools of visual and audio stimuli to tell a story. “Like a work of literature,” Cahir continues, “a film is the result of the process of composition, the meaning of which is ‘to make by putting together.’ Literature and film composition, unlike a painting, for example, both comprise a series of constantly changing images” (ibid). Just as literature is a composition of paragraphs or stanzas, explains Cahir, a film is (generally) a series of shots. Several shots are usually done of the same scene, at different angles, based on the perspectives the director wants to show: this can be close-ups (CUs) of different characters, sometimes over the shoulder (OTS) of another character, two-shots (2S) of two characters together, or wide shots (WS) of several characters, to name a few.<sup>5</sup> Of course, these shots do not have to be of characters necessarily; they can be of objects or scenery, such as a close-up of Emma's archery target or a wide shot of Mr. Darcy's Pemberley estate. An important angle is a point of view (POV) shot: Usually a CU or MCU of another character, a POV shows what a character is seeing. For example, if

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<sup>4</sup> While the mini series is not technically a “movie,” for the purposes of this paper, it is to be understood as one; the term “movie” is often used interchangeably with “film,” while the two are not the same. Film would include both movies and mini serieses, while “movie” obviously deals with the former. However, points made about “movies” in Cahir also apply to media that uses multiple shots and perspectives, as most TV shows do, including the *Pride and Prejudice* mini series.

<sup>5</sup> Based on my own experience in film and media, these are the common shots and their abbreviations.

Emma and Harriet face each other in conversation, showing Harriet's face is showing Emma's point of view, and is therefore a POV shot. The angle of the camera, the subject of the shot, is the most valuable tool a filmmaker can utilize to show his/her meaning, to convey the narrative s/he wants to tell. "Like words in a sentence, film frames are placed in a specific sequence. They have a definite syntactical structure; and, as in writing, the sequence of the frames (which creates the film's particular syntax) helps to create the work's clarity of meaning and definition of style" (Cahir 46). Traditionally, each scene is shot from a variety of angles, and the director works with the editor to determine which perspectives are featured at which second-- or rather, which 1/24th of a second, as seconds are cut into twenty-four frames. Through these camera shots, perspective is lent, compensating, in a way, for the lack of written perspectives of various characters, particularly the heroine. As Suzanne Ferriss writes in "Emma Becomes Clueless", "Cinema inevitably transforms narrative point of view. Since the photographic medium represents exterior states, film can only suggest interior states through subjective point--of-view shots, visually rendering the protagonist's perceptions" (Troost and Greenfield 123). This again reinforces the priority of the camera and visual impact on narrative. However, while Cahir minimizes the importance of sound, of audio stimuli, there is much to be gained from the script as well. "Film is not only a visual medium... it also uses words-- spoken words within the dramatic situation... [and] also voice-over words" (Hutcheon 4). Dialogue and voiceover are important tools in adaptations, and they cannot be taken for granted.

### **One Woman, One Voice: The World of Vlog**

Finally, let us turn to the vlogs. Vlogs, unlike films, often only contain one perspective: that of the vlogger. The classic set up of a vlog is the camera trained on the

vlogger in a close-up or medium close-up as s/he speaks... and that's it. That is the camera work. Vlogs can be shot in one take, or they can be done in several takes edited together.

*The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* follows this one-angle style, using the latter form, of multiple takes; it is obvious from the slightly awkward jumps (meant to have been edited by Lizzie's friend Charlotte Lu (Charlotte Lucas), presumably purposefully amateur) that episodes of the vlog series are not done in one take.

*Emma Approved* is styled slightly differently than *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, for although it mostly involves Emma talking to the camera, it also includes cameras set up by Emma for the purpose of "documenting [her] greatness" (*Emma Approved*, E1, 2:11) in her coworkers' offices, allowing us to see their conversations without her, and these shots are edited into the vlog as well. *Emma Approved* does not seem to jump from take to take, transitioning more smoothly than *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, perhaps because it is not pretending to be edited by a grad student.

A vlog presents many of the same complications as a work of film: It, too, relies on visual and auditory stimuli, as an onscreen adaptation form. This will raise the same questions as the *Pride and Prejudice* miniseries and *Emma* feature film, then: How can the narrative be translated? How are the perspectives of free indirect discourse maintained, if at all?

Silke Jandl, in the article "The Lizzie Bennet Diaries: Adapting Jane Austen in the Internet Age", claims that "Austen's style of focalization lends itself well to the vlogs" (Jandl

167).<sup>6</sup> Interpreting Austen's focalization of Austen novels as completely in line with the heroine would lend to this conclusion; if one determines that Pride and Prejudice and Emma are mostly from the subjective view of the respective heroines, Jandl's statement rings entirely true, since vlogs almost completely show the vlogger's perspective.

However, the difficulties with this theory are twofold, both because of the fact that the vlogger is choosing the content she wishes to present: One, there is too much subjectivity; Jandl has ignored the fact that free indirect discourse also involves an element of the objective narrator, and while this can be compensated for in film's externality, it is not so in a vlog, where the heroine can choose what she says to the camera. Two, along those lines, the vlogger is always aware that the camera is on her, and her conversations with others onscreen are somewhat staged-- she knows she has an audience. Jandl herself admits that "the core story is related from Lizzie's point of view. This means that whatever she is prepared to share on the Internet will be subjective as well as selective" (Jandl 178). Therefore, we cannot trust that the vlogger is being entirely open and honest-- "accordingly, her perspective is never presented as the whole truth" (ibid)-- unlike in film, where the characters are simply living their lives without knowledge of a camera presence (obviously the actors are aware of the cameras, but with the suspension of disbelief in play, we look at films as with characters who are unaware of an audience).

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<sup>6</sup> Jandl presents other arguments as to why Pride and Prejudice lends itself well to a vlog adaptation, such as that its plot centers around one family, and it contains much dialogue (which I think lends itself better to film than vlog, though *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* and *Pride and Prejudice* do a marvelous job compensating for this). The former of these two arguments is perfectly valid, and it lends itself to Emma as well in that having a plot centered on a small cast of characters, particularly one heroine, is precisely what a vlog needs; however, that is beyond the scope of this paper's discussion of specifically narration being translated.

Furthermore, Jandl points out that the primary purpose of a vlog is to attract viewers, meaning the world of the vlog is filled with exaggerations for the sake of entertainment; characters will not necessarily be honest if their primary goal is crowd pleasing. With this in mind, we will explore the vlog adaptations *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* and *Emma Approved*.

This paper will show that while compensating for the narrative voice is not an easy task, nor is it always accomplished, it is possible to adapt Austen's narrative style to fit the screen, big or small. While BBC/A&E's *Pride and Prejudice* miniseries does align the viewer with Elizabeth Bennet to an extent through POV shots and following her with the camera, it also shows us much of Mr. Darcy, and Elizabeth from Mr. Darcy's point of view, establishing him as a hero, unlike the novel. The Miramax *Emma* does not take proper advantage of POV/CU shots, instead using a lot of WS, while it does have voiceover giving us more of Emma's inner world, and useful CUs of the heroine. The vlogs, on the other hand, align us with the heroines well because of their first-person narration style. However, because there is no objective narrator, there is no one to establish our trust in Elizabeth, which is needed to replicate the novel's experience; since that is not as necessary for Emma, the effect of the novel is able to be recreated.

### **Pride and Prejudice: Seeing the World Through Elizabeth Bennet's Fine Eyes**

Felicia Bonaparte in "Conjecturing Possibilities: Reading and Misreading Texts in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*" points out that *Pride and Prejudice* is full of conjecture, using words such as "suspect," "presume," "conjecture," "guess," "detect," "surmise," "infer," "trust," "perceive," "believe," "construe" (Bonaparte 142). "Suppose," says Bonaparte, is Austen's "favorite of this kind," appearing, to her count, ninety times in the

novel (ibid). This close reading of the text shows that Austen drops hints for the reader that not everything is factual, to be depended upon-- much of the text relies upon assumptions. Even when the word “know” is used, as Bonaparte points out, it can be false. For example, Lady Catherine says, “I know it must be scandalous falsehood” to rumors of Darcy and Elizabeth discussing marriage (Bonaparte 143). Mr. Darcy also tells Elizabeth in his letter that he is secure in his conviction that Jane has no real feelings for Bingley, which the reader knows to be false. Bonaparte’s article shows that the convictions in the novel are often, indeed, misjudgments.

However, all of this is realized upon a second, third, or millionth reading of the text; it is not part of the original reading. When we read Pride and Prejudice, it is with faith in Elizabeth, established at the beginning of the text, as addressed previously. The heroine seems to us, the readers, a rational, good judge of character. Therefore, when Mr. Bingley suddenly departs from town, for example, we can only assume what Elizabeth does. Elizabeth, speaking with Jane of the letter Miss Bingley writes to explain their departure, fumes about Mr. Bingley’s sisters and Mr. Darcy, “They may wish many things besides his happiness: they may wish his increase of wealth and consequence; they may wish him to marry a girl who has all the importance of money, great connections, and pride” (Austen, Pride and Prejudice, 132). Jane insists, “If [Miss Bingley, Mrs. Hurst, and Mr. Darcy] believed [Mr. Bingley] attached to me, they would not try to part us” (Austen, Pride and Prejudice, 132), but Elizabeth is convinced it is not so. We are already set up to believe Elizabeth’s version of events: Through free indirect discourse, we have already been exposed to the story through Elizabeth’s perspective. The narrator tells us that Elizabeth hears what happened, she listens “in silent indignation... divided between concern for her sister and

resentment against all others” (Austen, Pride and Prejudice, 129), that she dismisses the idea of Mr. Bingley having any feelings for Miss Darcy, as insinuated, because “That he was really fond of Jane, she doubted no more than she had ever done;” she believes, however, that Mr. Bingley is “the slave of his designing friends, [which] led him to sacrifice his own happiness to the caprice of their inclinations” (ibid); and then the narrative slips into Elizabeth’s head smoothly: “Had his own happiness, however, been the only sacrifice, he might have been allowed to sport with it...”

This is an example of where the focalization is blurred, and the reader is tricked into seeing the story from Elizabeth’s perspective. Thus, when she debates the cause of the party’s leaving Netherfield with Jane, we without a doubt side with our heroine. This conviction is furthered when Elizabeth discovers from Fitzwilliam for a fact that it was Darcy who insisted on Bingley’s leaving town and terminating the match: she determines that it was Darcy’s pride, which “would receive a deeper wound from the want of importance in his friend’s connections” (Austen, Pride and Prejudice, 177), that caused him to interfere. This is the tool of alignment-- while it is not as much in free indirect discourse as the earlier part of this story, we are only told Elizabeth’s thoughts on this conversation, and this alignment with her perspective strengthens our belief that she is correct about Mr. Darcy’s shallow motives. Ultimately, we will learn that Jane was right: If Mr. Darcy had understood the bond between Mr. Bingley and herself, he would not have torn them apart.

The other major plot point where we follow Elizabeth’s lead in assuming the worst of Mr. Darcy is the story concerning Mr. Wickham. When the three run into each other first, Elizabeth notes that both men “changed colour” (Austen, Pride and Prejudice, 71), and notices that while “Mr. Wickham, after a few minutes, touched his hat,” this is “a salutation

which Mr. Darcy *just deigned* to return” (ibid, italics mine). This observation that Mr. Darcy is the rude and standoffish one can be Elizabeth’s, not the narrator’s-- another example of free indirect discourse misleading the reader. That we are in Elizabeth’s head is proved even more likely by the next sentence, clearly hers: “What could be the meaning of it?” We are already inclined to like Mr. Wickham more than Mr. Darcy, as Elizabeth does. This positive view of Mr. Wickham is solidified by the description from the narrator, “Mr. Wickham was the happy man towards whom almost every female eye was turned, and Elizabeth was the happy woman by whom he finally seated himself; and [it was an] agreeable manner in which he immediately fell into conversation” (Austen, Pride and Prejudice, 74). This favorable impression of Mr. Wickham leads us to readily believe his story, as Elizabeth does. Her reaction to his story reinforces the perception of him as the wronged, noble hero. Of Mr. Darcy, she “exclaimed, ‘To treat in such a manner the godson, the friend, the favourite of his father!’ She could have added, ‘A young man, too, like *you*, whose countenance may vouch for your being amiable’” (Austen, Pride and Prejudice, 78). Again, the novel is setting us up to fall for Elizabeth’s judgements by using her as the focalizer.

The turning point of Pride and Prejudice is something that might normally be considered quite ordinary: the receipt of a letter. This letter, Mr. Darcy’s explanation to Elizabeth of events from his perspective, changes everything as a reader by allowing for an understanding of a viewpoint other than Elizabeth’s. We learn that Darcy was quite convinced of Jane’s “indifference,” (Austen, Pride and Prejudice, 188), and, while he disapproved of the match in other ways as well, was motivated by care of protecting his friend’s heart. The letter also addresses Elizabeth’s entirely inaccurate assumptions of Darcy and Wickham’s past. Elizabeth trusted Wickham’s versions of the events, though he makes

outrageous claims of Darcy's character, because she was predisposed to liking Wickham and disliking Darcy. Elizabeth herself admits this to herself, growing "absolutely ashamed of herself" when she realizes she has been "blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd" (Austen, Pride and Prejudice, 196). "'How despicably I have acted!'" she [cries]. 'I who have prided myself on my discernment!'"

This letter and scene are the climax of the novel: the moments the reader realizes, along with Elizabeth, that she has been wrong all along. The reader, until this point, has thought Elizabeth judgement to be steadfastly accurate, and now all is in upheaval. Our heroine realized that her own vanity has led her to be prejudiced against Mr. Darcy, who has insulted her pride from the beginning. Just as Elizabeth must reread Darcy's letter to truly understand it, go back in her memory to see the past with an unprejudiced eye, the reader of Pride and Prejudice must return to the beginning, to see what clues s/he has missed that could have revealed a completely different reading of all the prior events.

It is not even Mr. Darcy's feelings for Elizabeth, which she refuses to see, that shock the reader, as we have been privy to his commentary and reflections on her "fine eyes" and "face of a pretty woman" (Austen, Pride and Prejudice, 27) all along. For "though he had detected with a critical eye more than one failure of perfect symmetry in her form" at first glance, and "made it clear to himself and his friends that she had hardly a good feature in her face," Mr. Darcy looks at Elizabeth again to see the "beautiful expression of her dark eyes," which "rendered [her face] uncommonly intelligent," and "he was forced to acknowledge her figure to be light and pleasing" (Austen, Pride and Prejudice, 24). Besides her physical appearance, Mr. Darcy is "caught by [the] easy playfulness" of her manners-- and we know that "Of this, [Elizabeth is] perfectly unaware." Knowing Mr. Darcy's thoughts of Elizabeth,

we understand that he cares for her, when she does not know or return the feelings, but we do not know that Mr. Darcy is not the villain Elizabeth makes him out to be until the letter. All along, though, while we understand that Mr. Darcy is falling in love with Elizabeth, we do not understand that he may be worthy of her. Even at the point of the letter, Darcy has character development to do-- but he is not the evil, cruel figure that Wickham paints him to be and Elizabeth believes he is. Overall, we are misguided about Darcy as Elizabeth is: not about his feelings, but about his character. We must learn, with Elizabeth, not to be prejudiced because of our first impressions.

### **Match-Making in Alignment with the Title Character of Emma**

Emma Woodhouse is (perhaps arguably) a worse judge of character than Elizabeth Bennet. While Elizabeth is wrong about many things, particularly concerning Wickham and Darcy, Emma is wrong about practically everything. Elizabeth, at least, understands those she is close to, like her sister Jane; Emma, even by the end of the novel, is totally wrong about Harriet, assuming the other woman is in love with Frank Churchill when she is actually enamored with Mr. Knightley. With Emma, we are able to understand that she is continuously wrong; still, we miss many of the same truths under her nose because we are too wrapped up in her perspective. Therefore, while we keep thinking we have learned our lesson in being a better reader, we do not actually become better readers unless we mistrust Emma's speculations, which we are not wont to do completely until the end of the novel-- while we never have full faith in her, we are still as confused as she is, and we miss many clues due to the alignment with her perspective.

Our alignment with Emma is reinforced in two ways: One, Emma is made out clearly as our heroine. Most of the narrative revolves around Emma's perspective, using her as the main focalizer of the story. The first plot point, Miss Taylor's marriage, is told in relation to Emma, as she is referred to in terms of being Emma's friend: "It was on the wedding-day of this beloved friend... the event had every promise of happiness for her friend..." (Austen, Emma, 4). This, coupled with the novel being named after Emma and the first sentence being a descriptor of her, predisposes us to understand that Emma is our heroine and sympathize with her, more than with Elizabeth, who only enters the story pages in. From this point and throughout, the novel almost entirely details events from Emma's point of view. This sets us up to see things Emma's way, even as we watch her make many mistakes throughout the story.

The second way we are aligned with Emma is through free indirect discourse. Our impression of Mr. Robert Martin, for example, may sound objective, but it is through Emma's eyes. The clue that the narrative will be slipping into Emma's perspective is, "Emma was not sorry to have such an opportunity of survey; and walking a few yards... soon made her quick eye sufficiently acquainted with Mr. Robert Martin" (Austen, Emma, 28), before the next sentence continues with the description of the man: "His appearance was very neat, and he looked like a sensible young man, but his person had no other advantage" (ibid). While this sounds like any other description in the novel (like the example of Mr. Weston being introduced by the narrator, perfectly objective), we can hear a hint of subjectivity in "his person had no other advantage," which we know belongs to Emma, due to the preceding sentence. Through free indirect discourse such as this, we are still drawn into Emma's perspective, though not with the conviction we have of Elizabeth, validated by the narrator.

Emma does not have one moment of reckoning, though; she is constantly proven wrong throughout the novel, and we learn with her, slowly. This is in contrast to Elizabeth, with whom we learn our lesson on misreading people, on pride and prejudice, in one scene. Emma is never perfect in our eyes. In fact, Emma is described as thinking too highly of her own self in the beginning of the novel, but it is quickly shown that even she knows she can be wrong. This is shown in the case of Mr. Elton, whom Emma decides is perfect “driving the young farmer out of Harriet’s head” (Austen, Emma, 31), but later concedes that “she had taken up the idea, she supposed, and made every thing bend to it” (Austen, Emma, 126). This is an example of Emma realizing she has been wrong, and it is on one series of instances-- all that she misconstrued to be Mr. Elton’s feelings for Harriet, when they were really for herself all along. We must reflect on these past misreadings, as Emma does: “His manners... The picture! How eager he had been about the picture” (ibid). As readers aligned with Emma’s perspective, we have fallen for Emma’s miscalculations; though we know Emma is scheming to match Harriet and Mr. Elton, we have been led to believe that her design was working. This can be considered one of the many moments of reckoning in the novel—but we still do not learn. If we were good readers, we would be able to pick up on Austen’s clues to the truth, but we are far too immersed in Emma’s perspective for this.

Let us look back with Emma on the Mr. Elton misreading to understand why we missed these clues. When Mr. Elton compliments Emma’s improvement of Harriet, we read it as a compliment of Harriet, like Emma, by interpreting it as a comment on how Harriet is perfect now. This is because the conversation is prefaced by Emma’s view of it, through free indirect discourse: “His perception of the striking improvement in Harriet’s manner... was not one of the least agreeable proofs of his growing attachment” (Austen, Emma, 38).

Therefore, when Mr. Elton says, “You have given Harriet all that she required... you have made her graceful and easy. She was a beautiful creature when she came to you; but, in my opinion, the attractions you have added are infinitely superior to what she received from nature” (Austen, Emma, 38), we believe this unprompted compliment of Harriet’s improvement shows his affection for her, as Emma does. Now, as informed readers, we know it is just a compliment of Emma’s skill. Furthermore, when Mr. Elton agrees with Emma’s statement about Harriet that she ““never met with a disposition more truly amiable,”” we are told that his reply, ““I have no doubt of it’,” is “spoken with a sort of sighing animation which had a vast deal of the lover” (Austen, Emma, 39). This serves as further duplicity, as we are told how pleased Emma is with this reaction. As we look back, we can see that Mr. Elton sighs as a lover merely because he is talking to Emma. As for the picture, the narrator describes that Emma “was not less pleased, another day, with the manner in which he seconded a sudden wish of hers-- to have Harriet’s picture” (Austen, Emma, 39). The way this is phrased, we must be led to believe that Mr. Elton, as stated, wishes to “*have* Harriet’s picture” (ibid, italics mine). However, what Mr. Elton actually says is, “Let me entreat you... It would indeed be a delight: let me entreat you, Miss Woodhouse, to exercise so charming a talent in favour of your friend” (ibid). He then goes on to talk about Emma’s drawings, to the point where Emma even thinks, “You know nothing of drawing. Don’t pretend to be in raptures about mine. Keep your raptures for Harriet’s face” (Austen, Emma, 39-40). This praise of Emma’s skill could have been an indication of Mr. Elton’s preference for her, but Emma frames it as “pretend,” and we therefore see it from her angle, until she is proved wrong.

Mr. Knightley is often the instigator of Emma's realizations that she has been in error. Back in the portrait scene, Mr. Knightley points out that Emma has made Harriet "too tall" (Austen, Emma, 44). Interestingly, "Emma knew that she had, but would not own it" (ibid). Even Emma herself knows that Mr. Knightley is right about her own misconceptions, but she will not admit it. On a larger scale than drawing her friend disproportionately in a picture, Mr. Knightley points out that Emma has meddled inappropriately regarding Harriet's love life. When Emma reveals that Mr. Martin proposed and that Harriet had rejected him, Mr. Knightley intuits, "You saw her answer! you wrote her answer too. Emma, this is your doing. You persuaded her to refuse him" (Austen, Emma, 56). Again, Emma refuses to admit herself in the wrong: "And if I did, (which, however, I am far from allowing), I should not feel that I had done wrong" (ibid). Here, as opposed to with the painting, Emma does not allow even to herself that she did not do the right thing, until the end of the novel, when she is happy that Harriet accepts Mr. Martin. All along, clues to Emma being wrong lie in what Mr. Knightley says. This is another clue to show the reader that Emma is fallible from the start-- the type of clue not found in Pride and Prejudice.<sup>7</sup>

Where Emma is most deceived, however, is in her own feelings, leading us to be deceived about them, too. Emma's judgement is impaired is in her own "affections" for Frank Churchill. Emma always had an interest in Frank Churchill, even before meeting him:

"Now it so happened, that, in spite of Emma's resolution of never marrying, there was something in the name of Mr. Frank Churchill, which always interested her. She

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<sup>7</sup> Except, perhaps, in Miss Bingley's aforementioned warning of Mr. Wickham's untrustworthiness-- however, we do not consider her a reliable source, as she is portrayed as a villain. Unlike Mr. Knightley, whom we might believe, if we take his words into serious consideration.

had frequently thought,-- especially since his father's marriage with Miss Taylor,-- that if she *were* to marry, he was the very person to suit her in age, character, and condition. He seemed, by this connection between the families, quite to belong to her... she had a great curiosity to see him, a decided intention of finding him pleasant, of being liked by him to a certain degree, and a sort of pleasure in the idea of their being coupled in their friends' imaginations." (Austen, Emma, 112)

Emma's predisposition to like Frank Churchill leads her to an immediate conclusion, upon seeing him, that she likes him: "She felt immediately that she should like him" (Austen, Emma, 179), and his "well-bred ease of manner, and a readiness to talk... convinced her that he came intending to be acquainted with her." Emma thus deceives herself that she and Frank Churchill have feelings for each other. Because of our alignment with Emma, our understanding of her feelings mirrors hers-- though an informed reader could look again to see that she has only built it up in her head that she likes him, the first time reader sees only that Emma and Frank Churchill have a natural chemistry. We only realize Emma does not have real feelings for Frank when Emma realizes that "her own attachment" to him has "really subsided into a mere nothing... not worth thinking of," and that she has never really loved him, she worries about his embarrassment, as he had "undoubtedly been always so much the most in love of the two" (Austen, Emma, 229). And until it is revealed that Frank Churchill has been engaged to Jane Fairfax all along, we can believe Emma's version of events, since we are focused on her perception of Frank's feelings, as well as his flirtatious behavior towards her. Still, there are clues to the contrary, for the educated reader, such as Frank's hurry to get the Bateses (aka Jane) from the carriage at the ball, and his visiting them before departing. Had we learned to be better readers from Emma's reckoning with Mr. Elton

and Harriet, we would not have missed these clues. However, because it takes us the whole novel to progressively become better readers, we still get lost in Emma's delusions at this point.

In the case of Mr. Knightley, Emma has no sense of his feelings towards her, or her own feelings towards him, until the end of the novel, and so neither does the reader, due to the disadvantage of only seeing things through Emma's lens. Mr. Knightley, on the other hand, whom Emma describes as "the worst judge in the world" (Austen, Emma, 136),<sup>8</sup> understands it from the moment Frank Churchill enters the picture. This is why Mr. Knightley has "certainly taken an early dislike to Frank Churchill" (Austen, Emma, 326), which Austen describes as "for some reason best known to himself"-- this reason, which only he knows and not Emma, is his love for her. Mr. Knightley sees Frank Churchill as competition for Emma, and he therefore dislikes him before he even sets eyes on him-- and seeing how handsome he is probably does not help the situation. This is a hint that a reader can easily understand in retrospect, but because the novel does not delve into this "reason best known to himself" and instead focuses on what Emma perceives, it is not obvious upon first reading. Similarly, when she agrees to dance with Mr. Knightley at the ball, Emma says, "We are not really so much brother and sister as to make it at all improper," to which Mr. Knightley exclaims, "Brother and sister!--no, indeed" (Austen, Emma, 315). This is another clue to Mr. Knightley's true feelings that is not apparent to a fresh reader. As for her own feelings towards Mr. Knightley, Emma herself does not realize them, and it is therefore virtually impossible to distinguish them when first reading the novel. Though there may be

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<sup>8</sup> This is specifically referring to Frank Churchill's dependence on his aunt and uncle, but a good example of her attitude towards his opinions that conflict with hers in general.

slight clues-- such as Emma's constant worrying about Mr. Knightley's approval, or her collaboration with him to get her father comfortable the night of the Christmas Eve party, this does not mean to the reader any more than their closeness as practically relatives, since that is how Emma considers them-- not "*so much* brother and sister" (ibid, italics mine) as to make dancing together "improper," but that still implies to some extent.

Overall, Emma's perception does shape our own, leaving us to continuously be taught lessons in reading, as Emma learns the truths about others and herself. Throughout the novel, we slowly understand to look back at events and reinterpret them, as Emma does herself, but we continue to make mistakes with her until the very end. Therefore, while we learn to take a second look at situations at various points throughout the novel, it takes the conclusion to really make us better readers, and we must reevaluate the whole of the novel.

### **Mini Series, Major Changes: BBC/A&E's *Pride and Prejudice***

The 1995 BBC/A&E miniseries adaptation *Pride and Prejudice*, upon shallow glance, appears to be a pretty perfect replica of the novel. The setting, costuming, and dances evoke the Regency period of Austen, and much of the original dialogue is preserved. We even have Elizabeth's character built as one we can trust. However, the miniseries makes one major choice that changes the entire dynamic of perspective: giving Mr. Darcy major screen time, disproportionate to the amount he is spotlighted in the novel. This alters our perception of him, and thereby throws off our trust in Elizabeth's version of events, to an extent.

In this adaptation, we first see Elizabeth running down a hill. We see her free-spirited playfulness, which the novel spells out as what attracts Darcy to her, besides her physical appearance. We see Mrs. Bennet complain as Kitty and Lydia fight, and she calls for her two

eldest daughters, Jane and Elizabeth, painting them as the peacemakers and voices of reason in the text. Hereby, Elizabeth's character has been established, without the use of written description, as Austen describes her in the novel through the narrator's voice. Mr. Bennet's description of Elizabeth, however, is closely echoed, in his line "Lizzie has a little more wit than the rest" (BBC/A&E E1 5:50), lending the credibility to her character that he does in the novel. Therefore, we trust Elizabeth in the series as we do in the novel, which is important for the effect of aligning our perspective with hers.

However, even before Elizabeth, Mr. Darcy is introduced-- unlike in the novel. He rides in on his black horse in the opening shots of the first episode of the miniseries, alongside Mr. Bingley, and the two appraise Netherfield Park. He deigns that Netherfield Park is "pretty enough" (BBC/A&E E1 1:00) but claims that Bingley "will find the society something savage." While we get a couple CUs of Bingley's smiling face here, we get nothing but a side profile of Darcy.

Darcy is thus established as a principal character, but he is also semi-established as proud, which is confirmed later by another added scene: As Darcy and Miss Bingley come into the picture, literally, before the assembly at Merryton, they take in their surroundings unsmilingly (BBC/A&E E1 12:09), until Miss Bingley smiles sarcastically as she asks Mr. Darcy if he thinks they will "be quite safe" in the lower class neighborhood. We then get our first CU of Darcy: a side profile, still unsmiling, for less than five seconds. Lisa Hopkins, in "Mr. Darcy's Body," points out that Darcy is mainly seen in profile, until his first proposal to Elizabeth (Troost and Greenfield 113-115). Hopkins suggests that this is part of the phenomenon referred to by scholars Nora Nachumi and Stephanie Oppenheim as "hot Darcy" tension (Nachumi and Oppenheim 17).

I would like to posit, however, that this is to mimic the effect of the novel: While we do dip into Mr. Darcy's psyche slightly, we mostly see him from Elizabeth's perspective, and she does not see him fully until his proposal and onwards-- finally understanding his intentions towards her with the proposal, and seeing the rest of his perspective with the letter, after which Darcy is seen full-on. This is part of the camera establishing Elizabeth's perspective. This is an example of the miniseries properly playing into the experience of the novel, but it is unbalanced by the disproportionate amount of Darcy.

Other scenes with Mr. Darcy, additions to the miniseries from the novel, derail us from the Elizabeth's-perception-of-Darcy-train. For example, the scene where Elizabeth is playing with the dogs at Netherfield park, and Darcy watches her from the window. While we are still seeing his side profile, not really seeing him, we are getting much more Mr. Darcy perspective than in the novel. We see Elizabeth from his POV shots. This partially aligns us with Mr. Darcy, too. This bonus footage of Mr. Darcy-- including the famous scene with his lake dip at Pemberley-- softens us to him, makes us see him as more than Elizabeth's object of contempt. While we still do see him as proud, as slighting Elizabeth, we are not quite as in line with her perception of him as we are in the novel.

Also, Mr. Darcy's obsession with Elizabeth is as apparent and known to the viewer as it is to the reader of Pride and Prejudice. Just as in the novel, Mr. Darcy describes to Miss Bingley the "agreeably engaged" state of his mind in "meditating on the very great pleasure which a pair of fine eyes in the face of a pretty woman can bestow" (BBC/A&E E1 32:05). When asked whose the eyes, Mr. Darcy answers Elizabeth Bennet's, and the camera follows his gaze with a CU of the subject of his reflection. CUs of Darcy are often followed by ones

of Elizabeth, showing that he is watching her. This helps Mr. Darcy become the hero, the obvious future love interest of the story.

This makes the plotline with Mr. Wickham confusing. On the one hand, Elizabeth trusts Mr. Wickham, and we have a level of alignment with her. On the other hand, we know Mr. Darcy is the hero of this story-- so how can we believe that he has acted so despicably, as Mr. Wickham claims he has? All the more confusing is the camerawork in Mr. Darcy and Mr. Wickham's interaction when they meet in town. Mr. Darcy is literally on his high horse. The camera shows a CU of Elizabeth, an MCU of Mr. Darcy, then a CU of Mr. Wickham, as Elizabeth watches the two men's eyes meet, faces both shocked. In a CU, Mr. Wickham tips his hat to Mr. Darcy, who in his own CU stares the other man down. This action inclines the viewer to favor Mr. Wickham, continuing the idea of him being all politeness and Mr. Darcy being all pride. This staging and slight change of action (in the novel, Mr. Darcy slightly tips his hat in return), as well as the fact that there are POV shots from all three characters' perspectives, leaves the viewer unsure of what to think, who to believe.

The moment of reckoning, Mr. Darcy's letter, is greatly diminished by this buildup of Mr. Darcy and confusion of focalization, as well as the fact that we watch Mr. Darcy himself write the letter. As he writes, Mr. Darcy revisits the past through flashbacks. The viewer, therefore, must reevaluate all before Elizabeth has the chance to. The experience of reading and learning together with Elizabeth is partially stripped away from the viewer of the miniseries. There is too much balance of Elizabeth's perspective and Mr. Darcy's perspective for us to completely make Elizabeth's mistakes and learn from them.

While the miniseries does a wonderful job adapting Pride and Prejudice in many other respects (beyond the scope of this paper), it does not properly align the viewer fully enough with Elizabeth's perspective, instead focusing on Mr. Darcy often and somewhat ruining the experience of submitting to Elizabeth's judgement and becoming a better reader with her.<sup>9</sup> The moment of reckoning, the reappraisal of Mr. Darcy, is lessened by our soft spot for him all along, our unwillingness to believe he is the villain that Elizabeth convinces he is in the novel.

### **Mira-maximizing the *Emma* Experience**

The Miramax version of *Emma* mimics the effect of the novel in that the scenes revolve around Emma, so we do not know the story beyond what she sees, and we hear her thoughts through voiceover. We are not as aligned with her as we may have been had the film used more POV shots instead of WS, but we still see from her perspective more than anyone else's, importantly.

This adaptation opens with narration about "a young girl who knew how this world should be run" (Miramax 3:08). The camera pulls back from a CU on a spinning globe to focus on the face of a smiling Emma, who proclaims that "the most beautiful thing in the world is a match well-made" (Miramax 3:10). We immediately see Emma, from the camera's

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<sup>9</sup> As will be discussed in the conclusion, not necessarily is the adaptation trying to replicate the narrative effect. However, as I argued in the introduction, the most important piece for the adaptation to retain is the experience, and the experience of the Austen novel is, as I argue, in its narrative style. Therefore, the focus on Darcy (who is purposefully portrayed by the handsome Colin Firth), while certainly a stylistic choice and part of the "Hot Darcy" phenomenon mentioned earlier, detracts from what this paper considers to be the essence of Austen adaptation.

love of her, as the star of this show, and from the narration, the sense of entitlement that the novel marks as a flaw of Emma's from the beginning.

When Harriet is describing Mr. Martin to Emma, the perfect opportunity for a CU of Emma's reaction, or a POV shot to align us with Emma's view of Harriet, is missed. However, when they encounter the man in question, we are aligned with Emma's thoughts of him, as in the novel, by the camera closing in on Emma, with a voiceover to inform us. The camera turns to an MCU of Emma, whose voiceover says, "Really, Harriet? We can do better than this" (Miramax 15:25), while she makes an unimpressed face. This focalizes the story from Emma's perspective, and we primarily understand Emma's view of Robert Martin.

When Mr. Elton praises Emma's improvement of Harriet in the novel, we have access to her thoughts. In the film, however, there is no voiceover, no CU of Emma's face to see her reaction-- no indicator as to her belief that the conversation reflects Mr. Elton's having feelings for Harriet. However, in the next scene, where Emma draws Harriet's picture, and Mr. Elton hints of his affections for Emma by saying suggestively that there are "no husbands or wives *at present*" (Miramax 18:39), we can see Emma interpret it as directed towards Harriet, since she looks at Mr. Elton, then at Harriet with raised eyebrows. When Mr. Knightley comments that Emma has made Harriet too tall, as in the novel, we again do not know Emma's thoughts, but Mr. Elton responds that "It may not be Miss Smith's height in terms of measurement, but it is surely the height of her character" (Miramax 18:57), and the camera closes in on Emma's face as she turns to Harriet, eyes bulging with the conviction that Mr. Elton has just expressed very strong partiality for Harriet. This CU aligns us with Emma's perspective, making us construe Mr. Elton's words as she does. While we do not have certainty in her being right, we are led to believe her view, since it is what we are

seeing, as in the novel. The dialogue, as it happens, encourages this view far too much; in the novel, Mr. Elton merely defends the measurements as correct. This tricks us into believing Emma is right, which does not happen in Austen: While we are aligned with the heroine in the novel, we do not have proof of her being right.

To align the reader with Emma's thoughts regarding Mr. Frank Churchill, the movie again turns to voiceover. Emma writes, presumably in a diary, when Frank Churchill leaves, "Well, he loves me... I felt listless after he left and had some sort of headache, so I must be in love as well. I must confess I expected love to feel somewhat different than this" (Miramax 1:04:53). Voiceover is a clever tool in translating a novel such as Emma, which revolves around a character's inner world; this way, we are able to follow Emma's thought process throughout the movie-- on this thread, we have her finally conceding that she "must own" that she is "not in love with Frank," when he leaves in the middle of the narrative, and she realizes that she has "not thought of him since he left" (Miramax 1:15:05). As she writes this, and we hear it in voiceover, the thought of Frank Churchill and Harriet pops into her head, which she exclaims aloud for the audience to follow.

Because of Emma's voiceovers, we are led to believe that Harriet likes Mr. Churchill, aligning us once again with her perspective. After the gypsy incident, when Harriet throws her remnants of Mr. Elton into the fire and intones, "Goodbye, Mr. Elton," (Miramax 1:27:05), a voiceover of Emma continues, "Hello, Mr. Churchill" (ibid), presuming Harriet's finally getting over Mr. Elton has to do with the earlier events of that day, entwining our view with hers.

The film uses both visual and audio stimuli to create Emma's final moment of recognition-- when she realizes that she is in love with Mr. Knightley, the camera uses an image flashback during another voiceover. Emma realizes her feelings for Mr. Knightley through another journal entry; she begins by writing of her efforts to reconcile with Miss Bates after her egregious insult of the latter, then says, "Above all, I am most gratified to say that good Mr. Knightley (Miramax 1:36:14)"-- and here she pauses, and an image of Mr. Knightley kissing her hand and looking up at her flashes in her mind (or rather, on screen). The camera then shows Emma, reflecting on this image before continuing, "Good Mr. Knightley... hmm..." and writing that if he could have "seen into her heart," he would not have "found anything to reprove." This scene truly utilizes the tools available to film to reveal the workings of Emma's mind.

Overall, the Miramax film does a good job recreating the effect of Emma, but there is what to be desired in terms of close-ups, closer alignment to Emma, and a truer experience of the novel based on the original dialogue. As my mentor Nora Nachumi writes in "As If!", the film "*occasionally* succeeds" (Troost and Greenfield 134, italics mine) regarding the "delusions of its principal characters." However, sometimes the film does not align us with Emma's perspective enough, while it exaggerates proof of her imaginations.

### **Lizzie Tells All in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*... Is She Worth Listening To?**

*The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* aligns the viewer with Lizzie's perspective immediately, as, besides for the fact that it is her vlog, she, a modern woman, introduces herself as the voice of reason to her mother's outdated crazy. Lizzie (Elizabeth Bennet) begins her introductory vlog by holding up a t-shirt imprinted with Pride and Prejudice's famous

opening line: “It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife” (*The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* E1 0:01), telling the camera that her mother bought her the shirt for Christmas, making a face and stating that she has “yet to wear it-- ever” (*The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* E1 0:13). Lizzie describes her life as a “grad student with a mountain of student loans... preparing for a career” (*The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* 0:16), showing her audience that what matters to her is making her way into the world, while to her mother, “the only thing that matters is that [she’s] single.” This sets up the audience to see Lizzie as a strong, independent woman trying to succeed, and her mother as a silly woman obsessed with boys. This is further reinforced by their reactions to Bing Lee (Mr. Bingley’s character)’s coming to Netherfield: Lizzie reenacts Mrs. Bennet’s reaction as dramatically overexcited, while she herself comments, “It’s not like we’re all going to put our lives on hold because some rich single guy dropped from the sky” (*The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* E1 3:26). While we know a vlog is by nature subjective, Lizzie is now established as a reasonable person, in contrast to her mother, and we are on her side.

Because we are totally aligned with Lizzie’s perspective already, we seem inclined to believe her impressions of Bing Lee (Mr. Bingley), Caroline Lee (Miss Bingley, the only sister of Mr. Bingley represented in the show), and William Darcy (Mr. Darcy). Lizzie’s opinion of the third is more clearly spelled out than of the first two, though she makes it clear that she does not like any of them. Regarding Darcy, Elizabeth is outright hateful: “I recently had the absolute pleasure of meeting Bing Lee’s friend and house guest, William Darcy. Absolute isn’t the right word. It was more of a grotesque, nauseating, run the other way as if your life depended on it pleasure. Darcy is so obnoxious... Darcy’s boring, stuffy, unbelievably rude” (*The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* E6 0:03). In fact, she titles the vlog’s Episode

6 “Snobby Mr. Douchey”, proclaiming, “William Darcy is a snob... I just can’t properly express what an infuriating douchebag this guy is” (*The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, E6, 0:35). All we know Darcy, then, is what Lizzie tells us. While we do not have the third person narrator validating Lizzie, she seems pretty trustworthy, so we may believe her; it is properly set up in this way. But then this all is undone, and Lizzie is unauthorized: by her best friend and her older sister.

First, Lizzie’s reliability is undermined by Charlotte, who hijacks Lizzie’s video to tell the audience: “Lizzie hates changing her mind” (*The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* E8, 1:32), after clarifying that Bing Lee is nice and that Lizzie is being stubborn about him because she had “already made up her mind to hate” him (*ibid*). This is exceptional because vlog, as pointed out earlier, usually allows the vlogger to be selective about what her audience sees; here, Charlotte is the editor and can go over Lizzie’s head. Interestingly, instead of using this to show other perspectives that Austen does, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* uses Charlotte’s position to undermine Lizzie in a way Austen does not. While Lizzie does admit that Bing Lee is a good guy in Episode 11, proving Charlotte’s theory about her stubbornness and prejudice wrong (or so we may think) and reestablishing her reliability in our eyes, she is once again undermined in Episode 15, as Charlotte and Jane (Jane Bennet) make a video entitled “Lizzie Bennet is in Denial”. Charlotte tells the viewers, “We feel that Lizzie isn’t being particularly... comprehensive with her commentary regarding recent events... didn’t you think her last video was a bit inaccurate” (*The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* E15 0:20). Jane replies that “Lizzie sees what Lizzie sees” (*The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* E15 0:36), which reinforces the audience’s perception that Lizzie’s view is completely biased. Which, of course, it is, but this is contradictory to the Austen experience of Elizabeth Bennet: that of

total trust in her reliability as a judge of character. Jane also comments on Lizzie's portrayal of Mrs. Bennet, "You always make Mom seem unhinged" (*The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* E18 2:39), showing just how subjective and probably inaccurate Lizzie is.

Therefore, when Lizzie tells the "Tale of Two Gents" in Episode 38, we are suspicious of Lizzie's view of the world. It is clear that Lizzie is infatuated with George Wickham. She grins widely as she is distracted by texts from him, and she beams as she reveals, "George Wickham is texting me" (*The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* E38 0:34). Because we are already aware of Lizzie's faults concerning prejudice, thanks to Charlotte and Jane's additions to the vlog, we may not fall as hard for Wickham's story-- who's to say Darcy is bad and Wickham is honest? Our fallible narrator? Why should we believe her at this point? Even when we get to the "Darcy Wickham Drama", as Episode 44 is named, we have Jane undermining Lizzie's read on the situation. When Lizzie starts talking about "the major drama" (*The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* E44 1:09) of the two men running into each other, Jane interrupts to say that "it was not that major."

Even Lizzie herself admits that she makes "a lot of mistakes" (*The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* E45 0:13), though she claims that if she's wrong, she'll "be the first to admit it." Elizabeth from the novel is not a character we believe makes a lot of mistakes-- Lizzie is a totally different focalizer, one whom everyone, even herself, knows is blinded by her own pride and prejudice.

Therefore, we have a hard time trusting Lizzie's version of events when she determines that Bing Lee was coerced by others to leave Jane. While Lizzie has actually become friends with Caroline at this point and does not lump her into the blame for Bing

Lee's leaving town, she does pin it on Darcy: "Bing loves you, I'm sure of that" (*The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* E49 0:26), she tells Jane, "and if there is fault here, it lies not with Bing, but with John the Bastard. And by John, I mean Darcy." Here, Lizzie's lack of credibility really derails her theory (though she is technically correct that Darcy was the one behind this); we see no actual reason for Darcy to have concocted a scheme to separate Jane and Bing (especially with social standings not holding the weight they used to). Therefore, when Jane responds, "Do you really think Darcy engineered a convoluted plot to keep Bing away from me? People don't do that," we are inclined to agree with her, not Lizzie. In the novel, we attribute Jane's reaction to her insistence on seeing the best in people; here, we blame Lizzie for her prejudice, and concur with Jane's rationality that it makes no logical sense for Darcy to have driven the two apart. Jane insinuates that Lizzie is being paranoid, and Lizzie's angry retort that she is not only makes it seem more like she is.

The vlog episode "Are You Kidding Me!" is the equivalent to Mr. Darcy's letter, in that it is the climax of the series, where all is revealed. Darcy confesses his love for Lizzie: here, more of a surprise than in the novel or the miniseries, where we have seen more of Darcy's infatuation with Elizabeth through descriptions or camera shots of his obsessing over her. Lizzie does concede, though still furious at Darcy for what happened to Jane, "Maybe I was a little harsh on Darcy" (*The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* E62 2:52). This is a far cry from her exclamations in the novel, her horror at how wrong she has been. Even so, if we had not known all along how flawed Lizzie's judgement is, this may have been a dramatic reveal-- she had misjudged Darcy! As it is, this only strengthens our view that Lizzie is wrong a lot, as she admitted many episodes ago. This realization that Lizzie has misjudged Darcy is not much of a turning point for us as an audience on how we view our narrator.

Overall, the structure of these vlogs could have translated free indirect discourse very well. We could have been, as we were at the beginning, totally aligned with Lizzie's perspective, even though there is no objective narrator to validate her. The whole point of misleading the reader, though, is lost due to Charlotte and Jane's interventions. They ensure we know all along that Lizzie is being "too harsh" on people. We have no faith in Lizzie's judgement, knowing that we are only getting her side of the story and having her invalidated by the other characters, so we do not learn a lesson about becoming more perceptive by being blinded by Lizzie's perspective.

### ***Emma Approved, Approved Adaptation***

*Emma Approved* is structured similarly to *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* in that it follows the vlog style of mainly being one person talking to the camera, but it often has other characters come on screen. Emma also sets up cameras in her coworkers' offices, but footage from those is rarely shown unless Emma is there. Because there is not a Charlotte to edit the videos and insert her own opinions, the vlog is entirely aligned with what Emma sees, the way the novel is focalized.

We are introduced to Emma in a way that cleverly replicates Austen's third person description of her: Emma reads from her tablet what is presumably a review of her services, which states: "Emma Woodhouse: Beautiful, clever, and brilliant" (*Emma Approved* E1 0:01). Emma is thus established, the way the narrator depicts her. As for getting her way, or being spoiled, this is implied by Alex Knightley (Mr. Knightley) reminding her that her business is funded by her father setting up everything she wanted.

The structure of the vlog is perfect for aligning us with Emma, and as with the voice overs in the feature film, we are able to substitute for free indirect discourse, here by Emma talking to the camera as she is “documenting [her] greatness” (*Emma Approved*, E1, 2:11), giving us an inroad into her mind. Additionally, Emma’s facial expressions, utilizing the visual tool of media, are strong indicators of her feelings-- like in the portrait scene of the feature film, when she shoots Harriet suggestive glances after misinterpreting what Mr. Elton says as feelings for her friend.

For example, after Harriet gushes about Robert Martin, enthusiastically declaring, “He’s really smart” (*Emma Approved* E10 3:34) and becoming giddy when continuing, “If something’s broken, he fixes it!”, Emma sits down with Martin and basically interviews him. As she speaks with him, her face contorts with disgust (*Emma Approved* E11, 3:06, for example). After Martin leaves, Emma says to the camera: “I’m sorry, Harriet, but that is not Emma approved” (*Emma Approved* E11 4:26). These facial expressions coupled with Emma’s remarks to the camera are a great example of how the vlog uses the tools available to it (visual and auditory) to show us what Emma is thinking, an important part of the novel’s experience.

The alignment with Emma’s perspective and being in tune with her thoughts are important for understanding Senator Elton (Mr. Elton)’s feelings the way Emma does. When the senator brings Harriet yogurt and Emma flowers, which we would normally see as an indication that he likes Emma, she is able to convince us that it shows his feelings for Harriet. Emma is sure that “The Proof is in the Yogurt”, as Episode 19 is called. Because the senator had mentioned Icelandic yogurt to Harriet on their fake date, Emma tells Harriet she can tell Senator Elton is interested in her because “When a guy remembers something like

that and acts on it, he likes you” (*Emma Approved* E19 4:42). When Harriet points out that Senator Elton brought Emma flowers, Emma brushes it off, telling Harriet it was to “hide [his] intentions” because he wasn’t sure yet if Harriet returned his affections. While we do not have full trust in Emma (as we shouldn’t, like the novel), we can see this as she does because we are seeing the story through her lens already. Still, in this same episode, Emma tells the senator that she is trying to get Harriet play tickets, and he says he’ll take care of it: “For Harriet, and for you” (*Emma Approved* E19 3:34), which is a hint to his true feelings, and if we are experienced, we can catch this, while a new-to-the-story viewer may not. This replicates the effect of Emma: The viewer is guided by Emma’s perception but given hints to the truth, which are obvious only to the informed viewer.

Again, with Emma’s own feelings regarding Frank Churchill, the vlog uses audio and visual tools to convey her confusion because of the flirtatious dynamic between the two, and her eventual realization that she does not love him. When he enters the picture, Frank is extremely flirtatious with Emma. “One look at you, and how could you ever [have nefarious purposes]” (*Emma Approved* E38 2:36), he says smilingly, basically calling her a sweetheart. He follows this by calling their meeting “auspicious.” This mimics Frank Churchill’s inappropriately coquettish behavior towards Emma in the novel. She is drawn to him immediately, just like in the novel, proclaiming, “It is a shame we never met before” (*Emma Approved* E38 2:49). In the next episode, Emma reflects on Frank Churchill further: “Frank Churchill is an interesting character. Well dressed, smart, worldly” (*Emma Approved* E39 0:55) and playfully says that Frank coming over is “not the reason I dressed up today; that’s just a coincidence,” heavily implying the very opposite. Through the rest of the episode, Emma and Frank Churchill literally bat eyes at each other. The chemistry is clear-- to Emma,

certainly, and to the viewer. Emma's implication that she is dressing up for Frank, and her behavior when he's around, show the viewer that she believes she likes him.

We do get a hint of where Frank's heart truly lies, as he instructs Emma to place him at the table with the Bateses-- AKA, Jane Fairfax's table-- like we know how attentive Frank Churchill is in the novel towards the Bateses, but again, it is not obvious that Frank is more than nice to them, and we are still seeing his interactions with Emma, not Frank and Jane's private rendezvous, so we are only seeing our heroine's perspective: She and Frank have a romantic connection.

We continue to be involved in Emma's thought process as she is conflicted about her own feelings regarding Frank Churchill: "But I don't know how I feel! Do I like him? I don't know" (*Emma Approved* E56 3:15). She even goes so far as to wonder if her feelings about him mean she loves him. Finally, she realizes, "I like Frank, as a friend. But he is not necessary to my happiness" (*Emma Approved* E58 1:40). She then sighs, "I'm not looking forward to breaking his heart." This keeps us aligned with the novel, Emma's conviction that Frank loves her as she realizes that she does not love him, and Emma's rant to the camera perfectly translates the free indirect discourse.

Overall, *Emma Approved* shows that free indirect discourse and the narrative experience of an Austen novel can be translated into a vlog adaptation. This series succeeds at aligning the viewer with Emma while maintaining some feeling of externality, where we do not have trust in Emma as objective, like in the novel, but we see and feel the story from her perspective. We watch the vlogs from Emma's point of view, and the series succeeds in

keeping us in line with her views while stringing the audience along with all of the romantic confusion.

### **Conclusion**

Scholars have said that an adaptation must “be faithful not so much to the source text, but rather to the essence of the medium of expression” (Stam 58). This means that these onscreen adaptations have a duty to be good films or media, not just good retellings of Austen’s story; they must be, first and foremost, appealing to the audience as a miniseries, feature film, or YouTube vlog. Nonetheless, the audience of an Austen adaptation is often filled with Janeites, and loyalists want the retention of the original narrative experience: the alignment with the heroines’ perceptions, the trust in Elizabeth, the moments of reckoning when we realize we have been wrong, we have been blind, all along.

What the *Pride and Prejudice* miniseries semi accomplishes, and what the movie *Emma* does accomplish, is to align the narrative with the characters' perspectives as told in the novels. These onscreen adaptations do their best to align with the heroine but show glimpses into the objective truth, as well as depict the point of view of other characters that Austen sometimes highlights. The *Pride and Prejudice* miniseries, however, focuses too heavily on Mr. Darcy and not enough on its heroine, while the Miramax *Emma* uses too many wide shots and also does not focus enough on its heroine visually, though it does align us perfectly with her through the auditory, using voice overs.

Both film adaptations have many parallels between the illusions cast through Austen’s narrative, blinding the audience with the heroines’ misjudgments, while still giving hints, as Austen does, to the truth, but the *Pride and Prejudice* miniseries does not trick us as

much in terms of Mr. Darcy, due to the focalization from his point of view. (Parenthetically, something added by the film versions, though, is that the audience gains different insights into characters beyond the novel: George Wickham's charm in his conversations with Elizabeth in the miniseries help us understand his appeal, as he compliments her sisters and smiles winningly at her, and Frank Churchill's gallantry in his rescue of Emma when her wheel gets stuck adds to their connection.)

As for the vlogs, it is easy to understand Jandl's point that they have the ability to translate free indirect discourse well, as it turns into first person narration. However, it is difficult to prove Elizabeth trustworthy through a third person this way, and *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* fail by doing the exact opposite of validating her, instead of trying to do so. In both vlog serieses, we are aligned with the heroine, as we should be. This alignment without validation works well for *Emma Approved*, since we never have validation of Emma's perspective in the novel, but it is not enough for the Pride and Prejudice experience.

What is really lost through these adaptations, then, is not necessarily the heroine's perspective or free indirect discourse: If an adaptation is well done, it can replicate much of that. No, what is lost of the experience of a Jane Austen novel is Jane Austen herself. Nothing can replace Aunt Jane's mild but poignant sarcastic social commentary. The famous line "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife" (Austen, Pride and Prejudice, 5) cannot properly pack its punch coming from Elizabeth's lips, in the miniseries or the vlog. Just continuing on that first page of Pride and Prejudice, Austen's social satire is beautifully said in a way only she can express: "However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighborhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families,

that he is considered as the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters.” The entireties of Austen’s novels are riddled with gems such as these, which no screen adaptation, no matter the setting, no matter how much time it is given, could properly replicate. It is Jane Austen’s voice that creates the experience of reading a Jane Austen novel, and no film, no miniseries, no vlog, nor any form of an adaptation, faithful or otherwise, could replace that.

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