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**Not like the other girls: strategies for presenting the heroine's uniqueness
in two screen adaptations of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice***

The paper will look at the portrayal of the protagonist, Elisabeth Bennet, in two screen adaptations of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*: the BBC miniseries (released in 1995, written by Andrew Davies, directed by Simon Langton and starring Jennifer Ehle and Colin Firth) and the Working Title feature film (released in 2005, written by Deborah Moggach, directed by Joe Wright and starring Keira Knightley and Matthew Macfadyen).

Establishing the uniqueness of the female protagonist belongs to the time-honoured conventions of the romantic novel, where it can be achieved through narratorial comments, focalization and dialogue. In screen adaptations, this uniqueness can be further reinforced with the use of film language (e.g. shot composition, camera angles) and other visual elements such as costumes and scenography.

Among Jane Austen's six novels, *Pride and Prejudice* can definitely be said to have the most lasting popular appeal, which is evidenced by a plethora of recent derivative works such as the critically acclaimed transmedia adaptation *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, the BBC series *Lost in Austen*, P.D. James's sequel *Death Comes to Pemberley* and its subsequent screen adaptation, and Seth Grahame-Smith's mashup *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (both novel and its film adaptation.)

The novel definitely owes part to its appeal to its spirited heroine, who possesses many qualities that are valued by contemporary readers and audiences. In contrast with the more staid heroines that feature in Austen's other novels (*Sense and Sensibility*, *Mansfield Park*, *Persuasion*), Elisabeth Bennet is portrayed as independent and lively. She's active and (by the standards of the period) even sporty. Her conversation is intelligent and often witty. Because she's a centre of consciousness in the novel, the reader is also privy to her thoughts and can admire her insight as well as her irony and a wry sense of humour. Her appeal is further strengthened by the fact that she's admired by the positive characters in the novel (Mr Darcy, Mr Bennet, Mr and Mrs Gardiner), who all suggest that she's superior to other women in her social circle. She also becomes the object of jealousy and/or dislike of the novel's negative characters (Miss Bingley, Lady Catherine de Burgh), who however also grudgingly admit that there is something different and possibly special about her.

In my paper I am going to analyse the techniques that are used to underscore Elizabeth's uniqueness and to remediate her appeal from page to screen, analysing two above-mentioned screen adaptations: the phenomenally popular BBC television series of 1995, which contributed to the boom of Austen-mania in mid-1990s, and the feature film released in 2005. My focus will be on analysing the use of film language (shot composition, camera angles, light and colour, editing.) Apart from shot composition, which often shows Elisabeth (played by Jennifer Ehle and Keira Knightley respectively) at the centre of a carefully staged *tableau*, costumes are also used to great effect in both adaptations. I am also going to analyse such ancillary materials as interviews with directors, writers and actors who talk about their vision for the character.

KEYWORDS

Jane Austen; *Pride and Prejudice*; Austen on screen, screen adaptation, female characters

SHORT BIO

I am a Polish scholar of nineteenth-century literature. I completed the doctoral programme in English studies at the University of Warsaw. My doctoral thesis focused on the use of popular literature tropes in George Eliot's novels. In 2015 I started work as Assistant Professor at the Department of Modern Languages at the University of Kielce, Poland. In October 2017 I started a two-year Marie Curie Individual Fellowship at the Linnaeus University in Sweden. My Marie Curie research project focuses on the portrayal of female characters in recent screen adaptations of British nineteenth-century novels written by women.