

## Mass Marketing Jane Austen: Men, Women, and Courtship in Two of the Recent Films

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Some years ago I was given the “tip sheet” distributed by a well-known publishing house of mass-market contemporary romances. The document provides guidelines to prospective writers of these books. Prescriptions for the characterization of the hero immediately caught my eye: “The hero is 8 to 12 years older than the heroine. He is self-assured, masterful, hot-tempered, capable of violence, passion, and tenderness. He is often mysteriously moody. Heathcliff (*Wuthering Heights*) is a rougher version; Darcy (*Pride and Prejudice*) a more refined one.

The tip sheet thus makes it explicit that Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* is one of the models for the late twentieth-century mass-market romance. To be sure, some of the guidelines have little connection to the world of Austen’s novels. The aspiring romance-writer is advised that the heroine should have little interest in alcohol and cigarettes and that love scenes should be described sensuously and in detail. Nudity is acceptable, indeed welcome, as long as it is not presented too graphically—“references to pain and blood,” the would-be writer is told emphatically, “are out.” Nevertheless, if suggestions for the hero’s characterization do not give admirers of *Pride and Prejudice* a sense of déjà-vu, the tip sheet’s plot outline will: “the action should explore the relationship between the lovers. ... The story usually begins with a clash between the hero and the heroine. Often this has to do with misapprehensions each has about the other. Sometimes the heroine has heard a great deal about the hero and has some reason to resent him before they actually meet, or they meet under inauspicious circumstances and the heroine is put off by the hero’s ruthless, domineering and arrogant manner. Or the hero has formed an opinion of the heroine before he meets her.”<sup>1</sup>

Jane Austen as one of the mothers of the Harlequin or Silhouette novel? Such a genealogy makes many an Austen devotee smile. We know Austen’s novels to be so much more complex and nuanced, so much more culturally and linguistically enriching than the mass-market romance. And yet, recent popular representations reveal a distinct trend: the harlequinization of Jane Austen’s novels. If Austen is one of the ancestors of the paperback romance, recent films of her work are now the heirs of this popular form. The two most explicit descendants in this romance genealogy are the films of *Sense and Sensibility*, adapted by Emma Thompson and directed by Ang Lee, and *Emma*, adapted and directed by Douglas McGrath.

By harlequinization I mean that, like the mass-market romance, the focus is on a hero and heroine’s courtship at the expense of other characters and other experiences, which are sketchily represented. As the tip sheet suggests, the hero and heroine’s plot should begin in the first chapter—no wasting time with matters as extraneous as the heroine’s life anytime before she first encounters the hero. Harlequinization does not require a plot closely patterned on *Pride and Prejudice*’s. But it does necessitate an unswerving attention to the hero’s and heroine’s desires for one another and a tendency to represent those desires in unsurprising, even clichéd ways.<sup>2</sup> The mass-market romance suggests that familiarity breeds content. The pleasures of this form are to be found not only in the unfolding of desire and the achievement of gratification but also in the comfortable knowledge of what is to come and how it is to occur.<sup>3</sup> Finally, harlequinization is typified by attention to physical appearances, the result of the subtle and not-so-subtle commodification of persons in this intensely commercial form. Hero and heroine should both be good-looking and sexy. And since much of selfhood is loaded and expressed by appearance, love at first sight is understandable and appropriate. Clothes too are of interest not only as a means of bringing attention to the bodies of the hero and heroine but as objects of desire in their own right—another reminder of this highly commercial form.

Since I am going to be critical of some of the films’ divergences from the novels, I want to say at the outset that I don’t think that the medium itself is the culprit. Granted, film inevitably transforms novels. To take an obvious and important example, although Austen’s ironic narrators are central to the reader’s encounter with her books, most filmmakers wisely reject the amount of voiceover that would be necessary to reproduce the experience of a narrator. Moreover, the transfer to film of a work written in an earlier period also makes film versions radically different. Even had those involved in making Austen films all worked at rendering the novels as exactly and authentically as possible—and they did not—their efforts would still have been heavily mediated by late twentieth-century minds and bodies. These films were made by writers and directors and for audiences with inescapably modern mental lives. And actors, however good their period-style technique, have been physically shaped by late twentieth-century food, medical treatment, skin and hair products, sneakers, soft sofas, and weight machines.

Yes, a film of a book will always be different from the book itself, but let’s also acknowledge that film has the power to show us aspects of Jane Austen’s novels in new and revitalizing ways. For example, Ang Lee captures the emotional tension in Barton Cottage after Willoughby leaves for good and the personality differences among the inhabitants in a scene of breathtaking physical beauty shot looking down a staircase at the three bedroom doors and the landing connecting them. Elinor has pursued her mother up to the landing from below, where they had been arguing about the meaning of Willoughby’s sudden departure. Mrs. Dashwood goes into her bedroom weeping and shuts the door. Margaret, who has been trying in vain to get Marianne to open her bedroom door in order to hand her a cup of tea, passes the cup and saucer to Elinor, goes into her bedroom, bursts into tears, and shuts *her* door. Elinor, out on the

landing, hears weeping coming from behind all the doors. Sitting down carefully on the stairs, she drinks the tea, an activity evocative of custom and propriety. Emphasizing the solitude of her calm, quiet misery, the scene dramatizes the difference between Elinor and the rest of her family. Moreover, by placing the camera outside the bedroom doors and behind Elinor, the film aligns the audience with Elinor's viewpoint and way of coping.

I am critical then not of film alterations per se—but of alterations made in the service, I presume, of broad commercial appeal. *Sense and Sensibility* cost fifteen and a half million dollars to make.<sup>4</sup> While substantially less than the seventy million dollar budget for the 1996 blockbuster *Independence Day*, this is still an expenditure necessitating, as cultural critic Louis Menand recently put it, “the maximally profitable economic niche.”<sup>5</sup> McGrath's *Emma* cost considerably less to make—only six and a half million dollars—and is considered a specialized “boutique” film.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, it too has been in search of a profitable market share. Both films have been hyped aggressively, through magazine and television interviews with the films' stars and those seemingly endless, insipid newspaper articles on the making of these films and the reasons for the rash of Jane Austen movies. *Sense and Sensibility*, as of July 1996, had grossed forty-three million dollars and *Emma*, as of early October 1996, had grossed twenty million dollars.<sup>7</sup> These are only *domestic* earnings, however. Between February and June 1996 *Sense and Sensibility* opened in ten other countries, including Australia, Brazil, Mexico, and Japan. It has grossed over 125 million dollars worldwide.<sup>8</sup> Like modern romance paperbacks, these films are mass-market products, and this accounts for their similarities. The conventions of romance have sold well in Harlequin and Silhouette novels, and they have made box office successes out of mainstream American films.

Film itself is neutral, but American-produced popular films generally are not. To put Austen novels on film by means of corporations (Columbia Pictures and Miramax) that produce what is now a global popular culture shaped by American tastes is to enter a medium shaped by powerful generic conventions of romance. But the films' romantic emphasis also functions as a critique of Austen's writing. Told by a third-person narrator intimate with the consciousnesses of the female characters and usually at a distance from the mental lives and daily activities of men, Austen's novels, so the films suggest, underrepresent men. The films redress that imbalance by amplifying and glamorizing Austen's heroes, but, as I shall show, doing so prevents them from capturing the nuances of Austen's male characters as well as the teasing ambiguities of the novelist's representations of women and courtship.

The casting of the films' heroes was instrumental in achieving the on-screen romance-ification of Austen's work. Depicted by Austen's narrator only as “a sensible man” with “a cheerful manner,” Mr. Knightley is played in McGrath's film by the dark, good-looking Jeremy Northam.<sup>9</sup> He appears to be older than Gwyneth Paltrow's Emma, but certainly not by sixteen years. The actors playing Edward Ferrars and Colonel Brandon are also too physically appealing. Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* emphatically denies these characters striking appearances. “Edward Ferrars,” explains the narrator, “was not recommended to their [Mrs. Dashwood and her daughters'] good opinion by any peculiar graces of person or address. He was not handsome, and his manners required intimacy to make them pleasing.”<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Colonel Brandon's “face was not handsome” (34). To be sure, both men have gentlemanly behavior, affectionate hearts, and other admirable qualities. But they are made plain in part to contribute to the novel's anti-romance argument. The one male character in the novel who is endowed with the dashing looks of a romantic hero, Mr. Willoughby, proves to be not only immoral but also mercenary (the ultimate antithesis of the romantic sensibility).

Judgments of personal attractiveness are, of course, highly subjective, but the stage and film careers of Jeremy Northam, Hugh Grant, and Alan Rickman indicate that all have been widely understood to have at least as much romantic appeal as Greg Wise, who played the role of Willoughby in the film. Moreover, those prior roles inevitably mediate at least some of the audience members' perceptions of their characters in Austen films. Referring to the intertextuality that affects the reception of plays but could apply just as well to films, theater historian Marvin Carlson has noted “that every specific production is composed in large part of elements already encountered elsewhere, that often bring with them as a necessary and inevitable part of reception certain ghosts of these previous encounters.”<sup>11</sup> I have already suggested that the mass-market romance is a very important “ghost” affecting the script and direction of the films. But some of the actors' past roles also “haunt” their characters in these films. (For the sake of brevity, I will touch only on some of the actors' previous film roles.) Behind Mr. Knightley hovers Jack Devlin, for example, the menacing but seductive figure Northam played in the 1995 movie *The Net*. Colonel Brandon, for some of the audience, would not have escaped the aura of Alan Rickman's charming and charismatic villains, such as the terrorist in “Die Hard” and the Sheriff of Nottingham in “Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves,” or his poignant dead lover in “Truly, Madly, Deeply.” The nervous charm and amorousness of Hugh Grant's character in the film “Four Weddings and a Funeral” may have affected some filmgoers' experience of his Edward Ferrars. (For some viewers, however, that impact was superseded by another memory: Grant's Beverly Hills sex scandal, which occurred in June 1995, while filming was still in progress but after his scenes had been completed. Incidents in the private lives of public persons may also become ghosts that haunt a particular production.)

The film versions of Austen's men provide sustained dramatizations of their love for the heroines. Colonel Brandon's intense response to Marianne, particularly when she becomes gravely ill, is inflected, according to the novel, by his tragic history with his father's ward, the first Eliza. There is much more than *déjà-vu*, however, in Alan Rickman's interpretation of the character. “Like a man thawing out after having been in a fridge for twenty years” is the way he described his role,<sup>12</sup> but he moves rapidly in the part of Brandon from thaw to burn. In the book, Brandon embarks on the journey to bring Mrs. Dashwood to her severely ill daughter, after being requested to do so by Elinor. In the film she finds him pacing outside Marianne's bedroom in one of his most fetching outfits. He wears a waistcoat, to be sure—for Marianne that article of clothing has symbolized his age and infirmity. But because it is combined with boots, tight breeches, a white shirt with long flowing sleeves, and a thin black scarf draped carelessly around his neck, the romanticism he has quietly repressed in the novel is vividly displayed on his body. His plea to be assigned a useful task—“give me an occupation, Miss Dashwood, or I shall run mad”—combines the conduct-book virtue of industriousness with emotional excess and puts me in mind of the hilariously contradictory Laura of “Love and Freindship.” The next scene prolongs this romantic

vision of the Colonel, showing him mounting his horse in dashing hat and riding coat, taking a last look towards Marianne's bedroom window, and racing off alone in quest of Mrs. Dashwood.

The affection that Hugh Grant's Edward Ferrars shows towards Elinor in the film also substantially embellishes the novel. Austen's narrator refers to but does not dramatize their "growing attachment" (15). The novelist did not indulge in depictions of hero and heroine falling in love for crucial reasons. First, Austen presents the relationship of Elinor and Edward as one which, however strong their feelings, is conducted with a quiet decorum that surprises her mother and sister and is not, if we can be guided by their reactions, evocative for onlookers. Second, as Edward is already engaged, his affection for Elinor is tinged with guilt and the knowledge that his feelings are hopeless. In the early scenes at Norwood and during his visit to Barton Cottage (not presented in the film), Austen preferred to focus on his consequent bouts of dejection, perhaps as a way of dealing with the dubious moral stance of a suitor, already promised to someone else. The film compensates for Edward's shaky morality by showing him to be sympathetic not only to a family of grieving women, particularly the youngest, Margaret, but to the plight of genteel women in general. That portrait thus enables the film's indulgence in conventional scenes of courtship, dramatizing Edward's pleasure in looking at Elinor and feeling her gaze upon him, the intimacy of their conversations, and the moments of subtle physical contact, as when he retrieves the end of her shawl and places it around her again.

The dramatized affection of Jeremy Northam's Mr. Knightley diverges just as much from Austen's writing. Austen set herself a challenging problem in *Emma*. Within a confined community in which marriage is very important, two of the small number of its inhabitants are a lady and gentleman who see each other frequently, and are emotionally and socially suited to one another, *and* are not married to one another. How to explain that they have so far avoided their obvious destiny and how to keep them apart for several chapters? Austen does so by making Mr. Knightley sixteen years older and connecting him by marriage to the Woodhouse family. His age and pseudo-kinship as well as the paternalistic attitude they license function to keep hero and heroine apart. In encounters between them, his stern parental commentary on her behavior is matched by Emma's rebellious resistance to his advice and insistence on the rightness of her own conduct. In addition, although he is to be found frequently in the domestic and social arena, he is portrayed as a man preoccupied with experience elsewhere. Austen does not in general represent men away from the company of women. But the novel refers to Mr. Knightley's roles as road improver, farmer, and magistrate frequently enough to create a convincing, albeit "off-stage" world of male work. Finally, Austen's narrator provides, for the most part, Emma's point of view, allowing us little access to other characters' unexpressed thoughts or emotional states. So while the narrator must account for Emma's blindness to her love for Mr. Knightley, she doesn't have to explain him. She can leave it to the reader to infer his emotional states.

But what happens in the McGrath film? I have already noted that the age gap between Northam and Paltrow is not large enough. Nor does he seem paternalistic. By the time he lectures Emma on her treatment of Miss Bates at Box Hill that disapproving, judgmental stance can have little impact on the viewer—his distinctly unfatherly ardor for the heroine has already been vividly dramatized. At social gatherings he frequently comes to her side or meets her eyes in silent mutual accord about the behavior of others. At the Weston's Christmas party Mr. Elton sits down between Emma and Mr. Knightley, calling attention to the comfortable intimacy of the pair he interrupts—in the book he sits down between Emma and Mrs. Weston. Although they often argue, as in the novel, McGrath takes some of these conversations out of the drawing room and places them on the lawn of Donwell Abbey where the two engage in archery, drink tea, or play with one of Mr. Knightley's dogs. Their disputes are undercut by their choice to spend so much time alone together—in the book her father and others are usually present too—and by the joke-lines McGrath gives them. "Try not to kill my dogs," says a wry Mr. Knightley after one of Emma's arrows misses the target and pricks a nearby canine. No road improving or cattle buying for this Mr. Knightley. He has no place to go and nothing else to do but entertain Emma and, with an attention to dress worthy of Mrs. Elton, try out a variety of fashions, including a straw hat for outdoor parties.

A woman behind me in the movie theater gasped with surprise when Mr. Knightley professed his love to Emma on their walk to Hartfield near the film's end. But surely she belongs to a tiny minority. The filmmakers could have found ways to disguise or mute Mr. Knightley's feelings even without the benefits of a narrator situated at a distance from that character's mental life. They chose not to.

Consistent with their focus on the romantic couple, the films of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Emma* thin out and underpopulate the social world. Sir John Middleton is made a childless widower in *Sense and Sensibility*. The vulgar Lucy Steele has no even more vulgar sister. In McGrath's film, John and Isabella Knightley do not fall prey to the screenwriter's axe, but they are almost ignored by the cameramen. Does anybody remember what John Knightley looks like in the film? Nor do we have much sense of the elaborate and playful deceptions of Frank Churchill or the intricacies of his social interactions with Jane Fairfax. Even more important, the films' portraits of women's lives lack the complexity with which they are endowed in the novels.

Austen's works have engaged successive generations of readers because of their interpretative richness—none is reducible to a single, simple portrait of courtship (whether or not it is harlequinized). Indeed, many critics have argued that Jane Austen's representations of women undercut the dominance and centrality of the courtship plot. Although some post-war critical commentary about *Emma* has stressed the necessity of the flawed heroine's humiliation by Mr. Knightley and her subsequent reform near the novel's end,<sup>13</sup> more recently feminist critics have attributed less importance to Emma's marriage to Mr. Knightley. Instead, they have praised Emma Woodhouse's authority and autonomy. In Claudia Johnson's words, for example, the novel presents "positive versions of female power."<sup>14</sup> And feminist and non-feminist critics alike have been known to applaud Marianne's passionate vitality and independence, preferring it to Elinor's self-suppression. Marianne's champions have generally charged her creator with "betraying" her, by marrying her off to the drab Colonel Brandon at the novel's conclusion.<sup>15</sup>

Critics have also argued that in several of the novels women characters' friendships with one another are at least as

important as their relationships with male characters. For *Emma* this decentering of the courtship plot was accomplished first by critics who took the heroine to task for her infatuations with women.<sup>16</sup> But their homophobic attitudes were subsequently rejected by feminist critics who have since emphasized the value and importance for Emma of her bonds with Harriet Smith and Jane Fairfax. Some critics have also maintained that the strength of Marianne and Elinor's attachment to one another sometimes seems to overshadow *Sense and Sensibility's* courtship plot.

In finding profoundly rendered relationships among women in Austen's novels, critics such as Susan Lanser and Ruth Perry have suggested that Austen was not genuinely committed to the courtship plot that structures her novels.<sup>17</sup> My own book, *Jane Austen among Women*, suggests that Austen's attitude towards and treatment of the courtship plot was more equivocal. It shows the basis in the author's life for her fictional representations of women's loving ties, maintaining that without the support of her sister, Cassandra, and a handful of other female kin and friends, Jane Austen could not have become a novelist. But it suggests that Austen was also sincerely attached to the larger culture of the gentry and specifically to its high valuation of marriage and family life. Hence, *Jane Austen among Women* argues, Austen's six novels both endorse and subtly challenge the courtship plot's emphasis on heterosexual romance.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, at least in part it is because they are equivocal that so many diverse interpretations have been and will continue to be generated about the novels.

Neither of the recent films suggests that female friendships are sufficient to sustain an alternative emotional life for heroines without men. Emma's intense focus on and feelings for Harriet Smith are not given much weight in the film. She and Harriet are "girlfriends" in a modern, trivialized sense, talking about boys or playing with puppies. The film also considerably reduces representations of not only her contacts with but also her thoughts about Jane Fairfax. The presentation of women's relationships is more complex in *Sense and Sensibility*. The filmmakers were concerned that the film not seem to be about "a couple of women waiting around for men," and so they did emphasize the relationship between Elinor and Marianne.<sup>19</sup>

An early scene in Barton Cottage, invented for the film, illustrates both the discomforts of the Dashwoods' new home and the daily, ongoing intimacy of the sisters. The scene shows Elinor laying another blanket on the bed she shares with Marianne in their small room. She then wraps a shawl around her nightgown, blows out the candle, and seeks the warmth of the bedcovers and Marianne's body heat—only to be greeted by Marianne's complaint that her feet are cold. Elinor jumps out of bed, grabs some stockings, and returns to put them on. The intensity of their bond is also dramatized. At the height of Marianne's illness, Elinor leans over her unconscious sister, runs a hand slowly up the sheet covering her left leg and, in tears, pleads with her: "I cannot do without you. Oh, please, I have tried to bear everything else—I will try—but please, dearest, beloved Marianne, do not leave me alone." Although such scenes convey the importance of this relationship, they compete with and are ultimately trumped by the other invented scenes between Marianne and Colonel Brandon. His day-to-day presence in Marianne's life is established by scenes such as that in which he offers her a knife with which to cut reeds, and her growing love for him is established in one of the film's last scenes, in which he reads to her out on the lawn in front of Barton Cottage. Readers who have felt that in marrying Marianne off to the Colonel, Austen was "betraying" her character must surely be placated by this scene and by Rickman's interpretation of the suitor in general. The films of both *Sense and Sensibility* and *Emma* assert not just the appropriateness but also the romantic pleasures of their heroines' marriages.

The recent films of Jane Austen's novels have increased sales of her books. But those who read as well as buy are going to discover that the books are not harlequinized. When they encounter Edward Ferrar's silent despondency and Mr. Knightley's cool sternness, the constant, noisy intrusiveness of the Dashwoods' social circle and the loneliness and solitude threatening Emma, and always the self-discipline required for the good manners Jane Austen advocates—will they continue to be enthusiastic about the novelist? We can hope that if some new readers are first escorted to the novels by Jeremy Northam and Alan Rickman, they will stay to appreciate the encounters the books stage between wishes and deeds, glorious dreams and mundane material constraints, and, most of all, simple certainties and interpretive ambiguity.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Contemporary Romance tip sheet, Silhouette Books, dated April 1980, in author's possession.

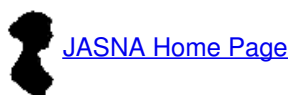
<sup>2</sup> Janice Radway's well-known study of readers and the mass-market romance confirms the central trait of these novels: "the most striking characteristic of the ideal romance [is] its resolute focus on a single, developing relationship between heroine and hero." See *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 122.

<sup>3</sup> Wendy Moffat argues that genres in general provide their readers with the satisfaction of being able to predict a work's outcome. See "Identifying with Emma: Some Problems for the Feminist Reader," *College English*, 53, No. 1 (January 1991): 48. "Formula fictions," such as mass-market romances, may be said to intensify the satisfactions of predicting a fiction's conclusion.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Gunther and Eryn Brown, "Alas, Poor Sony," *Fortune*, Sept. 30, 1996, 128.

<sup>5</sup> Louis Menand, "Hollywood's Trap," *New York Review of Books* Sept. 19, 1996, 4.

- <sup>6</sup> *Hartford Courant*, October 11, 1996; Menand, 6.
- <sup>7</sup> *Daily Variety*, July 2, 1996; *Daily Variety*, October 1, 1996.
- <sup>8</sup> Gunther and Brown, "Alas, Poor Sony," 128.
- <sup>9</sup> *Emma*, vol. 4 of *The Novels of Jane Austen*, ed. R. W. Chapman, 3rd ed. (1932; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), 9. Subsequent *E* citations are drawn from this edition.
- <sup>10</sup> *Sense and Sensibility*, vol. 1 of *The Novels of Jane Austen*, ed. R. W. Chapman, 3rd ed. (1932; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), 15. Subsequent *S* & *S* citations are drawn from this edition.
- <sup>11</sup> Marvin Carlson, "The Haunted Stage: Recycling and Reception in the Theatre," *Theatre Survey*, 35, No. 1 (May 1994): 17.
- <sup>12</sup> Emma Thompson, *The Sense and Sensibility Screenplay & Diaries* (New York: Newmarket Press, 1996), 251.
- <sup>13</sup> See, for example, Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 243-66. I am indebted to Claudia Johnson's discussion of postwar criticism of *Emma* in *Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender, and Sentimentality in the 1790s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 191-95.
- <sup>14</sup> Claudia Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 126.
- <sup>15</sup> See, for example, Margaret Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction* (1983; rpt. New York: Methuen, 1986), 87, and Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 100-02.
- <sup>16</sup> The most famous work in this vein in Marvin Mudrick's *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery* (1952; rpt. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 181-206.
- <sup>17</sup> Susan Lanser, "No Connections Subsequent: Jane Austen's World of Sisterhood," in *The Sister Bond: A Feminist View of a Timeless Connection* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1985), 53-67, and Ruth Perry, "Interrupted Friendships in Jane Austen's *Emma*," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 5, no. 2 (1986): 185-202. Numerous critics have argued that Austen treats the conventions of the courtship plot ironically and wants her readers, in effect, to read against the grain. See, for example, Wayne Booth, "Emma, *Emma*, and the Question of Feminism," *Persuasions* 5 (1983): 29-40.
- <sup>18</sup> *Jane Austen among Women* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).
- <sup>19</sup> Lindsay Doran, "Introduction," *The Sense & Sensibility Screenplay and Diaries*, 14.



[JASNA Home Page](#)

JANE AUSTEN- the hottest writer in HOLLYWOOD When the BBC screened its latest adaption of Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice*, it was watched by a record 18 million British viewers. The series was then sold to 18 countries round the world, from America to Australia, from Iceland to Israel. Jane wrote to her niece: 'Single women have a dreadful propensity for being poor- which is one of the most strong argument in favour of matrimony.' Thus in her novels, it is not just love, but also money which makes the institution of marriage so important. Not everyone is pleased by this. Winifred Wilson, member of the Jane Austen Society, says, 'These screen adaptations should have kept closer to the text. They are too heavy on romance and too light on satire. Deborah Kaplan, "Mass marketing Jane Austen: Men, women, and courtship in two film adaptations" [1998], in *Jane Austen in Hollywood*, 2nd edn, ed. by Linda Troost and Sayre Greenfield (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), pp. 177-87. See p. 178. Kaplan's essay was first printed in a slightly different form in *Persuasions*, 18 (1996). Google Scholar. 8. Joe Bray, "Austen, "œenigmatic lacunae" and the art of biography"™, in *Romantic Biography*, ed. by Arthur Bradley and Alan Rawes (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 58-73 (p. 58). Google Scholar. 9. In 1995 and 1996 six film or television adaptations of Jane Austen's novels were produced—an unprecedented number. More amazing, all were critical and/or box office successes. What accounts for this explosion of interest? Much of the appeal of these films lies in our nostalgic desire at the end of the millennium for an age of greater politeness and sexual reticence. Austen's ridicule of deceit and pretentiousness also appeals to our fin de siècle sensibilities. These recent productions espouse explicitly twentieth-century feminist notions and reshape the Austenian hero to make him conform to modern expectations.