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**FROM VERBAL IRONY TO AUDIOVISUAL MEANING:  
INTERSEMIOTIC TRANSFORMATION IN THE 1995 AND 2005  
ADAPTATIONS  
OF JANE AUSTEN'S *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE***

The adaptation of literary works into film and television is not a mechanical transfer of plot from one medium to another. It is an intersemiotic transformation in which verbal signs are reorganised into audiovisual meaning. This process is especially visible in screen adaptations of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, a novel whose artistic force depends heavily on irony, dialogue, free indirect discourse, social observation, and controlled narrative restraint. When transferred to the screen, these verbal and narrative devices must be recreated through different semiotic resources: performance, gesture, costume, spatial composition, music, lighting, camera movement, editing, and mise-en-scène.

The present paper examines intersemiotic transformation in two influential screen adaptations of Austen's novel: the 1995 BBC miniseries directed by Simon Langton and the 2005 feature film directed by Joe Wright. The study compares how both adaptations transform Austen's verbal irony and social critique into audiovisual language. The focus is placed on three main areas: the representation of class and marriage, the portrayal of Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy, and the translation of literary narration into visual, musical, and spatial codes.

The paper's theoretical basis draws on adaptation studies and intermedial approaches to literature and film. Bluestone's classic study of novels into film emphasises that adaptation involves metamorphosis rather than literal reproduction [4]. Andrew distinguishes between different modes of adaptation, including borrowing, intersection, and transformation [1]. Hutcheon argues that adaptation is both repetition and reinterpretation, since adapted works remain recognisable while being reshaped for a new medium and audience [8]. Stam also rejects the simplistic fidelity model and treats adaptation as an intertextual and dialogic process [12]. These approaches make it possible to read the 1995 and 2005 versions of *Pride and Prejudice* not as "copies" of Austen's novel, but as new audiovisual interpretations of the literary canon.

Austen's novel opens with one of the most famous ironic statements in English literature: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" [2]. This sentence immediately establishes the novel's central irony: marriage is presented as a romantic expectation, a social pressure, and an economic necessity simultaneously. Austen's language exposes the marriage market of Regency England without direct moralising. The irony depends on the gap between what society declares and what the narrative reveals. This is precisely the kind of verbal effect that cannot be transferred directly into film. It must be re-created through performance, visual contrast, rhythm, framing, and scene construction.

The 1995 BBC miniseries represents a relatively faithful model of adaptation. Its length allows it to preserve much of the novel's plot, dialogue, and social structure. The miniseries follows Austen's world through detailed attention to estates, interiors, costume, class behaviour, and restrained performance. This version, therefore, translates Austen's social and verbal world into a carefully organised visual system. It does not radically replace the novel's irony, but extends it through scenography and acting.

In the 1995 adaptation, locations become crucial semiotic devices. Longbourn is portrayed as lively, noisy, domestic, and somewhat chaotic. It represents warmth, family energy, but also social vulnerability. Netherfield functions as a space of elegance and social aspiration. Rosings becomes a visual sign of aristocratic dominance and Lady Catherine's social power. Pemberley, by contrast, is represented as a space of taste, order, wealth, and moral refinement. In Austen's novel, Elizabeth's changing view of Darcy is shaped by narration, description, and others' testimony. In the BBC version, this transformation is supported by architecture, landscape, and interior design.

Costume also functions as a language of class. Dinah Collin's costumes in the 1995 version help the viewer read social difference without explicit explanation. The Bennet sisters' simpler dresses contrast with the more refined and luxurious clothing of the Bingley sisters. Lady Catherine's clothing signals aristocratic authority and distance. Darcy's dress reflects reserve, wealth, and controlled masculinity. Elizabeth's clothing allows freer movement and visually supports her independence, vitality, and naturalness. Thus, the screen adaptation translates social hierarchy into visual texture.

Music in the 1995 adaptation performs a narrative function. Carl Davis's score contributes not only to period atmosphere but also to emotional interpretation. In Austen's novel, emotions are often mediated through dialogue, letters, and internal reflection. In the miniseries, music helps guide the viewer through emotional transitions and social rituals. Balls, visits, proposal scenes, and moments of recognition are shaped by musical rhythm. The audiovisual medium, therefore, replaces part of the novel's narrative commentary with sonic atmosphere.

The portrayal of Elizabeth and Darcy in the 1995 miniseries also demonstrates intersemiotic transformation. Jennifer Ehle's Elizabeth preserves the heroine's wit, intelligence, irony, and moral independence. Colin Firth's Darcy follows the narrative arc from pride and reserve to humility and emotional openness. However, the miniseries also makes Darcy more physically visible than the novel does. The famous lake scene, absent from Austen's text, is the clearest example. It is not a faithful reproduction of the novel, but a cinematic invention that symbolically breaks Darcy's aristocratic control and exposes his vulnerability. This scene shows how adaptation may depart from the source text while still developing its emotional logic.

Joe Wright's 2005 film represents a different adaptive strategy. It condenses the narrative more radically and shifts the centre from verbal irony to emotional immediacy, visual atmosphere, and bodily expression. The film uses natural light, open landscapes, close-ups, music, mud, rural interiors, and physical gestures to build meaning. Wright's version does not simply illustrate Austen; it reinterprets her novel through poetic realism and cinematic romanticism.

The opening of the 2005 film is especially revealing. Austen begins with a general ironic statement about marriage and fortune. Wright begins with Elizabeth walking alone through the countryside while reading a book, accompanied by morning light and music. This shift changes

the viewer's entry point into the story. The novel begins with society and irony; the film begins with subjectivity, landscape, and emotional atmosphere. Elizabeth is immediately presented as independent, reflective, and connected to nature. This is not a neutral change. It translates Austen's narrative intelligence into visual individuality.

Longbourn in Wright's film is also different from the more controlled domestic world of the 1995 adaptation. It is represented as a working, imperfect, muddy, noisy farmstead. Animals, domestic disorder, worn interiors, and blurred boundaries between home and farm make the Bennet family's social position visible. The film does not need to explain class through income figures; it shows class through material environment. Mud on Elizabeth's dress, crowded rooms, creaking floors, and rural textures become signs of class, vitality, and social limitation.

In the 2005 version, Pemberley becomes almost sublime. The estate is not merely elegant and tasteful; it is visually overwhelming. The sculpture gallery scene, replacing the novel's portrait-focused recognition, transforms Elizabeth's evolving perception of Darcy into a sensual, aesthetic experience. Instead of contemplating a portrait and hearing testimony about Darcy's character, Elizabeth moves through a space filled with art, beauty, and silence. The adaptation, therefore, turns moral recognition into visual and bodily perception.

The 2005 film also transforms the proposal scenes. Darcy's first proposal in Austen's novel takes place indoors and is structured as a verbal confrontation. The force of the scene lies in language: accusation, pride, refusal, and self-revelation. Wright relocates this scene outdoors during heavy rain. The rain, architectural setting, physical closeness, and music heighten emotional tension. The scene becomes less a debate of arguments and more a collision of bodies, class pressure, desire, and anger. The film translates verbal conflict into atmospheric intensity.

Music is one of the most important elements of Wright's adaptation. Dario Marianelli's score, with piano and string textures, gives the film a lyrical, intimate, and romantic quality [7]. Music often takes over the role of narrative commentary. Where Austen uses irony, dialogue, and internal reflection, Wright uses melody, silence, rhythm, and emotional accumulation. In the film, music does not merely accompany the image; it helps create the viewer's interpretation of Elizabeth's and Darcy's inner states.

The portrayal of Elizabeth in Wright's film also reflects the values of a modern audience. Keira Knightley's Elizabeth is younger, more openly emotional, more physically expressive, and more rebellious in visual terms. Her independence is communicated through movement, facial expression, walking, reading, and direct emotional reactions. This differs from Austen's more controlled literary heroine, whose intelligence is largely conveyed through dialogue, irony, and judgment. Wright translates intellectual liveliness into visible energy.

Matthew Macfadyen's Darcy is also reinterpreted. In Austen's novel, Darcy's silence and reserve are strongly connected to class pride. In the 2005 film, his reserve is also presented as shyness, awkwardness, and emotional repression. This makes him more vulnerable and accessible to contemporary viewers. His transformation is visualised through body language, facial expression, posture, costume, and lighting. The film humanises Darcy by shifting emphasis from aristocratic arrogance to emotional difficulty.

The theme of the class is therefore transformed differently in the two adaptations. Austen encodes class through property, inheritance, manners, income, dialogue, and social judgment. The 1995 BBC adaptation visualises class through estates, costumes, interiors, social rituals,

and restrained performance. The 2005 film makes class more material and sensual: muddy landscapes, rural interiors, bodily discomfort, vast estates, and natural light express social division. Each version preserves the theme, but each gives it a different semiotic form.

Marriage is also re-coded. In Austen's novel, marriage is a social and economic institution as much as a romantic ending. Charlotte Lucas's pragmatic marriage, Lydia's reckless union, Jane and Bingley's harmonious match, and Elizabeth and Darcy's mature partnership represent different models of marriage. The 1995 adaptation keeps this social framework strongly visible. The 2005 film, while preserving the theme of marriage, places greater weight on romantic fulfilment, emotional sincerity, and personal authenticity. The social institution of marriage becomes more strongly filtered through individual feeling.

The endings of the adaptations show the difference between literary and cinematic closure. Austen's ending is restrained and socially comprehensive. It follows the consequences of marriage for the wider family and social world. The 1995 miniseries provides visual closure through wedding imagery and social resolution, but it remains relatively close to Austen's decorous tone. The 2005 film offers a more intimate, romantic closure, focusing on Elizabeth and Darcy's emotional union. The social world recedes, while the couple's private feeling becomes central. This shows how screen culture often transforms Austen's social ending into affective cinematic completion.

The comparison of these two adaptations demonstrates that intersemiotic transformation is not simply the loss of literary complexity. It is a reorganisation of meaning across media. Some elements of Austen's prose cannot be transferred directly: free indirect discourse, verbal irony, narrative distance, and the subtle manipulation of reader judgment. However, film and television introduce new resources: facial expressions, costumes, locations, silence, light, music, spatial contrast, and visual rhythm. These resources do not merely decorate the story. They create meaning.

The 1995 adaptation can be understood as a translation of Austen's social world into detailed period television realism. Its major strategy is continuity: it preserves the novel's structure while expanding the audiovisual representation of class and character. The 2005 adaptation can be understood as a translation of Austen's emotional and thematic core into poetic cinematic language. Its major strategy is intensification: it condenses the story and heightens emotion through image, music, space, and bodily presence.

In conclusion, the movement from verbal irony to audiovisual meaning in *Pride and Prejudice* adaptations reveals the central problem of adaptation: how a literary work survives by changing form. The 1995 and 2005 adaptations show two different solutions. The BBC miniseries foregrounds fidelity, social detail, and narrative continuity. Joe Wright's film foregrounds emotional immediacy, visual atmosphere, and embodied interpretation. Both versions transform Austen's novel into screen culture, but they do so through different semiotic systems. For this reason, *Pride and Prejudice* remains not only a literary classic but also a productive object for studying intersemiotic translation, visual literacy, and the changing cultural life of canonical texts.

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