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**INTERTEXTUALITY AND FEMINISM IN JANE
AUSTEN'S *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE* AND
SETH GRAHAME-SMITH'S NOVEL AND BURR
STEERS' FILM OF *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE
AND ZOMBIES***

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ABSTRACT

Mira Salejärvi: Intertextuality and Feminism in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Seth Grahame-Smith's novel and Burr Steers' film of *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*

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This thesis will study and contrast social themes in Jane Austen's novel, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), Seth Grahame-Smith's novel, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2009), and Burr Steers' 2016 film of the same name. Austen's novel of manners has retained its societal influence for over two centuries, and its commentary on human nature and relationships has offered a premise for more imaginative interpretations and adaptations, such as the supernatural version of Grahame-Smith, where the Bennet sisters turn from society girls to zombie killers.

These texts are studied through the theory of intertextuality, looking at how the different versions of Austen's story interact and comment on each other by juxtaposing different and often incongruous genres and cultural values. The thesis also analyzes the novels and the film through the lens of feminism. Gender performativity, in terms of the social roles and behavior considered appropriate for women, is compared and contrasted between the original and the supernatural versions. The male gaze is also considered, examining how the adaptation of female characters by the male (co-)author and director affect the representation of women and the feminist themes of the texts.

Themes that are shared between the novels and the film are marriage as a life goal, pride and prejudice in the main characters of Elizabeth and Darcy, and class differences that influence the actions of the characters. But the modern adaptations place less emphasis on marriage, presenting women as empowered characters with greater agency, acting as warriors in the fight against zombies and not just defined by the search for a husband and social status. It could be concluded that Grahame-Smith and Steers' works might appeal more to a diverse, modern audience, for they seem relevant for the problems and anxieties of twenty-first century consumers; monsters are easier to fit anywhere, while Regency era social rules had to be reworked. However, the modern supernatural adaptations also undermine their attempt to give power and autonomy to women by viewing them through the male gaze, sexualizing and objectifying them in ways that Austen's novel did not. The linking of these different texts within a wide cultural web, where even Austen's original and the zombies themselves are influenced by other works, creates intertextual dialogues that reflect significantly on the works' underlying social attitudes.

Keywords: intertextuality, feminism, adaptation, zombies, agency, Jane Austen

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TIIVISTELMÄ

Mira Salejärvi: Intertekstuaalisuus ja feminismi Jane Austenin *Ylpeys ja ennakkoluulo*, Seth Grahame-Smithin romaanissa ja Burr Steersin elokuvassa *Ylpeys ja ennakkoluulo ja zombit*

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Tämä tutkielma tutkii ja vertailee sosiaalisia teemoja Jane Austenin *Ylpeys ja ennakkoluulo*-romaanissa (1813), Seth Grahame-Smithin *Ylpeys ja ennakkoluulo ja zombit*-romaanissa (2009) sekä Burr Steersin samannimisessä elokuvassa vuodelta 2016. Austenin romaani on pysynyt suosiossa yli 200 vuotta julkaisemisensa jälkeen, ja sen katsaus ihmisluonteisiin ja -suhteisiin on ollut inspiraationa uusille tulkinnoille ja adaptaatioille, kuten Grahame-Smithin yliluonnollinen versio, jossa Bennetin sisaret ovat muuttuneet seurapiirineideistä zombietappajiksi.

Näitä teoksia on tutkittu intertekstuaalisuusteorian kautta tarkastellen, millä tavoin Austenin tarinan eri versiot ovat vuorovaikutuksessa rinnastamalla erityyppisiä ja usein ristiriitaisia tyyli- ja sosiaalisia arvoja. Tutkielma analysoi romaaneja ja elokuvaa myös feministisestä näkökulmasta. Sukupuoli performatiivisuus, joka on määritelty naisten sosiaalisissa rooleissa ja heille suotavassa käytöksessä, on ollut vertailun kohteena alkuperäisen klassikon ja yliluonnollisten versioiden välillä. Miesten katsetta on myös tarkasteltu, ja miten miespuolisten kirjailijan ja ohjaajan muunnellut naishahmot vaikuttavat naisten representaatioon ja feministisiin teemoihin teksteissä.

Tekstien väliset teemat romaaneissa ja elokuvassa ovat avioliitto elämän tavoitteena, päähenkilöiden Elizabethin ja Darcyn ylpeys ja ennakkoluulot sekä luokkaerot, jotka vaikuttavat henkilöahmojen toimintaan. Modernit adaptaatiot kuitenkin vähentävät avioliiton tärkeyttä antamalla naisille enemmän mahdollisuuksia päättää omasta elämästään ja toimimaan sotureina taistelussa zombeja vastaan, eikä heidän merkityksensä ole sidonnainen miehen ja sosiaalisen aseman löytämiseen. On mahdollista päätellä Grahame-Smithin ja Steersin teosten vetoavan moninaisempaan ja modernimpaan yleisöön, sillä niiden sanoma on oleellinen 2000-luvun kuluttajan ongelmille ja peloille: hirviöt on helppo mahduttaa minne vain, kun taas romantiikan ajan säännöt ovat olleet pakko muokata. Toisaalta modernit, yliluonnolliset adaptaatiot sabotoivat omaa yritystään antaa naisille enemmän voimaa ja itsepäättäväisyyttä katselemalla heitä miesten näkökulmasta, esineellistämällä ja seksualisoimalla heitä tavalla, jota ei esiinny Austenin tarinassa. Sitomalla nämä teokset yhteen suuressa kulttuurillisessa verkossa, jossa jopa Austenin klassikko ja zombit ovat saaneet vaikutteita muista teoksista, syntyy intertekstuaalisia dialogeja, jotka vaikuttavat merkittävästi teosten keskeisiin, sosiaalisiin asenteisiin.

Avainsanat: intertekstuaalisuus, feminismi, adaptaatio, zombit, toimijuus, Jane Austen

Tämän julkaisun alkuperäisyys on tarkastettu Turnitin OriginalityCheck –ohjelmalla.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (*PP*, 1813) is a novel of manners and mostly addresses social issues, such as relationships and social status. The novel remains popular even to this day, and it has gathered interest among those, who have wanted to make their own versions of the beloved story (Baiesi 89-90). One of the most well-known authors of such rewritings is Seth Grahame-Smith, who wrote the supernatural version *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (*PPZ*) in 2009; Grahame-Smith incorporated Austen's text while inserting a new material about zombies and fighting to create an uncommon adaptation. The zombie story gathered popularity on its own and the film version of it was released in 2016. Grahame-Smith's novel version tells the story of Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy as closely to the original as possible but makes both parties capable zombie fighters. The film *PPZ* has the same premise, but the film emphasizes the fight against the zombies and makes survival the main goal for the characters. The social and romantic aspects take a secondary role, while still retaining most of their importance in the narrative.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine how Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is changed due to the introduction of the supernatural into the narrative, along with modern portrayals of social relationships. The difference between societal expectation and anxieties, such as marriage and independence, will be contrasted between narratives created in the nineteenth century and the twenty-first century. Firstly, I will explore Austen's *PP*, Austen and Grahame-Smith's *PPZ* and Steer's film version of *PPZ* using theories of intertextuality. I will compare the shared themes and contrast how the addition of zombies changes the social values. Secondly, I combine theories of intertextuality and feminism to study how the roles of women are portrayed and performed in the novel and film of *PPZ* in opposition – or similarly – to *PP*. I will also study how the male gaze is utilized by the male coauthor and director.

2 THEORY

The literary theories I use in this thesis are theories of intertextuality and feminism. Intertextuality will be connected to the other theories due to its overarching significance in the connections between the primary sources and in the analysis of those primary sources. Likewise, the primary sources can be analyzed through feminist theories and compared for their different approaches to the topic.

From the beginning, understanding texts depends on our ability to situate them in the world in relation to other texts. Our knowledge of existing texts and their possible interpretations is crucial because no text exist in a void: texts overlap and merge to create new texts (Barthes 146). As Graham Allen aptly puts it: “Every text has its meaning, therefore, in relation to other texts” (6). This definition of intertextuality is simplistic, and Allen continues discussing the complexity of intertextuality which is interpreted differently by most scholars studying it. He uses Barthes’ theories in “The Death of the Author” (1977) among other intertextual theories to illustrate the marketability of the author, but to also deepen the meaning behind words when the author is disregarded. This is evident in the case of *PP* and *PPZ*, because Austen’s name is difficult to separate from her literary works, but ultimately, while her name helped sell the supernatural version, her authorship does not control meaning in the novels. The overlap and connection between the primary sources are in the center of this analysis and in intertextuality itself.

As part of intertextuality, I will mention incongruous humor. The present intertextuality juxtaposes different genres and attitudes and thus produces incongruity. Terry Eagleton’s book, *Humour*, defines incongruity as involving “the disruption of orderly thought processes or the violation of laws or conventions” (Eagleton 67); undoubtedly, zombies in a Regency-era novel are unexpected and dysfunctional. The humorous incongruities highlight tensions between historical and social attitude, not only relating to zombies, but also to relationships between people and their behavior.

The focus of the feminist analysis will be on the equality between men and women, and gender performativity; I will analyze such themes as marriage and

motherhood from a gender perspective, and also the male gaze on women. The gender performativity theory has been credited mostly to Judith Butler (Blencowe 162): specific actions need to be performed repeatedly based on gender expectations to establish that gender. The idea of performing gender becomes relevant when the characters in *PPZ* deviate from their original appearances; the Bennet sisters become warriors, so their femininity needs to be reaffirmed in other ways. The social roles and customs have changed with the introduction of zombies, so the rules and performances of gender have changed accordingly. In view of this, the distinctions between men and women will be examined and the degree of equality will be analyzed between the different versions of the story.

3 SOCIAL COMMENTARY

The imitation of the Regency era in the *PPZ* book and film reflects the manners, values and anxieties that are explored in *PP*, but from a temporal distance. As Pedro discusses in her analysis of the TV show *Penny Dreadful*, the adaptations form a “temporal dialogue between them and us, allowing the audience to reflect on contemporary issues from a chronological distance” (195). The *PPZ* book is closely modeled on the original *PP*, so it does not differ greatly in regard to the values, but the film highlights the modern anxieties presented in the novel more clearly. All the versions share the desire to find companionship on one’s own terms: in the *PPZ* film, Elizabeth Bennet states after refusing Parson Collins’ proposal that “anything is to be preferred or endured rather than marrying without affection” (Seers, 2016). Elizabeth is critical and independent in matters of romance and marriage in *PP*, and it is only increased in *PPZ*, in which she has the power and autonomy to take care of herself, not financially but physically. By making her more in control of her future, the importance of marriage is decreased: it is a choice rather than an obligation. Despite this, marriage remains a dominating institution, because many see it as means to improve their lives.

3.1 Purpose of Life

Austen’s *PP* is a novel of manners (Baiesi 86); it presents and comments on the society and customs of its era, with a witty and critical narrator. Marriage is an important life goal to many of the people and it is even mentioned in the opening sentence of the novel: “It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife” (Austen 3). Rather than a fact, this is a belief in many women’s minds. In the novel, especially Mrs. Bennet, the mother of the family, believes this and tries to marry off her five daughters to such wealthy men: “The business of [Mrs Bennet’s] life was to get her daughters married” (Austen 5). The simple-mindedness of Mrs. Bennet is an attribute that the narrator subtly ridicules as the fault in her own marriage (Austen 5). However, both Mr. and

Mrs. Bennet are looking out for their daughters, because their purpose in life needs to be marriage for it is not possible for women to inherit or prosper outside of marriage. The different ways single ladies approach relationships and marriage prospects varies, but all of them acknowledge that they want and need to get married to fulfill their purpose in life.

By contrast, the addition of zombies changes the occupation of ladies from embroidery and socializing to training and weaponry. The supernatural aspect works for the novel version of *PPZ* because they are woven seamlessly into the original story without taking too much away from it. The women are still aspiring to get married, but they are not single-mindedly focused on the opposite sex. By introducing a way for the women to be useful to the nation without a man, Grahame-Smith introduces aspects of modern woman into the story. The women appear more in control of their own lives, and therefore more equal to men outside of marriage. But Grahame-Smith also emphasizes the domination patriarchy has over women through marriage; women lose their autonomy when entering matrimony, for they have to relinquish their status as warriors and become wives and mothers (Austen and Grahame-Smith 230). Despite the prevailing threat of the zombies, marriage moves the Bennet sisters from public life to private, all their fighting done behind closed doors. There cannot exist anything more powerful than marriage, apart from death.

The film, on the other hand, goes further in making the women more equal to men. The importance of marriage is present, but the women are not as bound by it as in the novels. Due to the film focusing on the zombies and how they have changed the society and landscape of Great Britain, so much of the original story and its meaning are overshadowed. A fitting example of this happens in the end of the film, when both Jane and Bingley, and Elizabeth and Darcy get married in a dual ceremony, and the wedding is disrupted by a massive zombie attack (Steers 1:39:45-40:46, 1:41:33-42:19). Just as marriage as a concept is often disrupted by the gruesome reminders of the undead – even the opening sentence is changed from its marriage-centeredness to a zombie warning – the actual ceremony is also

overshadowed. In addition, all four characters get ready to fight and defend the living, changing the idea that women are not warriors after becoming wives.

The changing values and goals in society are attributed to the modernization the male co-author and director bring to the story, but the degree to which they change the story has also an effect on the purpose of the story. Gothic, which is reanimated by the zombies, often “stage social and political conflicts, such as unequal gender relations” (Baiesi 85) to reflect and comment on anxieties that many in society have.

3.2 Pride and Prejudice

The name of the original novel reflects the most important themes discussed in the novel: pride and prejudice. Interestingly, these themes featured in the title are a reference to Frances Burney’s novel *Cecilia* (1782). *The Cambridge Companion to ‘Pride and Prejudice’* (2013) describe Burney’s influence in Austen’s writing, among other female writers in Austen’s childhood (62). The most notable similarity was that the romance in *Cecilia* was hindered as “the result of PRIDE and PREJUDICE” (Burney, capitals in the original, cited in *The Cambridge Companion*) just like the romance in *PP*. In Austen’s novel, these themes are expressed through Elizabeth and Darcy.



Figure 1: Burr Steers, *PPZ*, 1.09.39: Elizabeth and Darcy at the end of their fight.

Primarily, the theme of pride has been attributed to Mr. Darcy. Darcy, being a wealthy gentleman, has let his pride grow, encouraged by others' regard for him and his own vanity. Darcy enjoys popularity within moments of entering a room because he is handsome and rich (Austen 10). In *PPZ*, the addition of being a masterful zombie killer counts to his pride also (Austen & Grahame-Smith 16). However, his prideful attitude and contempt for others soon turns the opinion of his peers. His pride has made him only aware of his own life and he does not reflect on the lives of others. This creates tension which bursts in an eye-opening fashion at the half-way point of the story when Elizabeth turns down Darcy's proposal. In *PPZ*, novel and film, Elizabeth's refusal is accompanied with a physical fight between herself and Darcy: in Figure 1, Elizabeth has stated Darcy to be "the last man in the world whom she could ever be prevailed on to marry" before nearly piercing his heart with a dagger (Steers 1.09.25-37). While the devastating effect is managed without the dagger in *PP*, the weapon emphasizes the alteration Elizabeth's refusal causes in Darcy's life. The tension in the scene bursts in a humorous fashion – the characters act in an incongruous way by fighting – which quickly concludes in a devastating way, leaving Elizabeth in tears. None the less, in all versions, the talk makes Darcy aware of this aspect of his and he learns to manage his pride better.

On the opposite side, Elizabeth Bennet is riddled with prejudice. Being of lower social class than some other characters, prejudice against higher classes comes almost naturally to Elizabeth. As her family is not as well-to-do and respectable in manner, she has learned to conduct herself so that she nor others need to feel shame and ridicule at her expense. In *PP*, she is moderately well educated and behaved, and she is able to attract and maintain an interest of the opposite sex without behaving in an overly scandalous manner. In *PPZ*, her talents are increased by her proficiency with all kinds of weapons and her success as a warrior. However, she also suffers from pride, but more than that, from prejudice. She is too quick in forming an opinion of others based on their first impressions. She quickly dismisses the Bingley sisters, because they are lacking in intellectual or physical talents, in addition to feeling herself above their company. The moment Elizabeth and Darcy have their confrontation, Elizabeth understands that she does not always know the whole picture and she cannot trust her own or just one person's subjective view of events. Acknowledging this, Elizabeth slowly lets go of her prejudiced opinions.

On the whole, conflict and tension are created from both of these themes clashing in the characters, but the addition of zombies does not alter the tension. The continuity of these themes is significant, because it promises continuity of characters and Austen's influence through time. The problems they cause are transferrable through literature and genres and even to the modern world. Grahame-Smith does not have a motive to change this part of Austen's work, for it appears to be universal; save for the hurt pride of Elizabeth requires her to nearly kill Darcy a few times, but this is narrated in a humorous manner where other conflicts distract her. Usually, ironically, an attack of zombies saves Darcy's life.

3.3 Class Differences

Class differences as a theme continues through all the texts, but there are different ways they treat the topic. Attitudes that were discussed in the previous section continue from texts to film, with the exception that the zombies literalize the problem

of the poor falling between the cracks; their defenses against the dead are almost nonexistent.

The class divisions are present in the small country circle in Hertfordshire where the Bennets live, even if they are not as clear as they would be in an urban setting. Mr. Darcy and his aunt, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, are the highest standing characters in the novel while the inhabitants of Meryton are much lower. The mixing of the different classes is deemed insufferable: “the insipidity and yet the noise; the nothingness and yet the self-importance of all these people” (Austen 27). Miss Bingley voices the opinion many members of higher classes hold, and even Darcy is revealed to be thinking in such a way when he proposes to Elizabeth “against his better judgment” (Austen 191). His pride makes him assume that Elizabeth would only be glad of the proposal despite the insults he throws against her family and station in life. Austen does not even discuss characters below the general status of the Bennets and their neighbors, because lower classes seemingly have no significance in this society.

Similarly, *PPZ* represents the disadvantage of lower classes in a more concrete way. The lower-class citizens do not have the money or ability to defend themselves against the zombies, and thus many zombies are deceased lower class; for example, Mr. Bingley’s entire staff is devoured by two zombies (Austen and Grahame-Smith 84). Interestingly, the higher classes who have trained in the Orient but use their talents to defend the Crown of Britain, are considered valuable members of society, but these people also lose everything if they are zombified: “In a world where Englishness and zombiness oppose one another, zombies are excluded not only because of their non-human status but also because of their non-social position” (Baiesi 94). This is also evident in the film *PPZ*, where Darcy and Lady de Bourgh do not want to help the humane zombies that feed off of pigs’ brains, instead they make sure the undead are properly zombified and then killed (Steers 59:14-1:01:42; 1:28:10-29). The neglected and derision of higher classes towards the lower classes turn with the plague to open hostility. The great class differences remain unchanged for the benefit of showing how cruel the black-and-white vision of Regency era was;

the poor masses are turned into a nameless and faceless “Other” that needs to be vanquished.

All in all, unlike with the theme of pride and prejudice, the class distinctions do not transfer as seamlessly and clearly, but instead are only forcefully kept the same, because Grahame-Smith and Steers emphasize how insignificant the lower classes are in the eyes of the wealthy. Only their deaths are important, because they usually mean that the wealthy warriors have succeeded in their duty to defend the kingdom. These class differences are drastic, but not focused on as much as gender differences. Gender and feminism mirror class conflicts and are discussed next.

4 FEMINIST COMMENTARY

Part of intertextuality, but a major topic needing its own analysis, are the feminist themes and commentary in the novels and film. There is no evidence that Jane Austen was vocally supporting women's equal rights, but her novels comment on topics that can be construed as feminist. Her female characters, like Elizabeth, stand up for themselves and seek to better themselves, not for the amusement of others or to attract, but to improve as humans. The expectations for women to act or look a certain way have changed, but not disappeared in the 200 years that cover the period between *PP* and *PPZ*. In *PPZ*, the women are also expected to be respectable maidens *and* capable fighters (Austen and Grahame-Smith 38-9). These expectations indicate that the women need to show these sides to society and perform their assigned roles to be accepted, for they are always observed and evaluated. The following sections discuss this further.

4.1 Gender Roles and Performing Gender

Judith Butler's ideology of gender performance indicates that the repetition of gender roles creates the gender (Blencowe 163). The women in Austen's novel try to make themselves attractive to the men by dressing up, flirting, and showcasing their talents as amateur artists. Among the female characters, Elizabeth is distinguished, because in addition to doing many of the same things as other women, she is also independent and headstrong and does not defer to injustice: she stands up for herself when Darcy and his aunt, Lady Catherine, insult and try to control her (Austen 192-5, 355-9). She does conform to the gender roles, but she also wants to establish her own life with her own rules.

Generally, in *PP*, men and women have their own societal roles, and they pursue masculine and feminine pastimes respectively, so there is no confusion about their gender. During Austen's time, men were expected to better themselves while women's skills were aimed at attracting men (Mukherjee 4): men learn a trade, but women learn, for example, to play instruments, just to entertain guests. Yet Austen

implicitly refers to Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) when Elizabeth refuses Mr. Collins' proposal: "Do not consider me now as an elegant female intending to plague you, but as a rational creature speaking the truth from her heart" (Austen 109). Recognizing what the most patriarchal members of the society expect from women, Austen nonetheless challenges the line of appropriate behavior for women. There is not an obvious desire of equality – Elizabeth does exclusively act in a feminine way – but rather an acknowledgment of condescending attitude towards women. By contrast, in *PPZ*, the Bennet sisters "perform their gender in ways that break the rules of gender" (Blencowe 164); they expose themselves by lifting their skirts and fighting the undead without waiting a man to come to fight for them (Austen and Grahame-Smith 18). Even considering the conventions of the Gothic genre, the women are not damsels in distress, but they confront the monster themselves. They are hounded by the zombie "Other", but since the powerless woman is not enticing for the modern audience like it was in the Regency era (Mukherjee 5), the sisters are given the talent to dispose of the threat on their own while displaying sympathy benefitting their femininity.

However, despite the increased autonomy, women's position and freedom are debated between the *PPZ* novel and film. The novel's stance is that women are warriors until they die or marry, but it is not the same in the film. In the film, Elizabeth's friend, Charlotte Lucas, suggests that "for the right man you would [relinquish your sword for a ring]" to which Elizabeth replies, "the right man wouldn't ask me to" (Steers 12.50-53). The film allows, and even makes it a defining part of her attractiveness, that Elizabeth is such an accomplished warrior that she can fight for herself and defend her loved ones: Darcy's attraction to Elizabeth starts from seeing her fight at the ball (18:45-19:01). Only Parson Collins, himself an abysmal fighter, would require his wife to only lift "pots and pans" for there are no weapons in his home (35.50-55); homemaking is more important to him than any type of self-defense. This only adds to his ridicule, for it is unwise and naïve not to arm oneself during zombie apocalypse. The film is supportive of women not losing their own identity when connected by marriage with men.

In *PP*, Elizabeth was not entirely against the institution of marriage, but she has always had high expectations for her own matrimony: Mr. Bennet notes towards the end, after Darcy has asked for Elizabeth's hand in marriage, that Elizabeth would not be happy if she did not view her husband as her superior and "truly esteem him" (Austen 377). The increasing interest in getting married aligned with her falling in love with Darcy. On the other hand, in *PPZ*, Elizabeth is strictly against marriage; she states she prefers fighting the zombies until death than getting married to anyone. However, because the change from a single, warrior woman to a wife is more drastic, the change of opinion in Elizabeth is also notable. When falling in love with Darcy, she does not dismiss her status as a warrior, but it loses its priority in her thinking and she turns her mind to matters more feminine and matrimonial, like being the mistress of a household (Austen and Grahame-Smith 199). The step back to her expected gender roles would have been seen as an improvement for Elizabeth in Austen's time, but in *PPZ* seems almost absurd, since Grahame-Smith makes marriage on par with death; women are lost to the world as surely as if they were dead: the Bennet sisters are either a bride of death or a bride of man (119). Grahame-Smith introduces loss to matrimony: loss of identity, independence and even life, as in Charlotte Lucas' case.

Another challenge for typical gender roles is the idea of a woman taking a life. Women are associated with giving birth, so the opposite unsettling, the combination even more so. In *PPZ*, both in novel and film, a zombie woman with a zombie baby surprise the Bennet sisters (Austen and Grahame-Smith 95-6; Steers, Figure 2). It is unclear whether the woman turned the baby into zombie after turning herself or whether she gave birth to a zombie baby as a zombie, like in Peter Jackson's *Braindead* (or *Dead Alive*, 1992). While the zombie baby in *PPZ* is more realistic than Jackson's, the unnaturalness of a new life turning to living dead is more shocking than other incongruities the novel and the film present, and the sisters cannot bring themselves to kill the pair because their sensibilities are challenged more profoundly. The moment is significant, because the impact of the undead baby is much more upsetting to the characters and the viewers, and it is not used as a tool of humor (like

Jackson's). The scene almost reminds the women of their expected roles as caregivers, not killers.

What is expected of the female gender in *PP* is attentiveness to their appearance and their abilities to please a man, but in both *PPZ* versions, the Bennet sisters turn their attention to more public occupation, they break the mold. Their repeated actions, however, still uphold the proper femininity, because they acknowledge their status in society, despite their usefulness in the fight against zombies.



Figure 2: Burr Steers, *PPZ*, 23.39: the zombie mother and baby.

4.2 The Male Gaze on Femininity

One of the biggest differences between *PP* and *PPZ* – besides the zombies – is the influence of the male author and director. The male gaze reminds the reader that the women are evaluated based on their feminine attractiveness and traits; Darcy admires Elizabeth's fighting and her appearance, but her muscular arms do not "diminish her femininity" (Austen and Grahame-Smith 25). Furthermore, the performativity of gender becomes more apparent in the film version of *PPZ*. The visualization of the story and the characters offer a new medium for the male gaze to interpret the characters. The film has moved in a direction from the original that

appeals more to the modern viewer, but it is not always successful in the balance of women's freedom and entertainment. As Pedro puts it, these adaptations of historical narratives "exaggerate [old-fashioned] sexual repression, so that the overexploitation of women's sexuality can be perceived as empowering and liberating" but ultimately turn women into "hypersexualized objects in the hands of men and in the eyes of male viewers" (200). Especially the Bennet girls often depart in the feminine portrayals by adopting more masculine aspects, like violence and activity, so their gender needs to be portrayed – performed – for the viewer: them preparing themselves for the first ball showcases their dressing up and arming themselves in an unnecessarily sexual way (Figure 3). The clothes are designed to appear pleasing for the eye, not offer comfort or practicality for the young fighters: heaving chests almost spilling out of the tight bodices are not typical of Regency era, but they are added to the film, because violence and sexual desire are both entertaining and attractive to the male viewer.



Figure 3: Burr Steers, *PPZ*, 11.39: Jane and Elizabeth dressing up for the ball.

Moreover, the novel and film *PPZ* include sexualized humor absent from *PP*. Darcy makes remarks about "balls" to Elizabeth on several occasions that make her blush, indicating that there is an explicit double entendre: "Your balls, Mr. Darcy?" He reached out and closed her hand around them, and offered, 'They belong to you,

Miss Bennet’” (Austen and Grahame-Smith 209). Notable is that the balls mentioned in the jokes refer to both dances and ammunition. Such jokes are brief and meant to bemuse Elizabeth; they suggest a closer relationship between Darcy and Elizabeth than they really have. Without a doubt, the jokes feel out of place, because they do not fit the Austen style of purposeful mirth but are added only for the entertainment of crude humor that jokes about genitalia usually offer. There is no wit behind them, just juvenile curiosity with the forbidden.

Just as Austen targeted her novels to women, the male collaborators had all kinds of readers and viewers in mind. They made the female characters more empowered and independent with life outside of marriage market, but the supposed feminist rewritings appeared to be a façade that covers the deeply rooted sexist attitudes.

5 CONCLUSIONS

It can be argued that Seth Grahame-Smith's adaptation of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* makes the novel more low-culture, but it is Grahame-Smith's and Burr Steers' intention with the novel and film of *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* to make the story more approachable and modern to diverse audiences (Baiesi 97-8). The incongruity of blending gothic in with the classic story in *PPZ* is familiar enough, while at the same time, brand new, so it reaches and resonates with more consumers, female and male alike:

New revisions of old novels can actually offer modes of expression for contemporary audiences to cope with the pressures of modern society, which, like Austen's Regency England, is often frightening and mysterious rather than stable and rational: in this way, the zombie personifies an imperial critique of modernity itself. (Baiesi 99)

The appeal of the supernatural is proven multiple times (Taylor 2), so it draws in the audience, but the story that unfolds is mainly Austen and thus offers social commentary about Regency England that resonates even with the modern readers. The issues of freer dimensions of courtship and marriage, otherness and identity are discussed in Austen's novel, and highlighted in Grahame-Smith's adaptation (Baiesi 88-9, 91). Grahame-Smith does not write a new story, not only because it would not have had as big of an impact for the modern reader intertextually, but also because the adaptation allows the modern reader to acknowledge and appreciate Austen's novel of manners in a way that is more relevant to the challenges nowadays: women face pressure to balance public, working life and domestic life like Elizabeth balanced killing zombies and finding a suitable husband.

Darcy and Elizabeth retain their pride and prejudice. Only by lowering their weapons, physical and mental, can they communicate effectively and understand each other most clearly. Elizabeth's decision to give up her sword is only understood through the original story where women are more dependent on their husbands and give up the things relating to their girlhood: their names, their homes and their

“freedom”. Marriage is a desired outcome, even when women like Elizabeth want to marry for love and respect.

Gender performativity is not as simple to determine, because the characters do not deviate from their genders and positions in society. The women, even as zombie killers, are accepting of their place as inferior to those they respect, such as Elizabeth does to Darcy, but not to Mr. Collins. Furthermore, because Steers created the film to be entertaining, the female characters are also performing their gender roles for the male gaze; overly sexualized and revealing outfits appeals to the viewer rather than help the characters to be effective warriors. The feminist commentary is not as straightforward in *PPZ* than in *PP*, because the co-creators are men and do not further women’s rights in as personal manner as a woman can, but their effort to showcase how Austen worked within a patriarchal system is mirrored when they unconsciously uphold the attitudes that system upholds. The overall commentary is supportive, but it is not without its own challenges.

It can be seen from this analysis that Austen’s novel can transfer through time, because its message and themes continue to be applicable to the readers, whether it includes zombies or not. Grahame-Smith and Steers made momentous adaptations of her works, but these adaptations will most likely be part of the twenty-first-century zeitgeist and do not have significant intertextual influence on further literary works.

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