

## THE CHARM AND THE CHARISMA OF CELLULOID: A MISE-EN-SCENE ANALYSIS OF THE FILM *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*

*Vidya Merlin Varghese*

*Assistant Professor, Department of English, Baselius College, Kottayam, Kerala, India*

---

**Received: 15 May 2018**

**Accepted: 30 Jul 2018**

**Published: 10 Aug 2018**

---

### ABSTRACT

*Since the time of its inception films have been characteristically and categorically influenced by literature. Almost all great literary pieces of the world have had their film adaptations till date. It is estimated that about eighty percent of Hollywood movies have derived their life-blood from classics and best sellers that belong not just to the present but also from the bygone era. Literature and films are narratives, but there is a distinct way in which each presents a story – one is wholly verbal while the other is a visual and aural semblance.*

*The paper is an amateur's attempt at analyzing the mise -en –a scene or the on-screen presentation of the novel through the film *Pride and Prejudice* that was released in 2005. The film has been regarded to be an enchanting on the screen adaptation of Jane Austen's novel by the same name. Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* was penned two hundred years ago. The charm and the scenic details of eighteenth-century England has been most sincerely portrayed in the movie directed by Joe Wright. During the time of its publication, Austen's novel has been defined as a novel of manners. Wright's piece has been regarded to be the most faithful version of the novel. The film also augmented a steady demand for the novel. As everyone knows, once a fiction has been converted into a motion picture, it becomes a new thing. The paper roughly outlines how the settings, costume, lighting and other props of the film have helped to revive the charm and charisma of Austen's novel.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Life-Blood from Classics and Best Sellers, the Relationship between Films and Literature*

### INTRODUCTION

Austen is presently regarded to be one of the most widely read Victorian female novelists. Her stories are universal in the sense that they deal with the common love story of a man or woman finding their true love through a series of tests. Her novels provide us with a cross section of eighteenth-century gentry folks' lifestyle with which she was familiar. Through the movie director, the Joe Wright has presented most authentically the life and times of Austen's England. One may perceive this through a close analysis of the film. The relationship between films and literature has mostly been symbiotic in the sense that each relies on the other for its propagation. Cultural theorists have opined that films and literature can be seen as businesses and cultural vehicles that present figures of gender, race, fashion, and class. Despite their similarities and connections, films and literature use materially different ways to describe the world. In both, there is a reconstruction of images. When a novel is converted into a film there is a gradual shift from a 'uniquely verbal medium' to a 'multi-track medium' (Stam, Robert 74)

A novel is produced by a single person but a film is the collaborative effort of many people. Amy Villarejo has commented that 'film is structured like the language' (27) In other words a film is made up of a number of units that require close study. Film analysis aims at describing the world on screen. Mise en scene is commonly known to aim towards identifying and isolating the elements of what is put on the screen. It is a French term that can be translated as 'staging' or 'putting into the screen' (Dix 11) It has evolved from theatrical performances. Filmic mise en scene generally coincides with theatrical staging elements like setting, props, lighting, make-up, hair-style and acting. A comprehensive mise en scene analysis will focus not just on the theatrical components but also on cinematography, the distinct visual attribute that makes the film an innovative medium of expression. Thus mise en scene presents a useful starting point for describing what one sees within the camera's frame.

*Pride and Prejudice* were written by Jane Austen in 1813. The first title of the book was *First Impressions*. Two centuries have passed since its publication and yet the charm of this classic novel has not waned. The filmic and mini screen presentations have enhanced viewership and readership. The present paper draws wholly upon the 2005 film adaptation of the novel. Joe Wright's film by the same name is an Anglo-American production. It is deemed to be a fairly truthful presentation of the novelist's verbal world. The novel runs up to more than three hundred pages and the film's running time is approximately 121 minutes. When a novel is transformed into a motion picture it naturally undergoes many modifications. The task before the director is to realistically portray what the novelist has imagined. This is why Stam says that 'cinema is both a synesthetic and synthetic art' (80). As we read a novel, we use our imagination to fashion the mise en scene of the novel. The words in the novel have symbolic meanings. The film, a visual medium, provides little scope for the spectator's imagination. The director rearranges compresses or adds episodes to present a mirror version of the novel. Mise en scene analysis will help the spectator to compare the film and the novel both as coupled or separate entities.

Austen's novels 'focussed upon day to day pastoral affairs, conduct, and manners and the themes of love, marriage and personal relationships'(Chawdry 15) of the early eighteenth century England. The locale of the film is a typical English countryside scenario. The opening shot presents the early morning countryside with a bird's song and classic piano notes in the background. The camera moves gradually onto the prime focus of the film- the heroine Keira Knightley who plays the role of Lizzie. The lighting is another significant aspect of the opening scene. When Knightley appears on the screen there is what is technically known as high key lighting which aids in noticing not just the beauty of the surroundings but also the astounding charm of the heroine. The gentle mood of the film is set from the first scene itself. The hustle and bustle of the Bennet household encompasses the introductory scenes. There is a heightened excitement among the girls when they hear about the arrival of a rich young man in their neighborhood. All the members of the Bennet family are presented in the first few shots. The spectator can easily identify the gentle Jane, the nervous Mrs. Bennet, Mr. Bennet's cynical wit, the bubbly Kitty and Lydia, the odd Mary and the unaffected Elizabeth. Along with the indoor settings the outdoor settings also play significant roles. Darcy proposes to Elizabeth in the outdoors. The passionate declaration of love is followed by tumultuous rain. Bingley proposes to Jane indoors but he rehearses his proposition outdoors. This same background is the locale wherein Lizzie bears her mother's verbal attacks after her rejection of Collins' marriage offer.

Closely associated with settings are the props that recurrently occur on the screen as the movie progresses. They 'help to amplify a mood, give further definition to a setting or call attention to detail within the larger scene'(Villarejo 33). Props define the socioeconomic status of the character/s along with providing valuable insights into

the character/s. Elizabeth is mostly portrayed with a book in hand (indicative of her sensibility and lively nature). Women of Austen's day had to spend their sewing and embroidering but Lizzie turns out to be an exception by engaging in reading rather than in gossiping. The pianoforte is another remarkable prop presented in the film. Mary, the odd one amongst the Bennet girls is often pictured playing the pianoforte. At the ball, Mary is often asked to play a jig for her sisters. This was an indirect indication that Mary being the dullest and plainest of the brood had to stay away from the dancing arena. In fact, Lizzie too tries her hand at playing the pianoforte when she was at Lady Catherine's palatial home (here Lady Catherine was testing not just Lizzie's prowess but also her nephew's affection towards Lizzie). Miss Darcy is regarded to be an excellent pianist (young gentlewomen of the day had to be adept in art and music). Lady Catherine grants Mrs. Collins permission to use the pianoforte kept in the guest room (this again indicative of Lady Catherine's disdain for women who were deficient in womanly accomplishments).

The dining table is another significant prop commendably portrayed in the movie. The grand dining tables of Rosings are contrasted with the plain dining table of the Bennet household. You can easily notice the sumptuous meal on the one and the ordinary Victorian bread, butter, milk, eggs and boiled potatoes on the other. The dining table serves as a valuable juncture where the family meets together, sups together and makes commonplace comments of the people around them. Jane receives an invitation to the Bingleys' place while she was at the dining table, Mr. Collins proposes to Elizabeth while the family had assembled for their meals, Lady Catherine enquires about Elizabeth's upbringing while she was dining. Ribbons and handkerchiefs are props that suit Andrew Dix's proposition that props have 'an expressionistic power' (15). The fluttering and careless attitude of both Lydia and Kitty are vividly depicted through their use of ribbons and kerchiefs.

Lighting as mentioned earlier, aids in enhancing the feel of the movie. The typical Victorian country life with its pale, serene, picturesque scenario is contrasted with the bright, bustling township. 'Lighting helps viewers to understand setting as well as the characters and actors within those settings.' (Villarejo, 36) Keira Knightley's first appearance highlights her beauty, while Matthew Mac Fadyen (Darcy) is presented within less distinct lighting. As the movie runs we notice the natural goodness in Darcy through the natural illumination. The ballroom dancing scene has light from all sides. This enhances not just the beauty of the couples but also provides the spectators with a wholesome view of their acting which includes their 'facial expression, gesture, positioning, movement and speech' (Dix 19) Variant lighting patterns are used to depict the other characters.

Costume, makeup and hairstyle are some other pro filmic elements. The director has assiduously presented the eighteenth-century gentry folks life-style. The costumes worn by the Bennets, the Darcys, and the Bingleys are highly reflective of their class differences. Pale colors like white, grey, dull green and peach are worn by the young ladies. Lady Catherine's opulence is presented through the black taffeta and gemmed ornaments she has worn. Knightley mostly wears brown gowns. Her hair is unkempt often except when she is at the ball or she's touring with her uncle. This may be so because it is Lizzy's wit and vivacity that charms Austen's Darcy. Joe has done justice to this point by presenting Knightley with as little makeup as possible. The only time Knightley dons some makeup is towards the end when she accepts Mac Fadyen's marriage proposal. One may undoubtedly remark that Knightley's scintillating on-screen appearance and pointed dialogue delivery has enhanced the aura of the film. The only bright colored costumes onscreen are the red uniform of the militia. Makeup and costumes thus help augment 'the believability of a film's world' (Villarejo 37)

Music also plays a key role in the cinema. The opening background sound is a bird's song. We hear violin notes played in various tones as the film progresses. The ballroom dancing scene is enhanced with the rhythmic background dance numbers heard onscreen. The notes played on the pianoforte vary in tenor depending on which person (Mary, Elizabeth or Miss Darcy) handle it. 'Speech, music and noise' are the 'three types of film sounds' (Villarego 54). These three elements can be closely analyzed to interpret the images that appear on the screen. For example, Lizzy's uneasiness after being spotted by Darcy at his place is heightened by the ascending violin notes in the background. Speech is revealed through the dialogue delivery of the characters. Lizzy's punching wit, Darcy's arrogance, Mrs. Bennet's nervous nature, Jane's gentleness, Bingley's innocence and Lady Catherine's pride can be effortlessly detected through their dialogue delivery. Noise refers to the sound effects that help supplement the settings. The shift of scene from the countryside to the town is highlighted by the sound of horses' hooves and the sound of the militia marching.

Cinematography includes everything that comes within the purview of the camera. The camera includes within its frame, not just the settings but also the characters. In one shot the camera includes or excludes some elements. What the spectator views on the screen is not wholly reliant on camera position, it includes lighting and depth of focus. The movement and tilt of the camera are highly symbolic. The world of the film is presented through the camera lens. Through the camera's eyes, we perceive the social and economic condition of the gentry folk. The ballrooms with their music, dances, and merriment provide a sharp insight into the social gatherings of the day. The stateliness and opulence of the elite residences are subtly contrasted with the ordinary households.

Through the camera lens, we perceive Jane Austen's verbal descriptions. The long shots of the Pemberly Estate and Lady Catherine's abode help bring out the architectural grandeur and scenic beauty of the Regency period. The camera also serves as the silent narrator by speaking volumes through select shots. This is particularly noted in the scenes that come within view while Lizzie revolves on the swing rope in the courtyard soon after she has rejected Mr. Collins' marriage proposal. Marriage during Austen's age was necessary for women to survive. By refusing Collins' proposal, she was inviting disgrace and destitution to her family. The bleak surroundings augment the innermost workings of the character. It seems as if Lizzy is judging whether her own decision was right or wrong. We can easily decipher Lizzy's consciousness of the fact that her rejection will delineate her not just from motherly affections but also from sisterly affections too. Confrontations between Lizzie and her mother are shot from a distance, but the Darcy-Lizzie verbal duels are shot close up.

A mise en scene analysis has enabled to closely observe the composite elements of the film. The film is structured just as the novel into three distinct parts. The scenes have been clubbed into 16 chapters comprising of four scenes each. The director has compressed three hundred or more pages of reading material into an hour or more of sensory and visual matter. The charisma of Jane Austen has been preserved intact. The film has solely relied on the novel for its storyline and the on-screen presentation has rendered the film to be an artistically sound version of the novel. George Bluestone has argued that 'the moment the film went from the animation of stills to telling a story, it was inevitable that fiction would become the ore to be minted by story departments' (240) To sum it all, the film *Pride and Prejudice* has only ascertained the fact that celluloid has this enticing capacity to enliven old time classic works of literature.

## **REFERENCES**

1. *Bluestone, George. "The Limits of the Novel and the Limits of the Film". Film and Literature: An Introduction and Reader. Ed. Timothy Corrigan. London: Routledge, 2012. Print.*
2. *Chawdry, Vinita Singh. Jane Austen: A Feminist Vision Jaipur: YKing Books, 2014. Print.*
3. *Dix, Andrew. Beginning Film Studies. New Delhi: Viva Books, 2015. Print.*
4. *Pride and Prejudice. Dir. Joe Wright. Perf. Keira Knightley, Mathew Mac Fayden Universal Pictures, 2005. DVD.*
5. *Stam, Robert. "Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation." Film and Literature: An Introduction and Reader. Ed. Timothy Corrigan. London: Routledge, 2012. Print.*
6. *Villarejo, Amy. Film Studies: The Basics. London: Routledge, 2015. Print.*

