Becoming Jane: Adapting Female Authority

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Sarah Williams, Kevin Hood, and Julian Jarrold's *Becoming Jane* (2006)[1] can be described as both a biopic and an adaptation. Its title refers to Jon Spence's biography, *Becoming Jane Austen* (2003), and it brings to the screen both Spence's text and Jane Austen's authorial persona. In this paper I wish to explore how some of the alterations made, as text becomes film, are mediated by the film's structure. Of particular interest is the film's characterisation of Jane Austen's family relations and the way in which it reflects the film's approach to her gender and authority. While the familial influences found in Spence's text are displaced by the film's focus on romance, the film also carefully enacts the characters' individual gazes so as to express Jane's authority in relation to patriarchy.

'Becoming Jane' as adaptation.

Film biopics and adaptations share a common set of relations between text and source. Both distil and dramatise their sources—a life and a source text respectively. It is not so much a question of treating *Becoming Jane* as *either* a biopic *or* an adaptation, it is simply a matter of what light Spence's text can throw on the film. This approach is informed by Marie-Claire Ropars' view of adaptation studies, which argues for

> the necessity of evaluating cinematic adaptations, not in terms of their fidelity, or even (as in [George] Bluestone's analysis) in terms of how the cinematic adaptation functions as an autonomous work of

[1] *Becoming Jane* (2006), Miramax Films, dir. Julian Jarold, DVD (Magna Pacific, 2007).

> art, but rather in terms of how the encounter with a literary source creates a commentary on the narrative process itself.[2]

My consideration of the film's departures from Spence's text is not intended to use fidelity as the measure of success. Instead, I will consider the film's specific characterisation of Jane Austen's authority using some of the key compromises and transformations that have been made as a result of the biopic's need to adapt her life and history into one hundred and twenty seven minutes of cinema.

Spence's biography finds the origins of Jane's authorial persona in both an extensive consideration of her family life as well as in her romance with Tom Lefroy. Jane's letters to her sister Cassandra are relied upon more heavily than any other source material, and much of his text is devoted to Jane's female relations and neighbours. Of the importance of Jane's relationship with Cassandra, Spence notes that:

> In his memoirs of his aunt Jane Austen, James Edward Austen-Leigh remarks on Jane's deference to her sister: 'Something of this feeling always remained; and even in the maturity of her powers, and in the enjoyment of increasing success, she would still speak of Cassandra as of one wiser and better than herself.'[3]

And later, 'She always thought of Cassandra as her superior, but in the world of art Jane Austen was free.'[4] Cassandra informs Jane's writing not so much through any known direct influence on Jane's literary skills or education; her influence was more general, as an admired example and sounding board for Jane's attitudes and opinions.

Spence's heavy reliance on Jane's letters to her sister for evidence of the events of Jane's life and her attitude to those events mean that his text is fundamentally shaped by their relationship. As a key source for his insights, Jane's relationship with Cassandra, and the specific way in which their

[2] Judith Mayne, *Private Novels, Public Films* (Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1998) p.6.
[3] Jon Spence, *Becoming Jane Austen* (London: Hambledon and London, 2003), p. 29.
[4] Ibid. p.193.

different characters throw light on one another, fundamentally inform Spence's characterisation of Jane. In a way, the surviving letters she wrote to her sister allow Jane to continue to define her own authorial voice beyond her fiction. They articulate Jane's perspective on the events of her own life and offer some foundation from which Spence can speculate on the effect of these events on Jane and her work.

Spence gives Mrs Austen, Eliza de Feuillide, Anne Lefroy and Jane's brothers Edward, James, and Henry important roles in Jane's literary education. Eliza, Henry and James not only provide subject matter for Jane's early literary experiments, they also represent a broader milieu in which readings, performances, and publication were all elements of Jane's family life. These characters create an environment in which literary expression seems to be a regular presence. This is significant as the home life, and the specific place literary expression takes within it, are very different in the film. Of Edward's influence, Spence writes:

> Edward is the first of her brothers whose voice we hear, and in it ring distinctly characteristic notes of Jane's famous style… Evidence of Edward's talent only survives in his journal but is a slight foretaste of Jane's gift, a gift that in her was to develop into genius.[5]

Anne Lefroy's influence is also quite direct. Spence states:

> Anne's brother Egerton Brydges remarked in his memoirs: 'I remember Jane Austen, the novelist, a little child; she was very intimate with Mrs Lefroy and much encouraged by her.' Anne's great passion was for poetry, and it was perhaps she more than the novel-reading Austens who was responsible for Jane's cultivation of her own love of poetry. Brydges wrote that his sister 'had an exquisite taste for poetry, and could almost repeat the chief of English poets by heart, especially Milton, Pope, Collins, Gray and the poetical passages of Shakespeare; and she composed easy verses herself with great facility'. Brydges thought highly enough of his sister's work to get two of her poems published before she was married.[6]

[5] Ibid. pp.35-6.
[6] Ibid. p.32.

Similarly, Spence also identifies Mrs La Tournelle as a possible influence on Jane's developing literary and aesthetic sensibilities: 'Perhaps it was from her that Jane began to acquire her wide knowledge of plays, which enters her fiction in the mastery of the dramatic scene and the economical dynamic of the narrative.'[7]

Mrs Austen's influence lies somewhere between these direct influences and Cassandra's indirect influence. She provides a hereditary precedent for Jane's figurative use of language as a means of expression: 'When she was a small child, her uncle Theophilus Leigh, the Master of Balliol College Oxford, had called her 'the poet of the family".[8] Moreover, Mrs Austen may have provided an example of the display of wit in language, normalising it for Jane during her childhood years. Between Mrs Austen and Anne Lefroy, the young Jane would have received examples of the literary expression of both wit and emotion. In Anne, we also see evidence of an education in literary aesthetics. These relations not only represent a range of key influences on Jane's authorial persona, they also suggest that Jane had a number of strong, varied, female and *familial* influences.

The film's focus is significantly narrower. Firstly, it enhances the role Jane's texts are to play in the selection, organization and evaluation of the biographical material. Spence states that:

> Jane Austen's mature novels tend to point to or confirm connections between her art and her life. An awareness of autobiographical elements in the work enhances our understanding and appreciation, not of the novels but of the woman who wrote them.[9]

The film takes this further, *altering* the biographical material to fit with the nature of Jane's text. Thus Mr. Collins becomes John Warren (Leo Bill), Mr. Darcy becomes Mr. Wissley (Laurence Fox), Mr. and Mrs. Bennet become Reverend Austen (James Cromwell) and Mrs. Austen (Julie Waters), and so on. Furthermore, while Spence's text attempts to deal with the entirety of Jane's history and the way it informed her authorial persona, the film

[7] Ibid. p.34.
[8] Ibid.p. 25.
[9] Ibid.p. xi.

operates as a synecdoche, presenting the inspiration for *Pride and Prejudice* as indicative of the inspiration for Jane's broader persona. It takes up Spence's claim that ‘First Impressions' 'is not as far as I can see, ‘about' Jane Austen's relationship with Tom Lefroy, but the paradigm comes from his family's situation and Tom himself is the inspiration that drives the novel.'[10] The film's approach is to take the significant influence Tom had on ‘First Impressions' and not only narrativise it so that it more obviously resembles events and themes from *Pride and Prejudice*, but also to project his influence over her whole authorial persona.

The film does make some effort to provide Jane with a strong female literary influence in its construction of a meeting between Jane and Ann Radcliffe (Helen McCrory). It is significant, however, that this influence has been taken out of the family unit. It not only allows the film to characterise Mr and Mrs Austen in line with Mr and Mrs Bennett, it also allows Jane to be characterised in contrast to her mother and father. This is particularly important, as it is in this comparison that Jane's place in the patriarchy is defined. Placing strong literary influences within the familial context would prevent the film from using that family unit as an expression of the social conditions that shape Jane's development as an author.

This choice of focus suggests that the film may have succumbed to gender bias in its very conception. Mayne states that:

> The profound and intimate connections between authorship, male identity, and the public sphere can be gauged by looking at the excessive lengths to which a classical film text has to go in order to create a film about *female* authorship. Consider *Devotion* (directed by Curtis Bernhardt, 1946), for instance, a film about the Brontë sisters. A love triangle is created between Charlotte, Emily, and Mr. Nicholls. Emily, we are told, was madly in love with Mr. Nicholls. But her love was unrequited, and because she understood the dynamics of tragic love she wrote *Wuthering Heights*. Mr. Nicholls loved only Charlotte, and after Emily's death the two walk across the moors, arm in arm. Mr. Rochester of *Jane Eyre* has found his

[10]Ibid. p.xi.

> equivalent in Mr. Nichols, and Emily becomes the source, it seems, of the mad wife in the attic. [11]

There is a clear similarity between *Devotion* and *Becoming Jane*, which also seeks to centre its explanation of 'First Impressions' and *Pride and Prejudice* on a love triangle—Jane (Anne Hathaway), Tom (James McAvoy), and Wisley (Laurence Fox). However, what is interesting about *Becoming Jane* is the specific way in which it attempts to reconcile this gender bias with Jane's persona as a formidable wit, something not so consistent with feminine stereotypes. On the one hand, in Jane we have an author who is known for satirically puncturing her contemporary society in her work. On the other, we have a gender bias which suggests that women are merely products of emotional romantic relations rather than intellectually active social agents in their own right.

That *Becoming Jane* is not willing entirely to submit Jane's persona to this bias is evident in the differences between the romantic triangles found in *Devotion* and those of *Becoming Jane*. Unlike in the earlier film, in which Mr. Nichols chooses which of the sisters he prefers, in *Becoming Jane* the heroine's love is left unrequited as a result of her own choice. Moreover, it is a choice that expresses a broader assessment of the situation rather than just an emotion. She has not fallen out of love with Tom, but she is all too aware of the conditions of patriarchy and knows first-hand that to marry Tom would be to condemn his dependants.

Mayne goes on to compare the treatment of the Brontë sisters with that of the male authors Zola and Flaubert, in *The Life of Emile Zola* (1937), and *Madame Bovary* (1949), respectively:

> Zola's relation to Nana, and Flaubert's to Emma, may have sexual overtones, but they are never *reducible* to sexual desire. For authorship encompasses the roles of father, lover, writer, and reader, held in what must indeed be at some points a precarious balance. Only for a woman author, within the logic of the classic text, can writing be the direct result, whether positive or negative, of a romantic attachment.[12]

[11] Ibid. pp.113-114.
[12] Ibid. p.114

Films such as *Shakespeare In Love* (1998) suggest that the cinematic text has become increasingly able to reconcile male authority with romantic and sexual desire since the 1930's and 40's. However, what I wish to focus on here is the way in which patriarchal gender bias suggests that the author is a paternal figure[13] specifically, on the way in which Jane's gaze is used to link her with her father. Elaine Showalter states:

> If a man's text, as Bloom and Edward Said have maintained, is fathered, then a woman's text is not only mothered but parented; it confronts both paternal and maternal precursors and must deal with the problems and advantages of both lines of inheritance. Woolf says in *A Room of One's Own* that 'a woman writing thinks back through her mothers.' But a woman writing unavoidably thinks back through her fathers as well; only male writers can forget or mute half of their parentage. The dominant culture need not consider the muted, except to rail against 'the woman's part' in itself. Thus we need more subtle and supple accounts of influence, not just to explain women's writing but also to understand how men's writing has resisted the acknowledgment of female precursors.[14]

Becoming Jane's treatment of Austen's life and work attempts to enact precisely this account of her authorship. In its rewriting of Mr and Mrs Austen, the film seeks to trace 'the problems and advantages of both lines of inheritance'.

Family vs. Authorship: The Austens' Gaze.

Unlike in Spence's text, *Becoming Jane* carefully presents Jane's authorship as transgressive and disruptive. Strikingly, the opening title

[13] One could also note how the film strikingly reduces Jane's authority to a level of equivalence with sexual desire in the scene where she begins to write ‘First Impressions'. That it stands in for a sex scene between Jane and Tom is suggested by the contrast offered by Henry following Eliza into what is presumably a bedroom, as well as in the scene's combination of lighting, setting, music, and montage, which all would have equally served a sex scene.

[14] Elaine Showalter, 'Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness' in *Writing and Sexual Difference*, Elizabeth Able (ed.), (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1981), pp.33-34.

sequence culminates with Jane's disrupting the household. More to the point, this disruption comes in the form of a celebration of the composition of a text. As such, the film suggests from the very opening title that Jane's developing authorial persona will disrupt the household. This is quickly translated from the *mise-en-scéne* into the dialogue. Jane's disruptive character is articulated as a problem to be solved by marriage: 'That girl needs a husband.' Significantly, these words are uttered by Jane's mother. The film foregrounds the practical and rational side of Mrs Austen that Spence describes throughout Chapter 2 of his text, taking it a step further by presenting her as a strong voice in favour of profitable marriage and connecting her to Mrs Bennett. This paves the way for the film's use of Mrs Austen as a striking counterpart to her daughter.

Just in case Jane's status as transgressor is in doubt, the second scene opens with her father drawing our attention to it in the implications of his sermon. Furthermore, this sequence represents the first time in the film that the camera's gaze is actively constructed as male.[15] Jane's father, Reverend George Austen (James Cromwell) is also the local pastor (and thus doubly representative of patriarchal authority—a familial and spiritual father). His sermon brings gender into focus in its explicit concern with the role of women in society. As he delivers it, the camera's focus enacts his:

[15] In the title sequence the camera *depicted* an objectifying male gaze when Cassandra (Anna Maxwell Martin) and Robert Fowle (Tom Vaughan-Lawlor) meet in the hallway, but the camera resists *enacting* that gaze.

'The upmost of a woman's character is expressed in the duties of daughter,

sister,

and eventually wife and mother.'

Although the camera does not take up the physical position of a male character in the first person, it clearly follows the focus of the Reverend's words and thus momentarily hands him control of the camera's gaze. With this sequence, the notion of patriarchal resistance to female authority, and by implication, female authorship, is tied to the Reverend Austen. Significantly, the seeds of Jane's challenge to those notions are also sown—initially, she does not return the Reverend's gaze, but is instead reading. In this presentation of the characters' gazes, the Reverend's authority over Jane competes with the authority of literature.

While the challenge to patriarchy presented by literature and Jane's developing literary persona is prefigured in this scene, it is clear that her authority has not yet fully developed. The Reverend implicitly reproaches Jane for disrupting the household that morning. Upon hearing the reference to her behaviour she looks from her book to her father. When he reproaches her, Jane averts her gaze revealing her obviation of his authority. With this, her status as transgressor enters into the narrative content of the scene as well as into its structural logic. At this stage of the film, Jane's gaze is not yet authoritative.

The sequence culminates by taking the expression of patriarchal gender bias and applying it specifically to the expression of wit. This has important implications for Jane's burgeoning authorship. The Reverend states that:

> If a woman happens to have a particular superiority, for example a profound mind, it is best kept a profound secret, humour is liked more but wit—no. It is the most treacherous talent of them all.

The statement is carefully specific—a profound mind does not in and of itself mark out a woman as deviant, it is the expression of that mind through wit that is transgressive. Jane's intelligence does not mark her out as deviant, but her expression of it in wit and irony does.

This represents a significant shift away from Spence's appraisal of the place of wit in the Austen home. Mrs Austen, in the poems Spence cites

in Chapter 2,[16] shows that wit, specifically literary wit, was by no means something that was to be distrusted as 'treacherous'. Indeed, throughout Spence's text there are a range of examples and episodes that suggest witty writing and literature was actively appreciated, in practice and performance. The film does take this up, presenting Jane reading to her family, but Jane's parents are to offer a key means through which the film articulates the effects of patriarchal gender bias on Jane's developing authority and authorship. It transforms the Reverend and Mrs Austen's attitude to Jane's literary exploits in order to frame Jane's developing authorial persona. The sequence's careful organization with respect to the sound of the sermon and the *mise-en-scéne*, takes the Reverend's gender bias and presents it as an ongoing challenge for Jane's developing authorship. We are visually taken to the post-service scene outside the church, while the soundtrack momentarily stays in the past with the sermon, which plays over the cut from the interior to the exterior of the church. By playing it over the cut in this way, the appraisal of wit expressed in the soundtrack is not just contained within the sermon, but is projected onto the events to follow. It becomes a defining statement of the social attitude to female intellect against which Jane will need to struggle.

It is not that women lack the power or intelligence to be active participants in social structures, rather that they are coerced to remain passive in spite of their potential. To translate this into the terms of feminist film criticism and theory, it is not that there is no active female gaze, but simply that this gaze is transgressive. In her seminal article, 'Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema', Laura Mulvey claims that:

> In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. [17]

[16] Spence, pp.25-27.
[17] Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' in E. Ann Kaplan, (ed.) *Feminism & Film*, Oxford Readings in Feminism, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp.39-40.

Becoming Jane utilises and depicts both male and female gazes, but it does so in a manner that authorises and normalises the male gaze, while presenting the female gaze as an aberration. In doing so, it shows that, while women and men both possess an active gaze, only the male's active gaze is authorised by the structure of society.

Consider the scene in which, following a cricket game (where Jane once again transgresses gender boundaries by participating with the men), Tom Lefroy (James McAvoy) and Jane's brother, Henry Austen (Joe Anderson) run off to swim in the river. Jane and her cousin Eliza de Feuillide (Lucy Cohu) follow them. The men proceed to strip before entering the river. The women stop short. The barrier between the men and the following women is emphasised by the presence of a stone arch though which the men run to reach the river,

and through which the women watch them before turning back.

In the sequence, we are twice afforded representations of the female's active, voyeuristic gaze.

Here the traditional voyeuristic looking pattern is momentarily reversed, with the men nude and the women watching. While the sequence clearly enacts the active desiring gaze of the female, it is both temporary and transgressive. E. Ann Kaplan in 'Is The Gaze Male' states that 'men do not simply look; their gaze carries with it the power of action and of possession that is lacking in the female gaze. Women receive and return a gaze, but cannot act on it.'[18] Here, the women do more than simply 'receive and return a gaze', but still they lack the power to act.

The scene serves to enact a careful shift in the nature of Jane's transgression. Having earlier established her transgressive status as a result of her work, this scene redirects it into Jane's romantic gaze. Both Jane and Eliza are to embark upon transgressive romances with Tom and Henry respectively, and the eventual outcome of these romances is subtly prefigured in this sequence. Jane, who will eventually give up Tom, averts her gaze and turns away. Eliza on the other hand does not avert her gaze, and she looks back over her shoulder as they leave.

[18] E. Ann Kaplan, 'Is The Gaze Male', in *Feminism & Film*, op.cit., p.121.

Both women are aware that they are not permitted access to the active world of the men. Furthermore, they are also aware that their objectifying gaze is transgressive of traditional gender roles in precisely the manner that Kaplan articulates, and as such are compelled to leave. However, unlike Jane, Eliza has financial security, which provides her with the means to test the traditional limitations and conventions that limit the power of her gaze. Indeed, in the end, Eliza has the means both to follow her affection for Henry and to support Jane's transgressive literary expression.

This notion that gender boundaries are mediated by wealth is a constant concern of the film. Jane's specific situation in this regard is most comprehensively elaborated in the scene in which Jane and her mother argue over Jane's refusal to marry Wisley. This sequence articulates precisely how the film's depiction of Jane's gaze relates to her parents. As they argue, we see Jane looking at her mother. The camera is positioned behind Anne Hathaway's right shoulder, suggesting that the sequence will take up the classic shot-reverse shot format commonly used to show two characters conversing. However, the reverse shot contains only Jane and is taken from a position completely separated from that of Mrs Austen's:

The representations of the character's gazes are asymmetrical. As the sequence progresses, Mrs Austen turns away from Jane for a moment. At precisely this moment we cut back to the reverse shot of Jane seen above. This makes it clear that the reverse shot is not connected to Mrs Austen's gaze at all, and as a result we are directed to identify primarily with Jane. Mrs Austen is transformed from a potential literary influence and educator, as she is in Spence's text, to an example through which Jane is to learn the demands patriarchy makes upon romance and marriage. Kaplan states:

> feminists rationalised their fears and anger, focusing on the destructiveness of the nuclear family as an institution, and seeing the Mother as an agent of the patriarchal establishment. We were unable then to see that the Mother was as much a victim of patriarchy as

> ourselves, constructed as she is by a whole series of discourses—psychoanalytic, political, and economic.[19]

Becoming Jane presents Mrs Austen as precisely the sort of victim Kaplan describes. Spence, on the other hand, does not:

> Cassandra Leigh was in an enviable position for a young woman of her time. She had the expectation of inheriting £3000, enough to protect her from dependence and penury, but not so much as to raise expectations of her marrying for wealth or rank. Her ordinariness gave her a kind of independence. She could remain single, or she could marry the man she chose. In accepting the poor country parson George Austen she exchanged security for matrimonial adventure. Her choice was not imprudent, but the marriage brought uncertainties that would have to be met with ingenuity and energy. Brisk, capable and intelligent, Cassandra probably found the challenge attractive.[20]

The film transforms Mrs Austen so as to conform to a particular maternal stereotype, and then differentiates Jane from that type using the cinematic gaze. Jane refuses to become 'an agent of the patriarchal establishment'.

Mr Austen is also present in the scene, listening to the argument from around the corner. While the content of the argument greatly diminishes his status as an authority by exposing his limited ability to provide financial security for his family, his gaze is once again to be read in a manner that underscores his status as patriarch. He reveals himself to his wife and daughter in an attempt to quell the argument by asserting that status in his use of the possessive 'my': 'What's this? Trouble? Amongst my women?' That he fails immediately to reconcile the women admittedly qualifies his authority. Despite the qualification to his authority evident in the scene's content, however, he remains the patriarch established in the sermon scene by the treatment of his gaze.

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[19] E. Ann Kaplan, 'The Case of the Missing Mother: Maternal Issues in Vidor's *Stella Dallas*' in *Feminism & Film*, op.cit., p.467.
[20] Spence, op. cit. p. 15.

As the scene shifts to father and daughter, both characters are afforded a more equal relationship with each other and the viewer than in the preceding depiction of mother and daughter. The viewer is initially placed roughly equidistant from both characters, with the height difference between them counter-balanced by the edge of the pig-pen which divides the frame. Due to its angle, the pen appears tilted such that Jane's end seems higher. As the sequence progresses the shot and reverse-shot structure contains a relatively symmetrical presentation of each character.

With the final shot, the camera has moved to the side, aligning itself slightly with Reverend Austen; this accentuates the authoritative advice he provides her and is counter-balanced by the lingering shot of Jane after the Reverend has left. Given the camera's treatment of the characters in these scenes it is clear that both Jane and her father are authoritative in a way that Jane's mother is not.

This is taken further in the scene in which the news of Robert's (Tom Vaughan-Lawlor) death is delivered in a letter to Reverend Austen as he and his family dine with Lady Gresham (Maggie Smith). The Reverend reads the letter and almost all of the diners read his gaze as he looks up from the letter to Cassandra (Anna Maxwell Martin). While it would seem that this scene depicts the authority of the male gaze as purveyor of meaning, it

is not quite so simple. Wisley is directed to see Cassandra as the subject of the letter by Jane's gaze, not by the Reverend's. It seems that Wisley's desire for Jane does not manifest itself in an objectifying gaze, but rather in a gaze that looks to her for meaning as well as gratification. This scene shows that her gaze is capable of communicating meaning in the same manner as that of her father—both possess gazes that are authoritative enough to be read. However, for Jane, it is a result of romantic attachment and, as such, her authority is simultaneously male/active and female/romantic.

This points us back to Mayne's descriptions of how classic cinematic texts characterised male and female authorship. *Becoming Jane* obviously and centrally enacts the classic patriarchal depiction of female authorship as essentially romantic. However, the romance simultaneously informs her work while it informs her gaze. In doing so, even though it is still framed by the feminine/romantic stereotype, the characterisation is allowed to fulfil the terms '*father*, lover, writer, and reader' and thus simultaneously enact fragments from classic cinematic depictions of both male and female authorship.

Returning to a consideration of *Becoming Jane* as an adaptation, the film's use of the gaze represents another symptom of the film's preference for *Pride and Prejudice*, rather than Spence's text, as its main source. While this preference has resulted in some fundamental departures from the biographical detail of Jane's life, it is not entirely out of step with Spence's appraisal of her authorial persona.
Spence notes,

> What distinguishes the girl Jane Austen as much as her polished and controlled style is the refinement of her intellect. By the time she was eleven, she was a formidable rationalist. Immense though the influence of earlier writers, especially the great prose writers of the eighteenth century, was on Jane Austen, there was a more profound influence: her own family. From their conversation she learned logic, a keen sense of cause and effect, a firm grasp of probability, and a quick penetration into human motivation. These were the tools with which she judged the books she read and the people she observed. The Austen's minds by habit—and probably by inclination—were trained to spot logical and emotional inconsistencies. This is revealed everywhere in Jane's writing and is overtly celebrated in *Pride and*

> *Prejudice* in the characters of Mr Bennet and Elizabeth, both separately and in their collusive view of the world. Jane Austen shared this way of looking at things with her whole family.[21]

Although the film does not show Austen sharing her 'way of looking at things' with her whole family, it does take up *Pride and Prejudice*'s pairing of father and daughter. In this way, the film enacts Jane's own rewriting of her family influences. To be clear, I am not suggesting that we are to read the filmic characterisation of Jane as a simple incarnation of Elizabeth Bennet.[22] Rather, the 'collusive view' to be found between father and daughter in *Pride and Prejudice* is enacted in *Becoming Jane*, and in both cases this can be read as a representation of Jane's familial influences.

This pairing also speaks to Austen's authorial practice on another level. As an author, she is renowned for her mastery of irony. The film takes this up when Jane is required to defend irony to Tom's uncle, Judge Langlois (Ian Richardson). Like Jane's father, Judge Langlois is doubly a representative of patriarchy: he is both a Judge, and Tom's patron. Subsequently, this scene reinforces her status as a transgressor of her father's earlier sermon. The way in which Jane's transgression is played out is reminiscent of Claire Johnson's assessment of Dorothy Arzner's work:

> The central female protagonists react and thus transgress the male discourse which entraps them. The form of transgression will depend on the nature of the particular discourse within which they have been caught. These women do not sweep aside the existing order and found a new, female, order of language. Rather, they assert their own discourse in the face of the male one, by breaking it up, subverting it and, in a sense, rewriting it.[23]

And later:

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[21] Spence, pp.73-4.

[22] *Becoming Jane* actually splits elements of Elizabeth and Darcy into three characters, Tom, Jane and Wisley, to specifically problematize attempts at this simple transference. However, a consideration of this aspect of the adaptation requires its own focused study, and is beyond the scope of this article's consideration of the film's treatment of Jane's familial influences.

[23] Claire Johnson, 'Dorothy Arzner: Critical Strategies' in *Feminism & Film*, op.cit., pp.143-4.

> the discourse of the woman fails to triumph *over* the male discourse and the patriarchal ideology, but its very survival in the form of irony is in itself a kind of triumph, a victory against being expelled or erased: the continued insistence of the woman's discourse is a triumph over non-existence.[24]

Similarly, in the film Jane's gaze never dominates her father's, nor does she supplant Judge Langlois as Tom's patron, but neither does she submit to either's assessment of feminine wit. Furthermore, her defence of irony in the film suggests that the irony of her novels can be taken as the emblems of her 'insistence of the woman's discourse.'

At first glance, the removal of key female influences, in conjunction with a central focus on Jane's romance with Tom Lefory, suggests that *Becoming Jane* may be little more than an exercise in patriarchal gender bias. However, tracing the alterations made to Spence's text in light of the film's use of the cinematic gaze shows that the film offers a far subtler characterisation than its infidelities at first suggest. The film treads a fine line between enacting and depicting the patriarchal ideology that shaped Jane's development as an author. It does so by combining Spence's text and *Pride and Prejudice*. In the end, it is not quite an adaptation of either, but rather a combination of the authorial personas that Spence describes and *Pride and Prejudice* enacts.

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[24] Ibid. Original italics, p.146.