

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE AND ZOMBIES: JANE AUSTEN CONSUMED BY HER POPULARITY

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Abstract

This paper presents an analysis of the novel *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (Seth Grahame-Smith, 2009), a parody of Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), and the movie with the same title released in 2016. It begins with a reflection about Austen's popularity through an examination of the current increasing publication of sequels and adaptations of her novels, a phenomenon that, among other consequences, has consolidated an image of her work as naïve love stories for women and the initiator of the modern 'chick lit'. Next, it moves to the study of *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* that includes the origins and entrance into popular culture of the zombie figure and a presentation of some excerpts from this parody in order to observe the changes made to the original and how these changes are related to contemporary values and concepts, which contribute to the weakening of Austen's work through the erasure of her irony and social criticism. Finally, a brief analysis of the movie will be conducted not only in relation to the original novel and its parody but also to the characteristics expected from the universe built by Austen's fans.

Key words: parody, movie, Jane Austen, zombies, fandom

Resumo

O presente artigo traz uma análise do livro *Orgulho e Preconceito e Zumbis* (Seth Grahame-Smith, 2009), uma paródia do romance de Jane Austen *Orgulho e Preconceito* (1813), bem como do filme de mesmo título lançado em 2016. Ele parte de uma reflexão inicial a respeito da popularidade atual de Jane Austen percebida pela crescente publicação de continuações e adaptações de seus romances, um fenômeno que, entre outras consequências, acabou consagrando a obra da autora como histórias de amor inocentes para mulheres e iniciadora da moderna 'chick lit'. Em seguida, passa para a análise de *Orgulho e Preconceito e Zumbis*, a qual inclui as origens da figura do zumbi na cultura popular e a apresentação de trechos dessa paródia para observarmos, em primeiro lugar, as mudanças feitas em relação ao original e, em segundo lugar, como essas modificações estão relacionadas a valores e conceitos contemporâneos, que também auxiliam no enfraquecimento da obra original de Austen pelo apagamento total de sua ironia e crítica social. Por último, será feita

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uma breve análise do filme em relação não só ao romance original e a sua paródia mas também às características esperadas pelo universo construído pelos fãs de Austen.

Palavras-chave: paródia, filme, Jane Austen, zumbi, fandom

A quick search on Amazon.com shows that last month there were 564 books available under the category of “Austen sequel”². It is impossible to describe them all, but basically this category includes traditional sequels or continuations, those books that base their stories on the lives of the main characters after the end of the original (sometimes also on the life of some other minor character); different kinds of spin-off novels that include stories which happen before the original (‘prequels’), or during (‘midquels’), or that are retellings of the same story by other characters; modern adaptations that will bring the story and the characters to our day; and finally, mash-ups that combine Jane Austen’s world with pirates, vampires and whatever is popular nowadays.

When dealing with these adaptations, we first need to remember that this is not a recent phenomenon. The first sequel to an Austen novel was written in 1914 by Sybil Brinton, with the title of *Old Friends and New Fancies*, where she continues *Pride and Prejudice* focusing mainly on Kitty Bennet and Georgiana Darcy, but where she also includes many characters from all of Austen’s other novels. But the few sequels that were published after Brinton cannot compare to the mass production of novels that has involved Austen’s name since the 1990s, nor with the amount of fan fiction available online. They do have something in common, though: whether old or recent, every sequel must solve an interesting paradox, where, on the one hand, it needs to bring something new and not simply reconstitute the original story; and on the other hand, it cannot go too far away from the original or it could, in Deidre Lynch’s words, fail to satisfy the “demand for more of the same” (Lynch, 166). It is intriguing, as several critics have noticed, that in their yearning for bringing something new, the sequels to Jane Austen’s novels try to insert much of the exaggerated sensibility and drama that was mocked by Austen herself. Many of these books end up resulting in celebrations of a style directly opposite to Austen’s, and, according to Deidre Lynch, “the consequence is that these narratives often feel like throwbacks to the Gothic and sentimental novels that Austen loved to burlesque. They often feel, in their sensationalism, strangely pre-rather than post-Austenian” (Lynch, 164-165).

² http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_sb_noss_2?url=search-alias%3Daps&field-keywords=austen+sequel
Accessed March in 29th 2016.

The result is that these sequels are not good novels; but still they are endlessly sought after and read by Austen fans. This continuous interest, even if it's disturbing, must be seen as an important phenomenon that has something to tell us about these readers, and how, in fact, Austen's novels are being perceived nowadays. For, if we consider the sequels and spin-offs as translations of Austen's text to the 21st century, we can agree with Rosemary Arrojo when she says that "our translation of any text won't be faithful to the original but to what we consider the original to be, to what we consider what constitutes it, - to our own interpretation of the original text, that will be always a result of what we are, feel and think" (Arrojo, 41³). Hence, these sequels must be analyzed as products of our time, which can tell us much more about ourselves than about Austen's novels.

Usually, these sequels will have some characteristics in common: they offer a sort of nostalgic image of Austen's world, seen as a genteel and polite 'old England' where manners were superior and life was simpler than today; they focus on the feelings of Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy and their happy ending – more often than not, with many depictions of their sex life; and they tend to place Mr. Darcy in the spotlight, transforming him, firstly, in the main character of the novel, and, secondly, recreating him in a much more sentimental and emotional way. That is, as Cheryl Nixon points out, "inconsistent with Austen's character development and, more importantly, at odds with Austen's own critique of sensibility" (Nixon, 26). All these sequels, along with several TV and film adaptations, are responsible for spreading the idea that Jane Austen was a writer of naïve romances for women, the inventor of modern 'chick lit'⁴. Many critics have noticed this phenomenon they call the "Harlequinization" of Austen, meaning that she has become the model for all the cheap paperback romance novels produced by Harlequin, Silhouette and Mills and Boon editions. As Deborah Kaplan defines it,

"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. (...) [It] necessitate[s] 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."
(KAPLAN, 178).

The happy ending of the main couple is a good example. As Patrice Hannon observes, Austen's novels, as comedies, end with weddings as a convention (Hannon,

³ All quotations from books in Portuguese are in my own translation.

⁴ "Chick lit" refers to a genre of literature for female readers that deal with the issues in modern women's lives such as career, love and sex. It became popular in the 1990s, and the most famous example is Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary*, which not coincidentally is loosely based on *Pride and Prejudice*.

32), but that doesn't mean that the wedding in itself was the goal of the novel. In fact, since the last years of the 1970s, literary critics from women's studies have worked with new interpretations of Austen's novels regarding gender problems and the roles assigned to women in her society, opposing that well-accepted idea that her novels reinforced conservative values of her time. For example, 1979 saw the publishing of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's now classical study *The Madwoman in the Attic*, in which they argued that those who understood Austen as accepting the limits imposed on her by her society were not able to see a constant subversive trait in her stories. They said: "it is shocking how persistently Austen demonstrates her discomfort with her cultural inheritance, specifically her dissatisfaction with the tight place assigned women in patriarchy" (Gilbert and Gubar, 112). To Gilbert and Gubar, the love story in Austen's novels was a strategic parody that disguised other levels of meanings more critical of society, much like Austen herself used a blotting paper to cover her writings from people outside her family⁵. There is no denying that this 'cover story' was a good disguise, because we know that although she never acquired during her lifetime the same attention that she has nowadays, her novels weren't seen as inappropriate. But it's been more than three decades since literary criticism has explored the social critiquing feature in what Austen wrote, a feature that has been systematically erased by the editorial and cinematographic industry of love stories. For example, if we observe how Austen refused to write open or long declarations of love, and how she would even mock the wedding in the end, we can conclude that this "romantic" feature comes more from our current eyes than from her pen. In *Pride and Prejudice*, for instance, Austen opens the chapter of the double marriage of Darcy/Elizabeth and Bingley/Jane saying, "Happy for all her maternal feelings was the day on which Mrs. Bennet got rid of her two most deserving daughters." (Austen, 427, my highlight). That is very different from the scene of the wedding in the 1995 BBC adaptation where we can share the happiness of the couples followed by a glorious – non-existent in the book – kiss between Darcy and Elizabeth after they get in their carriage and were headed to their 'happily ever after' ending. This is just one example, but the point is that the sequels and the movies contribute to the way Austen's novels are being read; and the idea of a Jane Austen who is ironic, sharp and critical of her own time (which has been the tone of the discussion about her work in the universities for the last few decades), seems to be sadly isolated and does not reach the public in general.

And then we have *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (henceforth PPZ). At a first glance, this mash-up seems a new approach to the "Austenmania" of the last decades.

⁵ According to family tradition, quoted by AUSTEN-LEIGH, James Edward, 2002, p.82.

It was published in 2009 by the writer Seth Grahame-Smith and built up from the combination of the original text of *Pride and Prejudice* with new passages about zombies. In a way, PPZ has a hybrid nature in comparison with those sequels mentioned earlier because it tries to combine a theme utterly strange to Austen's universe while being very faithful to her text and style. This is evident by the cover alone, in which we see both authors' names: Austen's first, then Grahame-Smith's, indicating that the book was written somehow collaboratively – has anyone spotted a zombie Austen lately?

In an interview to the *Time*, Grahame-Smith states that the inspiration for PPZ came from Quirk Books' editor Jason Rekulak, who called him one day and said: "All I have is this title, and I can't stop thinking about this title. (...) *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*" (quoted by Grossman, 2009). Apparently, the idea had sprung forth from a matching experiment between novels out of copyright, such as *Wuthering Heights* or *Crime and Punishment*, with popular fiction characters like ninjas or pirates. It was obviously a commercial proposal, created by the publishing house and not by the author, who worked almost as a ghost writer whose role was simply to put the pieces together in this curious puzzle of combining Regency England with 20th century monsters. The first question that surges from this story is, why zombies? How this monster usually associated with B movies found its way into a novel that has been read more and more as a Cinderella story?

Jamie Russell, in a study about the origin of these creatures in popular imaginary and cultural industry, claims that vampires and werewolves demand respect, while zombies just drag themselves along the margins of the horror movie genre (Russell, 2010, p.17). To reinforce his argument, he quotes James B. Twitchell, who says: "A zombie is an absolute cretin, a lobotomized vampire, and that is what tends to make zombie movies little more than explicit violence vehicles, full of people poking each other and occasionally feeding from each other" (Russell, 2010, p.17). Zombies don't think, seduce, plan; they are not even essentially bad. They are just hungry. One zombie alone is not that threatening, despite its repulsiveness, but the great problem is that they move in hordes, and will eat up everything and everyone on their way.

Without the foundation of a literary heritage to support them, like Dracula, Frankenstein's monster or Mr. Hyde, zombies become, in Russell words, a busybody in the 20th century, whose first apparition for real in the Anglo-Saxon world can be traced to the publication of William Seabrook's study about Haiti called *The Magic Island* in 1929 (Russell, 2010, p.18). Seabrook was an adventurer who wrote travel books and his expedition to Haiti, during the American military occupation of that island, has become a reference about voodoo and the legend of its ability of reviving dead bodies.

The Magic Island was a success and immediately after it the zombie figure began to appear in horror stories in the 1930s. But it was Hollywood that discovered its potential for frights in the wave following the success of movies like “Dracula” and “Frankenstein”, both from 1931, starred by famous actors Bela Lugosi and Boris Karloff. According to Russell, after Seabrook’s book, with the fever for zombie stories and increasing voodoo superstitions, it was Hollywood, the industry of dreams in the USA, which transformed the zombie into America’s worst nightmare (Russell, 2010, p.35).

In spite of being brought into movies as soon as possible, still in the 1930s with the same Bela Lugosi as the sorcerer zombie leader, the classic zombie movie is George Romero’s ‘Dawn of the Dead’, from 1978. Even with all the worship from fans, Russell still considers it a B movie because of the low status of its monster in that time (Russell, 2010, p.18). Its image, however, has changed in the last two decades, with the exponential increase of movies and video games with this theme, such as the “Resident Evil” series whose box office achieved five hundred million dollars in times of piracy. Even Romero’s classic was remade in 1990 and again in 2006 in 3D. In these new movies, zombies gain more intelligence, speed and even conscience, distancing them from the dragging undead image and making them scarier. But nothing makes TV executives smile more than the series “The Walking Dead”. Appearing first in 2003 as a graphic novel, the classic story of a group of humans trying to survive in a devastated world has reached high audience levels throughout its six – and counting – seasons and has produced a spin-off in 2015, “Fear The Walking Dead”. With all this success, it is not surprising that zombies now have turned themselves to conquer that last territory that had been denied to them in the beginning: the literature.

So now we are back to *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*. As said earlier, Grahame-Smith combined Austen’s text with new passages concerning the zombie context, maintaining around 80% of the original. Not even the famous opening of the novel escaped this process. In the original, we read:

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife. However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighborhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered as the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters.

‘My dear Mr. Bennet,’ said his lady to him one day, “have you heard that Netherfield Park is let at last?”

Mr. Bennet replied that he had not.

‘But it is,’ returned she; ‘for Mrs. Long has just been here, and she told me all about it.’

Mr. Bennet made no answer.

'Do not you want to know who has taken it?' cried his wife impatiently.
(Austen, p.3)

Now the same passage with Grahame-Smith's alterations indicated in italics:

It's a truth universally acknowledged that *a zombie in possession of brains must be in want of more brains. Never was this truth more plain than during the recent attacks at Netherfield Park, in which a household of eighteen was slaughtered and consumed by a horde of the living dead.*

'My dear Mr. Bennet,' said his lady to him one day, 'have you heard that Netherfield Park *is occupied again?*'

Mr. Bennet replied that he had not *and went about his morning business of dagger sharpening and musket polishing – for attacks by the unmentionables creatures had grown alarmingly frequent in recent weeks.*

'But it is', returned she.

Mr. Bennet made no answer.

'Do not you want to know who has taken it?' cried his wife impatiently. (PPZ, p.7)

This passage illustrates the kind of alteration performed by Grahame-Smith to insert zombies in the plot. Most of them are related to the 'unmentionables', hordes attacks, violent deaths. Others are just little changes here and there. For instance, in chapter 43, Mr. Darcy's governess states that her master has just sent a gift for his sister Georgiana. In the original, it was a pianoforte. In PPZ, it has become a sword. A small detail at first sight, the substitution of the pianoforte for the sword indicates a significant change in that universe. We can see this again when Mr. Darcy tries to explain the talents required by a woman in order to receive the adjective of 'true accomplished'. She needs

(...) a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages; *she must be well trained in the fighting styles of Kyoto masters and the modern tactics and weaponry of Europe.* (...) All this she must possess, and to all this she must yet add something more substantial, in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading (PPZ, p.34).

We can observe here the insertion of the zombie theme regarding necessary training in martial arts for self-defense in the middle of a traditional list of activities relegated to women in Austen's time. Refined ladies should be, undoubtedly, good seamstress and embroiderers, musicians and readers (of the right kind of reading), but they also had to be good warriors. These abilities are so different, contradictory actually, that one seems to deny the other, to the point that the whole description sounds artificial. This is a feeling that permeates the entire reading of this novel: that

the forced fusion of those two universes was not coherent, and it was rendered even worse by the imitation of Austen's formal style.

We can also note from the example above that, despite being haunted and hunt by these monsters, life seems to go on as usual. In chapter 3, the assembly where Darcy and Elizabeth met for the first time was attacked and a few neighbors were killed. Even so, the chapter ends almost identical to the original (the only alteration in italics):

Apart from the attack, the evening altogether passed off pleasantly for the whole family. Mrs. Bennet had seen her eldest daughter much admired by the Netherfield Party. (...) Jane was as much gratified by this as her mother could be, though in a quieter way. Elizabeth felt Jane's pleasure. Mary had heard herself mentioned to Miss Bingley as the most accomplished girl in the neighborhood; and Catherine and Lydia had been fortunate enough never to be without partners, which was all that they had yet learnt to care for at a ball. They returned, therefore, in good spirits to Longbourn, the village where they lived, and of which they were the principal inhabitants. (PPZ, p.16)

In PPZ, then, the routine continues the same, as the social conventions, the class divisions and the husband-hunt necessity, even in a sieged London. The loss of friends and neighbors are not mourned, they are just numbers in a horror scenario that renders people numb, losing, therefore, what made them human in the first place. The shock is even greater when a human feeling is manifested by the monster, when the Bennet sisters encounter a mother zombie carrying her baby:

A long-dead female zombie stumbled out of the woods, her modest clothing slightly tattered; her brittle hair pulled back so tightly that it had begun to tear the skin of her forehead. In her arms, she held something exceedingly rare; something none of the sisters had ever seen, or ever wished to see—an unmentionable infant. It clawed at the female's flesh, emitting a most unpleasant series of shrieks. Elizabeth raised her musket, but Jane was quick to grab the barrel.

'You mustn't!'

'Have you forgotten your oath?'

'It's an infant, Lizzy!'" (PPZ, p.92)

In the end, Elizabeth can't bring herself to kill mother and baby, but the sisters swore never to mention what they saw, probably because this moment of weakness and indecision does not belong to this apocalyptical world. If, as Jamie Russell states, the zombie is, above all, a symbol of our universe turned upside-down, when death becomes life and life becomes death (Russell, 2010, p.19), in this passage we see a



moment when the monster becomes human by carrying with her the baby, and the human becomes the monster who tried to kill an infant.

According to Noël Carroll, one trait that can define the horror genre is the presence of an unexpected monster. It is something that must be feared, or more, something from which one must desperately escape to save one's own life. So, besides the presence of the monster itself, Carroll argues that the reaction of people when faced with it (screaming, panic) is also important (Carroll, 1999, p.32-33):

Boreads, griffins, chimeras, basilisks, dragons, satyrs, and such are bothersome and fearsome creatures in the world of myths, but they are not unnatural; they can be accommodated by the metaphysics of the cosmology that produced them. The monsters of horror, however, breach the norms of ontological propriety presumed by the positive human characters in the story. That is, in examples of horror, it would appear that the monster is an extraordinary character in our ordinary world, whereas in fairy tales and the like the monster is an ordinary creature in an extraordinary world. (CARROLL, 1999, p.32)

If we take how, in PPZ, people continue their lives as always, only adapting it to this strange situation, we can notice that monsters and violence are part now of their normal universe and it does not provoke the reaction expected from them according to Carroll's definition. PPZ, therefore, fails in scaring its reader and in becoming a horror novel. The curious thing is that PPZ does not try to make use of the sentimentalist and romantic fashion that surrounds *Pride and Prejudice* either. It does not focus on the feelings of Darcy and Elizabeth, and when it approaches their sexual tension, it is usually in a comic way, as in the passage below when both characters are forced to wait together for Elizabeth's uncle and aunt, and the moment is awkward because it's the first time they meet after Elizabeth's refusal of Darcy's marriage proposal. The only sentence from the original is in italics:

At such a time much might have been said, but nothing was. Elizabeth and Darcy merely looked at one another in awkward silence, until the latter reached both arms around her. She was frozen – 'What does he mean to do?' she thought. But his intentions were respectable, for Darcy merely meant to retrieve his Brown Bess [a gun], which Elizabeth had affixed to her back during her walk. She remembered the lead ammunition in her pocket and offered it to him. 'Your balls, Mr. Darcy?' He reached out and closed her hand around them, and offered, 'They belong to you, Miss Bennet.' Upon this, their colour changed, and they were all forced to look away from one another, lest they laugh. (PPZ, p.205).

In this way Grahame-Smith plays around the idea of the physical attraction that might exist between the couple, which has been the subject of several debates both among fans and academic critics. As stated earlier, this is not new. Most sequels and spin-offs seek to bring to the readers, with details, the intimate life of Darcy and Elizabeth. Of course, they are portrayed as the perfect couple, with perfect bodies and a perfect sexual life. If that was really the case in marriages in the turn of the 18th to the 19th century is very hard to believe given especially the low status of women in that society and what was considered proper behavior and what was considered devious conduct. These sequels, therefore, are a reflex of the contemporary idea of desire, of the search for sexual satisfaction that dictates our current society. So, to modern readers, a couple cannot be happy without the most active sexual life possible, not even in the middle of a zombie catastrophe.

Finally, the bluntness of the language adopted by Grahame-Smith is frequently used throughout PPZ, such as seen in the passage above where they speak about Mr. Darcy's balls, and the dialogues between the two main characters are no exception. That is a terrible loss. Many speeches in the original, mainly those spoken by Elizabeth, are filled with dubious meanings and a powerful irony that render the interpretation of the novel a challenge to be deciphered and fuel academic debate. Unfortunately, when the distaste of Elizabeth is clearly stated, or when Darcy's attraction is put out loud for everybody, the trade mark of Jane Austen's style, her elusiveness, is forever lost.

And yet, with only one day after its release, PPZ was ranked number 10 at the website Amazon.com (Kellogg, 2009). With this success, two other novels were produced: *Dawn of the Dreadfuls*, a prequel about the beginning of the zombie plague and Elizabeth's training in martial arts, and the sequel *Dreadfully Ever After*, which tells the story of Elizabeth seeking a cure after Darcy was bitten by a zombie. PPZ, then, has become the second novel in a trilogy, and its connection to the original gets even thinner. In spite of this success, from a formal perspective the novel can be seen as a failure because it loses Austen's social criticism and brilliant irony, it does not attempt to be the current adored romantic version, and it cannot even become a horror novel. PPZ is, then, a simulacrum of *Pride and Prejudice*, and even if it is about zombies, this novel is actually a vampire that feeds on the original, weakens it, and forever transforms it by contributing to the diffusion of a superficial interpretation of Austen's novel, being itself nothing more than this.

Commercially, however, there is no denying that PPZ achieved its success through the blend of two universes very popular nowadays, regency novels and horror novels, and the choice of placing Jane Austen's name on the cover as a 'co-author'

was clearly an intelligent marketing strategy. The back cover said: “*Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* transforms a masterpiece of world literature into something you’d actually want to read”. The target audience is clear, then: people that do not like the original. As Linda Troost stated,

I think part of [its allure] is making fun of a classic. We are a somewhat rebellious society and these are very much aimed at a younger audience. And I think they enjoy sort of jumping up and down on things that are revered by their parents. And there’s nothing more revered by – than, say, Colin Firth as Mr. Darcy by everybody’s mother. And this is, as I said, partly a way of getting back at your parents. (TROOST, 2010)

PPZ then is a comic way to respond to that “boring” view of Jane Austen that looks for “the rolling English countryside, its green and pleasant land. The pretty dresses, and the men with their elegant manners. That’s what a lot of people want, that kind of restrained, tasteful, classical, cultured world” (Troost, 2010). The reception by these nostalgic fans was confused. Many found themselves divided between the defense of their favorite author and the purity of her work – an argument, interesting enough, that does not reach traditional romantic sequels because they are seen as continuing her legacy and not destroying it – and the novelty that PPZ represented, and surprisingly many ended up approving of the book as a good joke. Despite the protests of the other half, this genre of ‘mash-up’ gained a whole new force, and soon other novels from Austen were partnered with different monsters: *Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters*, *Mansfield Park and Mummies*, and *Emma and the Werewolves*. Even in Brazil the effect of the mash-up popularity had its victims: *A Escrava Isaura e o Vampiro*, *Senhora, a Bruxa* and *Dom Casmurro e os Discos Voadores*. And, obviously, zombies also had their share in *Memórias Desmortas de Brás Cubas*. One cannot but wonder what will remain of literature after this cannibal attack.

This editorial phenomenon, however, did not last long. From PPZ’s release in 2009 until today, many classics of literature were rewritten in this mash-up genre, but the novelty soon faded away. That does not mean, of course, that the cultural industry easily gave up on the genre, and in February 2016 it was released “Pride and Prejudice and Zombies”, the movie! Its box office was not a success, though, falling short of reaching the movie budget⁶.

The movie removes all the comicality in Grahame-Smith’s novel and creates a serious war-against-the-apocalypse story, where, obviously, Darcy and Elizabeth are the bravest heroes, and Wickham is transformed from a simple scoundrel into an

⁶<http://variety.com/2016/film/news/box-office-hail-caesar-pride-prejudice-zombies-1201699490/>
Accessed in March 30th 2016

archetypal villain that leads the zombie army to conquer England. It also tries to retrieve the romance that was mocked in the novel. The star playing the role of Elizabeth Bennet, Lily James, is an English actress that became famous after her roles in the historical series “Downton Abbey” and in Kenneth Branagh’s “Cinderella” (2015) – a combination that made James an obvious choice given the current image of Austen’s works. Besides romance, the movie also aims to bring more of that sexual tension, focusing many scenes in the beautiful but deadly Bennet sisters:



Jane Bennet and Elizabeth Bennet get ready for a ball.
“Pride and Prejudice and Zombies”, 2016, 10min57’.

Finally, the movie also incorporates references from other adaptations, mainly from the 1995 BBC “Pride and Prejudice”. Its most famous scene, when Colin Firth as Mr. Darcy plunges half-undressed into a lake to emerge with a wet shirt clinging to his body, has become a classic, voted the most memorable scene in British television⁷, mentioned in many novels later (*Bridget Jones’s Diary*, 1996, *Austenland*, 2008) and reenacted in subsequent adaptations (“Lost in Austen”, 2008), including this zombie movie. The scene is not in Austen’s novel – many fans that only know the author through television are always disappointed when they learn of this fact. But it shows that, first, Austen cannot be explained only by her novels anymore, being also necessary to take in consideration her popularity and the effects that all the movies and TV adaptations have over her image. Secondly, that the fanon (fan + canon) incorporates into her work things that were not initially there, and that it’s mandatory for future adaptations and fan fiction to follow these dictates of the fandom (fans’ world and culture) to be accepted, more even than faithfulness to Austen’s original.

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⁷ <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/news/mr-darcy-giant-colin-firth-statue-in-londons-hyde-park-recreates-pride-and-prejudice-scene-8695490.html> Accessed in March 30th 2016

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