

From Page to Screen: the Secrets of Austen's Novels' Appeal to T.V and Film Producers. Analytical Perspectives

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The last two decades have seen a proliferation of Jane Austen's adaptations; many BBC television miniseries and many film productions, particularly in the mid 1990's, from page to screen, Jane Austen's six novels have known lately an unprecedented success; they appealed to many TV and film producers. The question that comes to the mind of any observer of this phenomenon, ought to be, what is the secret of this enduring fascination and eternally fresh appeal, in other words, what are the qualities that make of Austen's novels an appealing material for the large and small screens, what made them so readily adaptable to films

Troost and Greenfield (2001) argue that the boom of Jane Austen's adaptations started with the BBC adaptation of "Pride and Prejudice" by Andrew Davis in September 1995, starring Colin Firth and Jennifer Ehle, and that this boom crossed the Atlantic with the adaptation of "Sense Sensibility" by Emma Thompson. They further argue that the year 1996 was the big one for Austen's fans in the united states; Pride and Prejudice came to the art and entertainment network in January, the same month Persuasion and Sense and Sensibility enjoyed much wider distribution in the U.S.A, in July of the same year Gwyneth Paltrow appeared as the heroin of Mira Max's Emma directed by Douglass MacGrath. "Pride and Prejudice" didn't only inspire Americans, it also inspired Bollywood 's production of Bride and Prejudice 2004 starring Miss India Aishwarya Rai and the American Martin Henderson directed by Gurinder Chadha. We will thus try to shed light on how critics explain this fresh and enduring appeal of Austen's novels to T.V and cinema producers.

Features that attract TV and Cinema producers

In "Jane Austen on Film and Television", Parill(2002) included the declaration of Douglass MacGrath, the script writer and movie director of Mira Max's Emma (1996), in which he summed up the advantages of filming Austen:

I thought Jane Austen would be a good collaborator(...)because she writes, you know, superb dialogues, she creates memorable characters, she has an extremely clever skill for plotting ."(p.4)

In addition to the three elements McGrath pointed to, she further quotes Julian North's emphasis on Austen's Englishness and its appeal, the fact that was stated by many other critics like Higson (2003) and Irvine (2005), who stressed this feature of Austen's novels. Troost (2001) tries to explain the role of two other elements; Austen's devotion to manners and the fact that she allows us a reactionary escapism .This leaves us with six features to study in more depth: Austen's **characters, dialogues, plots**, her **Englishness**, her devotion to **manners**, and the sort of **escapism** she allows us .

1. Dialogues

Austen's skill in writing dialogues was praised by many critics , dialogues which in some adaptations are taken literally ; in her book "Jane Austen for Dummies "Joan Elizabeth Klingel Ray (2006) points to the fact that Austen's attention to details makes her novels a great source for scripts, she observes that the original dialogue is so right for the characters that it is not unusual to hear from the screen the exact, or almost exact words written in the novel. She furthers says that Austen is the writer of witty dialogues that are the specialty of her novels, each characters speech seems to match him or her perfectly.

2. Characters

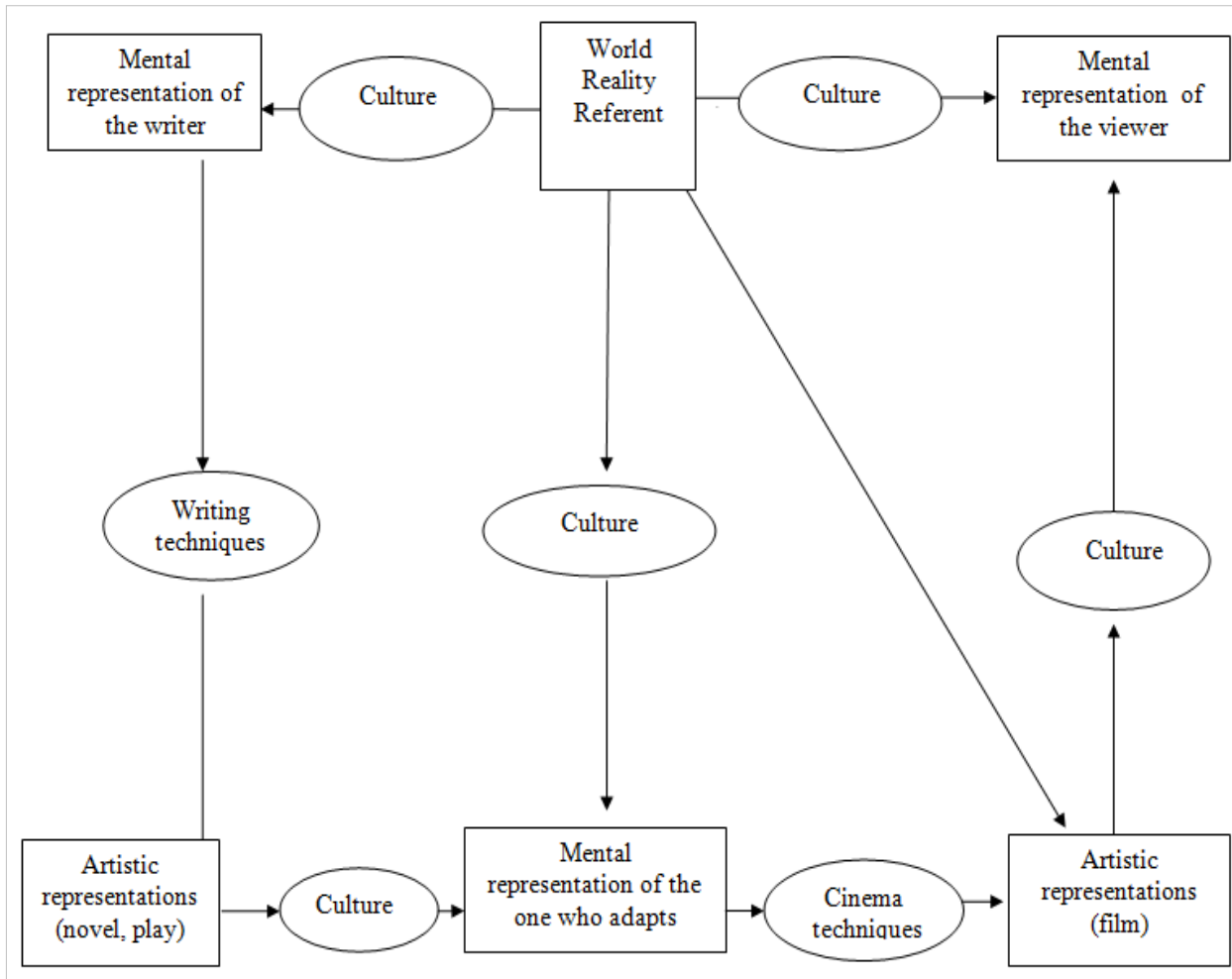
Austen's characters as Troost (2001) argues, strike a perfect balance between recognizable types and individuals with complex motivations and idiosyncratic personalities; readers and watchers identify with them and yet cannot fully predict their behavior. Carroll (2004) explains that the realization of character -and especially of consciousness -is best seen in action, in what the characters actually do, but the realization of mind is best revealed in their style, in what they say, and more importantly in how they say it, that's why he says Austen's style is elegant. her novels have authenticity without diffuseness or trickery.

3. Plots

Austen's plots are appealing to nowadays readers and viewers, Troost (2001) explains that the concerns at the center of Austen's plots -sex, romance, and money, are central concerns in our own era .she argues that the details of developing love and the constraints of limited finances provide difficulties that lend her storylines interest for the 1990 reader of sufficient maturity -and these elements of plot, like Austen's characters can translate to film mostly intact. Austen is committed to the ideal of intelligent love, according to which the deepest and truest relationship that can exist between human beings is pedagogic, the relationship consists in the giving and receiving of knowledge about right conduct.

4. Englishness

Austen's Englishness, according to many critics, is central to her novels appeal to cinematographic adaptations. Thompson (2003) advocates that she is the very embodiment of a white Englishness, especially for an anglophile American audience. Littlewood (1999) also argues that whatever position one takes in the controversy of Austen's Englishness, the fact confirms her status as an icon of English culture. According to Irving (2005), critics discussion of the ways in which these films represent a historically distant social order and an idea of 'Englishness' have been informed by an ongoing debate about the function of costume drama, particularly the adaptation of a classical novel for television, he says that in the cultural politics of the present day UK such critics ask what political interests are served by these reproductions of Austen in a contemporary context. In a scheme, Madame Martin Cost a teacher in the university of Provence in France clarifies how culture underlies both the novelist's work and the TV or Cinema producer's work.



**Figure 1. Adaptations à l'écran des romans de Jane Austen.
Lacoste, in Martin (2007) p1**

5. Manners

Another attractive feature of Austen's novels is their devotion to manners; Troost (2001) sees this among the greatest attractions of Austen's culture whether presented by book or film. Todd (2005) explains more Austen's devotion to manners, she advocates that in Austen's writings, manners can move from a purely social manifestation of individual behavior towards a manifesto to be promulgated.

Her work is an affirmation of the superior sense and moderate behavior of the English nation. Thus, Austen according to them depicts perfectly the manners of the middle class society and the provincial gentry, from the most amiable and refined characters to the most snobbish and conceited characters, thus offering us scenes of English manners and a wide range of characters and idiosyncracies .

6. Reactionary escapism

Troost (2002) believes that Jane Austen's novels appeal is also attributed to the fact that her novels provide experiences we are not used to, allowing us a **reactionary escapism** to a simpler time as it was lived by a comfortingly wealthy

and leisurely class, in these films we can hide from the uncertainties of the complex twentieth century existence, she further observes that Austen puts her characters in conversation that we overhear in the reading, by doing this she enables her readers to come to know the characters of the novels in the same way they know people in real life; thus comforting the reader, Littlewood (1999) always in the same perspective, reminds us that her novels were recommended for the severely shell-shocked soldiers during the First World War, as a sort of therapeutic narratives .

Conclusion

Hence, we see that Jane Austen's novels are really an appealing material for T.V and cinema producers for many of her novels' features, which make them so readily adaptable; we thus, understand perfectly the success of her novels adaptations.

Austen's originality lies not in inventing something new, but rather in representing the commonplace as it had never been comprehended before it's worth noting too, that despite her confined life, this gifted writer could understand a range of human emotions, desires, and eccentricities, to which she gave a fictional shape that attracts millions of readers and film producers to day.

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FILMS

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