In 20th century, Jane Austen is one of the most popular “classical” writers of the modern American and English society. Her novel *Pride and Prejudice* is the most popular of all her writings and has tempted movie directors already four times (in 1940, 1967, 1979 and 1995) to create a film presenting the relationship between Ms. Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy. One of the reasons, no doubt, is the fact, that the novel “*Pride and Prejudice*” is believed to be “wonderfully comic // clearly articulated and cleverly played against conventional expectations.” (Gard, 1994:99) Another might be the reason, that the driving forces presented in the novel, are still familiar to the society: “Jane Austen novels are important because they demonstrate the crude coercive power of society which is not just of her day, but exists today, albeit somewhat adapted, and still exerts a powerful influence over social life.” (*Pride and Prejudice*, Introduction, 1993) Jane Austen also is valued as one of the first feminist writers in British literature. In the age when women ought to be fragile, weak, and delicate, Austen managed to create heroines who were strong, rational individualities, able to make decisions and take responsibility.

**Impertinence Versus Weakness in Jane Austen Heroines**

To show a woman breaking norms of the end of 18th century is very difficult in a film that has to be presented in the end of 20th century. There are both objective and subjective causes. To the objective ones it must be mentioned, that the norms have greatly changed. The acts that might have seem revolutionary in the beginning of 19th century, escape the notice of nowadays spectator as being anything very special. For example, one of the most important features that distinguish the main heroine of *Pride and Prejudice* Elizabeth among other heroines is her impertinence, as Elizabeth states it in her dialogue with Mr. Darcy:

“Now be sincere; did you admire me for my impertinence?”

‘For the liveliness of your mind, I did.’

‘You may as well call it impertinence at once. It was very little less.” (*Austen, Pride and Prejudice* 1993:368)

In 18th century the word “impertinent” meant *presumptuous and/or over-familiar*, as stated by Myra Stokes (Stokes, 1993:106) in her analyses of the language of Jane Austen. In the turn of 18-19 century to be impertinent was a serious break of the accepted social rules. Jane Fergus states it: “To be impertinent, the reverse of the compliant and submissive behaviour recommended to young ladies, and not to suffer for it, is figuratively to get away with murder” (Fergus, 1992:83). Rebecca Dickson enlarges the topic: “There was also the problem of image. When Austen was alive, a woman who did not act in a submissive, domestic manner was assumed to be of a lower social order; therefore gentlewomen tried to act in a dignified manner that bespoke their cultivated civility. ... Gentlewoman kept their unhappiness about their place in the socioeconomic hierarchy to themselves or discreetly shared complaints with female friends in letters or in private conversations. Women were extremely careful about their social personas; they did not want anyone to describe them as indolent or shrill because indolence and shrillness were associated with the working classes” (Dickson, 2001:48) As Deborah Kaplan has indicated “A girl or woman who was self-willed might be ostracized, as happened with Hester Wheeler, an adolescent acquaintance of the Austen circle. ... Young Hester had the unfortunate tendency to speak her mind. She was thus considered a social disgrace. To keep her from sullying the characters of good girls, she was sent away to distant relatives.” (Kaplan 1992: 53, quoted from Dickson, 2001:48)

In the years when just to speak ones mind was despised flaw of character, if Jane Austen let her heroines...
act in obviously rebellious way, neither she would have been published, nor any woman would dare to admire her heroines. They and their authoress would have been viewed as 1) having bad taste or belonging to uneducated women from lower classes 2) seriously breaking the accepted rules that ought to be punished by forcing the rebellious women out of the society.

The best that Jane Austen could do was to allow her female protagonist to be impertinent – too bold and straightforward. “Elizabeth notoriously acts and judges independently and thereby violates many of the norms for proper female behaviour, but instead of finding herself ostracised by society, she becomes mistress of Pemberley, achieving the highest social position and greatest wealth that Austen ever bestows upon her heroines” (Fergus, 1992:82). It is a paradox that though in Jane Austen years of life her Elizabeth was characterised as even vulgar by contemporaries, now, having no deeper knowledge of the time, it is almost impossible to understand in what way Elizabeth proves herself to be impertinent. She seems just brave and witty, very open and not a hypocrite. Neither her open response towards Wickham, nor her direct and brave answers to Lady Catherine, nor her teasing conversations with Darcy seem impertinent. If these scenes do not receive special attention, impertinence of Elizabeth, forming one of the most important character lines, is revealed inadequately.

Elizabeth’s walk on foot to Netherlands is a liberty that does not seem revolutionary at all. In the novel, we are informed: “That she should have walked three miles so early in the day, in such dirty weather, and by herself, was almost incredible to Mrs. Hurst and Miss Bingley; and Elizabeth was convinced that they held her in contempt for it.” (Austen, Pride and Prejudice 1993:30) As the reader together with Elizabeth hardly may have high esteem of the mentioned ladies, their attitude does not set an example. Due to the same reason, the audience does not take seriously Lady Catherine’s surprise of Elizabeth’s way of talking:

""Upon my word,’ said her Ladyship, "you give your opinion very decidedly for so young a person. // Lady Catherine seemed quite astonished at not receiving a direct answer; and Elizabeth suspected herself to be the first creature who had ever dared to trifle with so much dignified impertinence!” (Austen, Pride and Prejudice 1993:161)

It is almost impossible to surprise anyone with anything now. The liberty of Elizabeth to respond freely to Wickham will not be noticed as a liberty by the most of the audience, though it has been different in 18th century: “Lydia, of course, is a foil to Elizabeth, an example of unrestrained sexuality and independence. But, by allowing her heroine Elizabeth to exhibit such open sexual response to Wickham’s charm, Austen is violating some of the rules that govern many women writers in the period. Delicacy and purity were expected of them; even Austen herself expected it to some degree.” (Fergus, 1992:85)

The fact that accepted rules have changed considerably, state a serious dilemma for moviemakers. One option is to show Elizabeth exactly as she is described in the novel. The risk then is that the audience will not notice that Elizabeth is exceeding the boundaries set for females of her time. Another option how to show the free spirit of Elizabeth into a film is to make Elizabeth impertinent according to the expectations of the audience exaggerating or explaining her behaviour. Both variants have their favours and limitations.

In the films of 1940, 1979 and 1995 different means have been used to reveal the character of the protagonist. Analyses of the film versions prove that to show the boldness of Elizabeth without the alteration of her most important character traits has not been an easy task. In some cases, it is even doubtful whether the authors have reached their aim.

Thus in PP-79 Elizabeth (actress Elizabeth Garvie) is shown as sensible, well-bread young woman, more witty than presumptuous or over-familiar. To persuade the audience that impertinence can be ascribed to her, that Elizabeth is constrained by accepted social norms less than other heroines are, Elizabeth must act so that the audience notices the breakage of the norms without being told. In the scene between Elizabeth and Colonel Fitzwilliam in Hunsford there has been an attempt made to show

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1 Here and further PP-79 stands for film Pride and Prejudice made in 1979, PP-40 stands for the film made in 1940 and PP-95 stands for the film made in 1995.
Elizabeth acting in a slightly impertinent manner. (PP-79, 120:33) Here Elizabeth is running away without any explanations or excuses, just after Colonel Fitzwilliam reveals her how Darcy has rated her family when separating Bingley from Jane. It does seem that here Elizabeth acts either impolitely or is too impulsive and is unable to hide her real feelings. The heroine is not impertinent – she is weak, irrational, and lacking self-control.

Therefore, in PP-79 instead of impertinence an effect of failing is created. A weakness of such kind does not correspond to the novel, where Elizabeth in the same episode “would not trust herself with an answer, and, therefore, abruptly changing the conversation, talked on indifferent matters till they reached the parsonage.” (Austen, Pride and Prejudice 1993:180) In the novel the only “liberty” Elizabeth allows herself is to change the subject, but in no way she is so impulsive as to run away. Here director Cyril Coke in attempt to illustrate, that Elizabeth feels greatly vexed has made her more emotional and thus weaker than the heroine of the novel. In general, to exhibit ones feelings so openly, is a failure that is not typical to Jane Austen’s heroines. The author herself has always been against the fragility that was expected from her sex in her times: “Jane Austen seems to have an unarticulated image of a fully individualised woman who is physically and mentally unrestricted, more mobile, more aware, more herself than the fainting creature in need of male protection, an image that the conduct books and popular fiction had combined to idealise.” (Mukherjee, 1991:58) Still it seems, that in a way Cyril Coke may have thought that according to our knowledge of the time, or more like – not knowledge, but common belief what might have been the “natural” behaviour of the women of “those old times”, fragility should be a characteristic feature. Most probably, Coke has believed, that such action corresponds to the inner expectations of the audience. Nowadays we may doubt if there would be any rational woman who would run away or would leave the room immediately after listening to touching information. Still it seems that audience in general is taught to be ready to accept that the women of “those times” might have acted in such insensible way. Also the fact, that rational women in turn of 18 – 19th centuries (and Elizabeth is believed to be highly rational) would unlikely afford such display of emotions and the fact, that such action seems silly nowadays, may suggest, that the director has used the scene just to illustrate the common male view that women are instable, weak and irrational. View, which is still alive in many of our contemporaries.

Authors of PP-95 have set an aim to create a film that would closely follow the novel in both spirit and plot. Their Elizabeth (actress Jennifer Ehle) partly corresponds to the one of the novel. She has the same openness and playfulness. In most of the scenes she obviously demonstrates a very typical feature of best Jane Austen’s heroines – wish “not to lose one’s face” whatever happens. She is adequately smart, but she is not impertinent – the feature is completely lost to the screen. There is nothing revolutionary left to the Elizabeth of PP-95. Neither screenplay author Andrew Davies nor director Simon Langton have found it necessary to show the ability of Elizabeth and Jane Austen as her creator to out step the social boundaries set for women of 19th century. Again, instead of showing the rebelliousness of the protagonist, (which might have been overlooked by the creators of the film), untypical weakness of temper is ascribed to the heroine at the same time diminishing the comic effect of some scenes to minimum. Also PP-79 has not always managed to pertain the spirit of the novel, but the film of 1995 is the most melodramatic of all versions. The climax scene between Elizabeth and Lady Catherine instead of laughter or at least enjoyable approval of Elizabeth's witty answers causes compassion. Elizabeth of PP-95 takes the insults very painfully, obviously is barely able not to start crying, and has to flee away not to lose her temper if front of Lady Catherine:

(P-95, 285:09, listening to Lady Catherine)  
(P-95, 287:14, Elizabeth going away)  
Elizabeth running away, Lady Catherine following her)

In the novel Elizabeth, though having not the slightest reason to enjoy the conversation, does not leave the scene before she has accompanied Lady Catherine to her carriage: “In this manner Lady Catherine talked on, till they were at the door of the carriage, when, turning hastily round, she added, ’I take no
leave of you, Miss Bennet. I send no compliments to your mother. You deserve no such attention. I am most seriously displeased.” Elizabeth made no answer; and without attempting to persuade her ladyship to return into the house, walked quietly into it herself. She heard the carriage drive away as she proceeded up stairs.” (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 1993:347)

It is completely impossible, that Elizabeth would leave the scene and run away from Lady Catherine in front of her own house, most probably discreetly watched by all her relatives. As admitted by Dickson: “Austen’s characters always keep their tempers; when they are irritable or out of sorts, they remain in their rooms. Austen’s characters disagree in private, never with others present.” (Dickson, 2001:47)

In comparison to the scene created by authors of PP-95, Elizabeth of PP-40 is not at all moved by Lady Catherine’s insults. The scene is comic and provokes at least smiles. Also Elizabeth of PP-79 pertains her spirit and is witty and smart without becoming too agitated. Both Elizabeth’s of PP-40 and PP-79 instead of running away, politely or less politely show the door to Lady Catherine.

PP-40: “Lady Catherine: *I shall not leave this house until you give me the assurance for which I ask!*”

Elizabeth in a perfectly calm and kind voice: In that case, *Lady Catherine, I had better ring for the butler. He will show you to your bedroom. Or, if you decide after all not to stay, he will conduct you to your carriage!*

Elizabeth to butler: *Oh Mathew, I have the impression that her ladyship wishes to be taken to her carriage. Good by Lady Catherine!* (PP-40, 105:30)

In addition, Elizabeth of PP-79 cannot be set out of mood by a person whom she does not respect and she will not allow her enemy to see her distressed. During the whole conversation with Lady Catherine, Elizabeth of PP-79 does not let her smile to leave the face:

(P-P79, 213:12-34, listening to Lady Catherine) Elizabeth, opening the door: “Good day, Lady Catherine!”

By avoidance of melodramatisation of the episode, PP-79 has made the scene more serene, with no distinct crisis. Events lead to the resolution in peaceful manner. It is sure, that even if Elizabeth will have to lose attentions of Darcy, she is not going to let herself be constantly mortified.

Elizabeth of PP-95 being more mature and less likely just 21 year old as she should be, take the episode very painfully. Actually, the weakness here though lies not with Elizabeth but with the director again, who has made Elizabeth of 1995 more vulnerable – probably making her more feminine as if even the most reasonable female ought to be unable to hide her feelings or control herself.

In opposite to the films of 1979 and 1995 where some important characteristic features of Elizabeth have almost disappeared and new ones have appeared, the authors of PP-40 (screenplay authors: Aldous Huxley and Jane Murfin after the dramatisation of the novel made by Helen Jerome, director: Robert Z. Leonard) have obviously believed that impertinence in the present meaning of the word is very basic character feature of Elizabeth (actress Greer Garson) and must be exposed as much as possible. Actually, the result they have achieved corresponds to Hollywood cinema traditions: “Hollywood protagonists tend to be active, to seek out goals, and pursue them rather than having goals simply thrust upon them.” (Thompson, 1999:14-15) Elizabeth of PP-40 is not seeking her goals actively, as they are not clearly stated, but is responding to the events with much more spirit than Elizabeth of the novel is. While the authors of PP-79 and PP-95 may be accused for having not disclosed the impertinence of Elizabeth, authors of PP-40 seem to have exaggerated this aspect. Their Elizabeth besides being bold is occasionally rude and impolite. However, if women in Jane Austen times would dare to act like this
heroine, they would have lost their status in society. In a way it is presented, it is difficult to understand why women had to fight for their rights, as it does not seem that Elizabeth lacks any of those. There are many different causes why the characterisation in PP-40 has been changed. Of course, partly it is due to the fact that historical accuracy was not fashionable and was not looked for when creating Hollywood films in forties. It also must be noted, that women rights an role in the society of Great Britain greatly differed from the one in America – though having their own problems, women in America experienced more liberty and were less constrained by social norms, than their relatives in Great Britain were in both 19th century and in thirties, when the film was shot. In addition, as admitted by many historians, there was a strong tendency among Americans to idealize the “merry old England” – homeland of many of their ancestors.

In spite of all these factors, still one could wish that the roles of Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth were not changed to such extent. While in the novel both heroes are treated as having equally imperfect characters, in the film the fault of their disagreements falls almost entirely on Elizabeth’s side. Even during the most offensive scene during the first ball when Mr. Darcy finds Elizabeth just “tolerable enough” the accents have been changed. While his remark about her being not beautiful enough may cause mild insult, it is obvious that it has not been meant for the lady’s ears. To explain why Mr. Darcy is so unwilling to dance with Elizabeth, there is introduced an additional episode during which silly scheming of Mrs. Bennet is overheard by Darcy and audience (but not Elizabeth). Moreover, to diminish the unwanted offence to minimum, just after the scene he invites Elizabeth to dance. Then he is rudely rejected – impertinence of Elizabeth manifests itself for the first time. She continues in a similar manner throughout the film - during the archery lesson Elizabeth again tries to injure Darcy, in vain again as he bears it with perfect tolerance. In the scenes of Netherfield ball Elizabeth is characterised as impulsive, quick at laughing and no doubt – impertinent. Both in her running away and in hiding from Collins and with her attitude towards Darcy, she demonstrates also a kind of selfish disrespect to the other person’s feelings. It seems that PP-40 has exaggerated the violation of the norms and sometimes it may be difficult to identify with Elizabeth when she becomes too aggressive. Watching the film it often seems, that Elizabeth Bennet is the English sister of Scarlett O’Hara. Due to that after a number of the scenes proving Elizabeth being exceptionally strong female character, a very strong dissonance is created with the scene where Elizabeth is presented openly crying after Mr. Bingley’s sister offends her. The characterisation of the female protagonist is changed again and the inner logic of the story is broken. Thus beside exaggerated impertinence Elizabeth of PP-40 has got her share of weakness too, illustrating the popular idea that touchiness and excessive sensitivity naturally belong to any female character.

Stumbling Point - Marriage of Charlotte

“Accordingly they (feminist critics) try to find some evidence that Austen criticises marriage as well as other institutions. ... They find such evidence because Austen’s views are always double; but they often tend to forget that Austen has chosen comedy as her form.” (Fergus, 1992:87)

In Pride and Prejudice Elizabeth is the main representative of Jane Austen’s views on marriage – it is better to remain poor, than to marry without affection. Regarding the other heroines of her novels, Austen is not always demanding deep feelings as the base of matrimony, though not any of the main characters is allowed to marry without love. In this respect puzzling may seem the marriage between Charlotte and Mr, Collins as Charlotte marrying Mr. Collins represents quite an opposite view: “Miss Lucas, who accepted him (Mr. Collins) solely from the pure and disinterested desire of an establishment, cared not how soon that establishment were gained.” (Austen, Pride and Prejudice 1993:120)

Though Charlotte does something that her creator would never allow herself to do, she is not pitied by Jane Austen nor is her fate made miserable. In the novel Charlotte is described as 27 years old, plain and of limited means: “At the age of twenty-seven, without having ever been handsome, she (Charlotte) felt all the good luck of it,” and “Mr. Collins's present circumstances made it a most eligible match for their daughter (Charlotte), to whom they could give little fortune; // It (marriage) was the only honourable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want.”(Austen, Pride and Prejudice 1993:120)

Charlotte undoubtedly is a positive heroine, a close friend of the protagonist Elizabeth, in many cases
having sharper eye and evaluating events more precisely than Elizabeth. It is obvious, that her marriage with Mr. Collins is not guided by her heart but by the common sense, which is influenced by the society norms of 19th century. Still it would be very difficult to find any other novel of the time, in which a heroine would be allowed to marry out of pure mercenary calculations to a man whom she can neither respect nor esteem, and still be happy. Though actually marriage out of mercenary reasons was accepted and forced by the society, it did not correspond to the declared values of the time.

Representation of the fate of Charlotte in a film becomes a difficult task, as her action does not correspond to the expectancies of the audience and to the accepted moral values also of our time. Jane Austen does not attempt to make Charlotte miserable after her mercenary step. In the novel, Charlotte’s life in Collins’s house is shown as quite pleasing; it is more troublesome because of their neighbour, Lady Catherine de Bourgh than of her silly husband. Charlotte has found the ways to make her life quite pleasant:

“When Mr. Collins said any thing of which his wife might reasonably be ashamed, // Charlotte wisely did not hear.” (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 1993:151-152)

“Poor Charlotte! --It was melancholy to leave her to such society! --But she had chosen it with her eyes open; and though evidently regretting that her visitors were to go, she did not seem to ask for compassion. Her home and her house-keeping, her parish and her poultry, and all their dependent concerns, had not yet lost their charms.” (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 1993:209)

Jane Austen foreshadows opportunity that Charlotte may find all the charms of her own household too little for her happiness in the future, but so far there are no signs of that and Charlotte has no reasons to regret her step.

To show the situation of Charlotte neither punishing nor prising her for her marriage with Mr. Collins has not been an easy task for film producers. Two more recent screen versions of 1979 and 1995 have stressed the unpleasant side of Charlotte’s marriage and made it more miserable than it is in the novel.

In the novel *Pride and Prejudice*, three main reasons can be summed up why Charlotte is ready to marry a silly man: heir being plain, heir being one of a large family with little income and her being quite disillusioned and materialistic viewing the very institute of matrimony. In neither of the films of 1979 and 1995, all three causes are revealed.

Though Charlotte of PP-79 declares herself being a plain one with little fortune (28:30), the film does not allow Charlotte to be a truly plain one.

(PP-79, 82:33, listening to Collins’ proposal)

Being a pretty girl, her motivation to marry out of the reason that being neither beautiful nor rich she can hardly expect anything better is diminished. To increase the punishment, in PP-79 an episode is added in which Charlotte is made to polish the furniture of the house, because, as it is explained by Charlotte, Lady Catherine believes the servants cannot be trusted to do the job and Mr. Collins agrees to that.

(PP-79, 122:06, Charlotte polishing furniture)

Due to the fact, that nowadays audience might fail to notice that furniture polishing is something beyond tasks a lady should naturally perform at home, in the film it has been explained adding Elizabeth’s remark full of surprise and vexation: “Why cannot servants do it!” (PP-79, 122:10) Another scene is
added making Charlotte of PP-79 to admit that her husband is ridiculous and burst into laughter over him together with Elizabeth. These scenes have made character of Charlotte a little bit inconsistent. In some places Charlotte of PP-79 seems naïve, not sensing the awkwardness of Mr. Collins as acutely as Elizabeth does and at the same time Charlotte and the audience of the films, are made more aware of her humiliating status. The way Charlotte is characterised in the film, does not prove that she has “an excellent understanding” and the idea that also a sensible woman may enter into marriage like into a market place, loses its significance.

Though Charlotte of PP-95 may be called “plain”, she is not allowed to be forced into marriage due to her limited means of living: Lucas’s house is made quite rich, much richer than that of Bennet’s family and the fact that Charlotte is afraid of poverty is not stressed at all. To increase the negative aspect of her marriage, Mr. Collins of PP-95 is made the most unpleasant one, not only foolish, ridiculous and irksome, but also greasy and meticulous.

Collinses of all three movies:

Collinses of 1940 and 1979 are funny while Collins of 1995 is definitely repulsive. As for the punishment, Charlotte of PP-95 notices all the silliness of her husband and feels ashamed. She openly admits to Elizabeth that she is encouraging her husband to be off the house as often as possible. She is sensible and is shown as being aware of all the humiliation caused by the awkwardness and greasiness of her husband. To admit openly, that she better sees Mr. Collins out of the house than in, is a little bit more than the novel lets us know. In the novel Charlotte does not expose her feelings even to Elizabeth, and to admit, “It often happens that a whole day passes in which we have not spent more than few minutes in each others company. I find that I can bear the solitude very cheerfully,” (PP-95, 130:33) is to admit that she is aware that the price she has to pay for having married a man whom she cannot respect is spoiling her matrimony.

In PP-40 the fact that Charlotte steps into her marriage do to purely mercenary reasons, is completely ignored. Here as the motivation of accepting Mr. Collins’s proposal are given her views on matrimony, which are corresponding to the ones provided in the novel.

“Charlotte: Happiness, Lizzy? In marriage, happiness is just a matter of chance.
Elizabeth: But Charlotte! His defects of character! You know him so little.
Charlotte: Well, ignorance is blessed. If one is to spend one’s life with a person, it is best to know as little as possible of his defects. After all, one will find them out soon enough.” (PP-40, 66:50)

Collins of PP-40 is more pompous and comical than servile and in no way “his air is grave and stately, and his manners very formal.” (Austen, Pride and Prejudice 1993:61) To marry such Collins is not a punishment, and Charlotte, having no high expectations in matrimony, is shown as a perfectly happy wife.

In the novel, Charlotte by her step illustrates two very important matters. First, that a happy marriage is more like an exception than a commonplace event. Second – In the beginning of 19th century, marriage was the only way to secure economic and social position for most of the females. Making the sensible, but poor and plain Charlotte marry out of mercenary reasons, Austen besides breaking the accepted clichés of the representation of marriage in fiction also demonstrates the despondent position of her female contemporaries. Probably that has been one of the most important reasons, why Jane Austen does not “punish” Charlotte and let her lead considerably happy life. By ignoring the fact, that the social system was such that it just pressed women into marriage, moviemakers of 20th century have neglected very important aspect of human history.
Analyses proves, that in many cases the independent, bold and strong-minded heroines of Jane Austen have been changed, tamed, made weaker and less mature according to quite typical male view of a female character, thus lessening the rebelliousness of the heroines and females in general.

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