Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina
Centro de Comunicação e Expressão
Curso de Pós-Graduação em Letras - Inglês e Literatura Correspondente
Doutorado em Literaturas de Língua Inglesa

FROM PAGE TO SCREEN: A STUDY OF IRONY IN ADAPTATIONS OF JANE AUSTEN'S *EMMA*

por

GENILDA AZERÊDO

Tese submetida à Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina para obtenção do grau de
DOUTORA EM LETRAS

FLORIANÓPOLIS
Julho 2001

Esta Tese de Genilda Alves de Azeredo Rodrigues, intitulada FROM PAGE TO SCREEN: A STUDY OF IRONY IN ADAPTATIONS OF JANE AUSTEN'S *EMMA*, foi julgada adequada e aprovada em sua forma final pelo programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras/Inglês e Literatura Correspondente da Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, para fins de obtenção do grau de

DOUTOR EM LETRAS

Área de Concentração: Inglês e Literatura Correspondente
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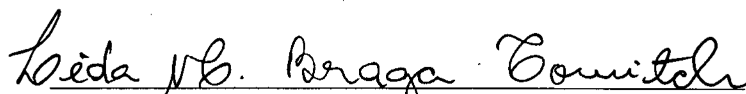

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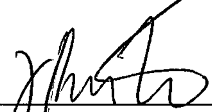

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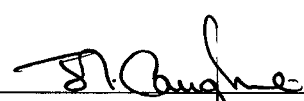

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Florianópolis, 24 de Julho de 2001

For Felix and Mariana
For my family
my most tangible and precious reality,
with love.

To Nair Barlow,
who introduced me to Jane Austen.

To Leonor Maia,
in her love and admiration for Jane Austen.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Following the spirit of T. S. Eliot's verses in "Little Gidding" (*Four Quartets*) that "to make an end is to make a beginning" and that "the end is where we start from" – now, that I seem to have finished an academic phase – I would first like to look back – gratefully – to the time when the Federal University of Paraíba, particularly the "Departamento de Línguas Estrangeiras Modernas" (where I work in João Pessoa) allowed me the four-year study leave which permitted the development of my doctoral research. I am very thankful to all of them there, especially to Guadalupe Coutinho – who kindly accepted to be my representative in the Department for matters of legal and bureaucratic decisions, but whose friendliness and affection always transcended such matters.

Certainly the result of my research would not have been the same if CAPES – a Brazilian academic funding institution – had not financed my four-year study program; the grant, for one thing, not only enabled me to buy precious books, but contributed to my carrying out a seven-month research at the University of Glasgow, under the always lucid and accurate supervision of Professor John Caughie. I am grateful to CAPES and deeply indebted to John, whose criticisms and suggestions have always been enlightening and challenging.

At the Federal University of Santa Catarina I would first like to thank Anelise Corseuil, not only for being my adviser, and thus for sharing the whole process involving the doctorate course with me, but for her general friendliness and solidarity in issues outside the academic; next, I would like to thank José Gatti, Mauro Pommer, Maria Lúcia Milléo Martins, Renata Wasserman, Sérgio Bellei and John Caughie, not only for the pleasure I had in taking their courses, but for the rare opportunity I was given to be once more a student. In different ways and gradations all of them contributed with readings of drafts and suggestions that helped me develop and refine embryonic ideas.

Two other people have been important to me in ways that go beyond the question of academic reading and intellectual exchange, though I also find these highly relevant, and credit them such merits: Sônia Zyngier, from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, whose readings, criticisms, and suggestions were highly relevant; and

João Batista de Brito, my first master in filmic studies, from the Federal University of Paraíba, who expressed his belief in my research project at a time when I mostly needed it. A special thanks and my love to both.

I would also like to thank Ildney Cavalcanti and Maria Lúcia Milléo for their kindness in providing me with bibliographical material on Austen and on irony, at a time when they themselves were also busy with their doctoral research.

My gratitude also goes to Susana Funck, not only for having promptly accepted to take part in the examining committee, but also for her careful and perceptive reading of the text. Her good sense of humor, during the defense, also made a difference.

Various other people (academics or not) and various other places (besides university classrooms) have provided stimulating situations and relaxing moments that were crucial for diluting the steady and solitary periods of writing. Bringing Barthes' notion of textual pleasure to mind that "it is intermittence… which is erotic," I would say that it is exactly these gaps, or pauses, in academic research that provide the necessary fuel for the research itself. In this sense, I would like to recall and register the moments I shared with friends during coffee breaks or at weekend gatherings in their homes, or in cafés, bars and restaurants, when we casually talked about films, music, recited poetry, and enjoyed ourselves simply (or not so simply) talking about our day-to-day lives. I dedicate the warmth of my affection to Antônio, Jorge, Sandra, Lucinaldo, Maria Lúcia, Felipe, Nara, Guilherme, Tacel, Eliana, Liane, Lauro, Neide, Alessandra and Ramayana. In different ways and intensities they share a place in my heart. In Glasgow my love goes to Ana Monteiro and John Gilmour; Augusta and John Corbett.

My friends and family in Paraíba also contributed to this "academic pleasurable intermittence" by making themselves present through gifts, poems, cards, letters, e-mails and phone-calls. Special thanks to Guadalupe, Ana Adelaide, Jeová, Glória, Vitória, Regina, Vilani, Rosângela, Célia, João Batista, Hildeberto and Morais; and to my family, to whom I dedicate the work.

ABSTRACT

FROM PAGE TO SCREEN: A STUDY OF IRONY IN ADAPTATIONS OF JANE AUSTEN'S *EMMA*

GENILDA AZERÊDO

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA

2001

SUPERVISING PROFESSOR: DRA. ANELISE REICH CORSEUIL

The main purpose of this research is to examine the constructions and functions of irony in Jane Austen's novel *Emma* (1816), and in three 1990s filmic and television adaptations of the novel: Amy Heckerling's *Clueless* (1995); Douglas McGrath's *Emma* (1996); and Diarmuid Lawrence's *Emma* (1996). The different contexts in which both the novel and the films are inserted have required a theoretical discussion of ironic discourse that ranges from the considerations of Robert Scholes to Linda Hutcheon, and from those of Alan Wilde to Richard Rorty. The different theories on irony aim at illuminating and responding to the varied ways through which irony is generated, as well as for what purposes, in both Austen's novel and in the films. Moreover, the reading of irony in the audiovisual texts is further supported by theoretical principles of adaptation and filmic narrative. As such, the thesis is intended as a critical contribution to both the areas of literary and filmic studies.

Number of pages: 220 pages
Number of words: 68.528 words

RESUMO

DA PÁGINA À TELA: ESTUDO DA IRONIA EM ADAPTAÇÕES FÍLMICAS DO ROMANCE *EMMA*, DE JANE AUSTEN

GENILDA AZERÊDO

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA
2001

PROFESSORA ORIENTADORA: DRA. ANELISE REICH CORSEUIL

A presente pesquisa tem como objetivo principal examinar as construções e funções da ironia no romance *Emma*, de Jane Austen (1816), e em três adaptações fílmicas e televisivas do romance realizadas na década de noventa: *Clueless* (1995), de Amy Heckerling, conhecido no Brasil sob o título de *As Patricinhas de Beverly Hills*; *Emma* (1996), de Douglas McGrath; e *Emma* (1996), de Diarmuid Lawrence. Os diferentes contextos em que ambos romance e filmes se inserem exigiram uma discussão teórica do discurso irônico que abrange as considerações de Robert Scholes, Linda Hutcheon, Alan Wilde e Richard Rorty, dentre outros. As diferentes teorias sobre ironia têm como objetivo responder às variadas formas através das quais tal estratégia discursiva é gerada, e para que propósitos/funções, tanto no que diz respeito ao romance quanto aos filmes. Além disso, a análise da questão da ironia nos filmes também é embasada nas teorias da adaptação e narrativa fílmica. Desta forma, pretende-se que a tese constitua uma contribuição crítica tanto para a área de estudos em literatura quanto em cinema.

Número de páginas: 220 páginas
Numero de palavras: 68.528 palavras

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A Study of Irony in Adaptations of Jane Austen's *Emma*

by Genilda Azerêdo

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"For what do we live, but to make
sport for our neighbours,
and laugh at them in our turn?"
(*Pride and Prejudice*, 372)

Chapter I

Introductory Remarks

> "I cannot fix on the hour, or the spot, or the look, or the words, which laid the foundation. It is too long ago. I was in the middle before I knew that I *had* begun."
>
> (*Pride and Prejudice*, 388)

The 1990s have definitely consolidated Jane Austen as a success on the screen, both cinema and television, at least to the extent that successful means "marketable" and "profitable."[1] In 1995 four adaptations of her novels were released: *Pride and Prejudice* (miniseries produced by the BBC and A&E); *Sense and Sensibility* (feature film produced by Mirage/Columbia); *Persuasion* (telefilm made by the BBC and WGBH and later released as a feature film from Sony Picture Classics) and *Clueless* (feature film produced by Paramount), a contemporary loose adaptation of Austen's *Emma*. In 1996 the public had the chance to watch not only two other Austen adaptations, but two adaptations of the same novel: *Emma* – one produced by Miramax and another by ITV and A&E.[2] In 1999 it was the time for another adaptation of Austen, this time *Mansfield Park* (Miramax), to be shown on the big screen. This most recent Austen film is based not only on her novel but on materials taken from her letters and journals.

Interestingly, the headlines of some reviews written in the period in which these films came out illustrate the extent of success and fuss that the transposition of Austen to the screen arose: "Jane Austen for the Nineties" (*The New Criterion*, September, 1995); "How did a 200-year-old novel become the British TV sensation of the year?" (*Listener*, August 31, 1996); "Austen Found: Hollywood Rediscovers the 19th-Century Writer" (*Washington Post*, December 10, 1995); "No longer Clueless about Jane Austen's Clout" (*Christian Science Monitor*, April 5, 1996); "A Surprise

Film Hit About Rich Teen-Age Girls" (*The New York Times*, July 24, 1995); "It's Austenmania: Why Jane Austen film adaptations are turning the writer into a nineties phenomenon" (*Radio Times*, November 23-26, 1996); "The Jane Austen Thing" (*The Progressive*, July, 37-38, 1996).

Actually, the relationship between Jane Austen and adaptation dates from a more distant past. In *Jane Austen: The Novels*, Nicholas Marsh comments on the Austen family habit of both reading aloud Austen's own writings, and of using them for the performance of amateur dramatic productions, during which Austen could better "visualize" the appropriateness of characters' speeches and the alignment between characterization and voice, for instance (226-27). In one of her letters, Austen complains of her mother's inability to adequately reproduce the dialogue in *Pride and Prejudice*:

> Our second evening's reading to Miss Benn had not pleased me so well, but I believe something must be attributed to my mother's too rapid way of getting on: and though she perfectly understands the characters herself, she cannot speak as they ought. (*Letters*, 299; as qtd. in Marsh, 227)

I believe one can consider these moments as somehow marking the beginning of the relationship between Austen and adaptation; such "family happenings" do provide a significant illustration of the potentialities of Austen's texts to be dramatized, to be enacted; among these, her use of dialogue – most often woven through wit, humour, and irony – and her precise sense of characterization, so as to create vivid characters the reader immediately recognizes, at the same time that she plays with romantic stereotypes, thus also making readers deceive themselves in their hasty predictions.

The Austen family's performance of the characters already points to the existence of certain elements in the Austen text that make it amenable to

dramatization, or to adaptation. This assumption provides a counterpoint to opinions that view Austen adaptations only within the context of film industry; viewed as such, the frequent adaptation of her novels would simply result from a guarantee of foreign sales, and of the existence of an already significant domestic and international audience for them. Although no one can be naïve enough to ignore the role of profit in dealing with a mass-market activity like film, one must also be aware that, if Austen films mean an *a priori* success, they must already possess something that makes them successful. The 'profit' justification ends up leading one back to the nature of the Austen text itself. Besides Austen's construction of characterization and dialogues, which certainly favour a more traditional and linear kind of audio-visual transposition, Austen is also valued, still in the 20th century, for the themes she usually depicts in her novels, mainly as they relate to women, family life, domesticity, social relationships and ethic values.

The range of Austen adaptations has varied from theatrical performances to television series and feature films. Her novels have quite often been adapted to meet school reading aims. In "Jane Austen Adapted," Andrew Wright traces a "genealogy" of these adaptations, considering both the frequency with which her novels have been re-told in a condensed and abridged form for school children, or school reading, and also their adaptations into plays, series, musicals and film. (By the time Wright published his article, only the 1940-version of *Pride and Prejudice* had been adapted as a film). Wright provides a relevant annotated list of adaptations, which includes school editions, abridgments, sequels, dramatizations and performances based on Austen's work. In one of the examples he considers, a retelling of *Pride and Prejudice* (1962) elaborated by Joan Macintosh, this is how the adapter summarizes Austen's literary universe: "Jane Austen's six novels are straightforward love stories,

with happy endings, good plots, and a strong respect for domestic virtues" (424). As one may conclude, in re-telling Austen, those must have been the aspects considered and privileged by Macintosh. Clearly, such a view is not only a reductive estimation of Austen, but a partially inappropriate account as well. To say that Austen's novels constitute "straightforward love stories" is to miss the indirection of Austen's style, and her constant undermining of romantic stereotypes. Likewise, to say that Austen shows "a strong respect for domestic virtues" is to ignore the criticism she makes of Regency social rituals and values, mainly as these affect questions concerning domesticity, appearance, propriety, women and marriage. A key passage in *Northanger Abbey* is representative of Austen's view of the function of the novel – a "work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour are conveyed to the world in the best-chosen language" (*Northanger Abbey*, 25).

These considerations already offer an introductory parameter for a further investigation of what happens to Austen in these 1990s television and filmic adaptations. One of the conclusions that Wright reaches after analyzing several adaptations of Austen, is that "the closer the rendering to the words of Jane Austen the better" (439). He praises a 1942-theatre production of *Pride and Prejudice* (an adaptation by Anne Louise Coulter Martens, published under the pseudonym of Jane Kendall, at the Chicago Community Theatre) on the basis of faithfulness as well: "this unpretentious *Pride and Prejudice* recommends itself by a large degree of faithfulness to the original that is the hallmark of successful adaptation" (436).

Bearing these issues in mind, in dealing with adaptations, a crucial question is, what exactly do critics mean when they talk about "fidelity to the original?" Do they

mean fidelity to the words used in the novel? To the themes and characters portrayed? To the sense of pastness? To the ideology at work in the prior text? To the nuances of tone the author adopts? Indeed, a more productive reading of adaptations might result from the consideration of the peculiarities inherent to the forms – literature/film – and from the consequences and effects arising from the cuts and additions to a film adapted. As Seymour Chatman reminds us in his article "What Novels Can Do that Films Can't (and Vice-Versa):"

> Close study of film and novel versions of the same narrative reveals with great clarity the peculiar powers of the two media. Once we grasp those peculiarities, the reasons for the differences in form, content and impact of the two versions strikingly emerge. (404)

Attention to these peculiarities constitutes a basic premise underlying the present study, which aims at contributing, in general terms, to current critical debates on the relationship between Jane Austen and adaptation. More specifically, this study aims at discussing the question of irony – considered by a great part of her critics as a significant aesthetic strategy she employs in her novels – and the treatment that directors and screenwriters give to this figure in its transposition from the literary texts to the audiovisual language of television and film.

For such purposes, the texts selected for analysis are the novel *Emma* (1816) and the three adaptations this novel received in the 1990s: *Clueless* (scripted and directed by Amy Heckerling, 1995); *Emma* (scripted and directed by Douglas McGrath, 1996); and *Emma* (scripted by Andrew Davies and directed by Diarmuid Lawrence, 1996). Though these constitute the main focus of the analysis, references at times may be made to other novels by Austen and to other Austen adaptations so as to illustrate and deepen the discussion, as well as to suggest further research. The decision to focus on *Emma* has been guided by several assumptions: 1. The novel

presents varied uses of irony; among them, the conjunction of the strategy with the matter of focus of narration constitutes a challenge to the screen; 2. The novel was adapted three times between 1995 and 1996, a fact that allows for an analysis of the adaptations in their different contexts of production; the proximity in time is also an advantage, since the films do not present different cinematic/audio-visual techniques (as it would happen if I had included the 1972-BBC adaptation, which relies heavily on television and theatrical devices); 3. The film *Clueless* is a kind of adaptation that does not follow the period-piece pattern (as most adaptations of Austen), thus illustrating a loose adaptation of the novel. 4. Given the importance of social context and shared systems of values and knowledge for the attribution and comprehension of irony, the films constitute a means through which irony may be viewed and discussed from different perspectives, thus generating new dialogues and effects with Austen's universe.

The different contexts to which these texts belong substantially affect the analysis of irony in other ways as well: for one thing, irony will be considered not only in relation to the different periods in which the texts are inserted but also in relation to the different media in which irony is actualized. This difference will favour an investigation of the ways in which irony is generated in verbal language (the novel) and in audiovisual language (the films).

The fact that two of the adaptations selected are period-pieces and one is a transposition of Austen to contemporary times (set in Los Angeles) also engenders a significant question related to the matter of faithfulness and of the limits between the so-called quality and non-quality works. That is, in the same way that there is a general tendency (mainly in departments of literature) to consider novels as superior forms to their adaptations, there is also a propensity on the part of film reviewers and

the public in general to consider faithful adaptations as superior to those that deviate from the 'original' source, as is the case with *Clueless*.[3] In dealing with a canonical author like Jane Austen – who has been equated with the very conception of 'Englishness' – this issue seems to become more problematic, since subverting the textual 'origin' means also a subversion of the values and beliefs associated with the English tradition that Austen is said to symbolize.

In terms of specific theory on irony, the crucial theoretical principles will range from considerations of the topic in a semiotic tradition (Robert Scholes' "A Semiotic Approach to Irony in Drama and Fiction"); in a structuralist tradition (Jonathan Culler's *Flaubert: The Uses of Uncertainty*); to a more discourse and culturally-oriented perspective, as those offered by Alan Wilde (*Horizons of Assent: Modernism, Post-Modernism and the Ironic Imagination*), Linda Hutcheon (*Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony*), and Richard Rorty (*Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*). Besides the theory on irony, Naomi Schor's *Reading Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* will also be of use in order to introduce a discussion of the relations between the private and the public in Jane Austen's universe, and how they relate to the question of irony.

Methodologically speaking, the present research is introduced with a theoretical chapter on irony, in which the distinction between irony as a linguistic strategy (ironic discourse) and irony as a way of perceiving, and answering to, the world (ironic imagination) is considered. This point of difference constitutes a springboard for the argument that irony in Austen's *Emma* and irony in *Clueless* belong to different ironic sensibilities; that is, they characterize different ironic looks at the world they portray. Other aspects concerning irony that are taken into account include the semantic and pragmatic characterization of irony; types of irony; the

relationship between irony and context; the participants in ironic discourse; and the functions of irony. The theoretical principles derived from these topics will underlie the reading of irony first in the novel *Emma*, and later in the analysis of the films. Previous to the analysis of the filmic versions, the question of irony is related to the process of adaptation in order to identify the specificity of ironic discourse in literature and the challenge it poses to screen adaptation. Obviously, because the films are inserted in a context that differs to a great extent from that of Austen's novels – films are not only directed to a greater audience (hence, their mass-oriented feature), but to audiences all over the globe, many of whom get into contact with Austen through the films – the question of irony, which is highly connected with the question of context, will be not only enlarged, but will become more complex as well.

Bearing these issues in mind, the thesis has been organized in the following chapters:

Chapter I : Introductory Remarks presents an outline of the problem to be investigated and the assumptions underlying it; here I also justify the choice of texts to be analyzed, the methodological procedures to be used, and mention the main theoretical material that will support the analysis.

Chapter II: Irony in Literary and Cultural Theory and Criticism elaborates the main theoretical premises to be used in the analysis. This chapter discusses the difference between ironic imagination and ironic discourse; within ironic discourse, careful attention is given to the semantic and pragmatic characterization of irony; types of irony; the relationship between irony and context; participants in ironic discourse; and the functions of irony.

Chapter III: Reading (in) Detail: Irony in Jane Austen's *Emma* provides a reading of the question of irony in Austen's novel. First, a general criticism on Austen

is provided, mainly as it refers to what some critics consider as her representation of a limited and restricted world. In a second moment I offer an overview of previous readings of *Emma* that have also dealt with a consideration of irony – such as Wayne C. Booth's "Control of Distance in Jane Austen's *Emma*," Marvin Mudrick's "Irony as Form: *Emma*" and Wendy Moffat's "Identifying with Emma: Some Problems for the Feminist Reader." After these introductory sections, that also aim at contextualizing both Austen and critical studies on her, I concentrate on the reading of irony in *Emma*. Due to the pervasive way this strategy is used in the novel, I have decided to focus the analysis first on the parts in which Emma – the novel's heroine – plays the task of a *creative interpreter*. The expression comes from Naomi Schor's discussion of "Fiction as Interpretation/Interpretation as Fiction" (more of this in Chapter III) and certainly applies to Emma's propensity at – more than interpreting stories – creating and inventing them, so as to add to the reality surrounding her. The moments when Emma performs the task of *creative interpretation* are related to the presence of *diegetic details* (another term coined by Schor) in the narrative. The other passages chosen for analysis relate to Mr. Knightley (also playing the role of a *creative interpreter*), Mrs. Elton (that illustrates an ironic character portrait) and the Box Hill picnic, considered to be the climax of Jane Austen's *Emma*.

Chapter IV: Adaptation and Irony constitutes another theoretical chapter whose aim is to elaborate on the relationship between adaptation and irony, so as to provide support for the analysis of irony in the adapted films in the following Chapter. Several texts dealing with the question of adaptation will be considered: Dudley Andrew's "Adaptation;" Seymour Chatman's "What Novels Can Do That Films Can't (And Vice-Versa);" John Caughie's "Small Pleasures: Adaptation and the Past in British Film and Television;" Brian McFarlane's *Novel to Film: An Introduction to*

the Theory of Adaptation. The outcome of this discussion will inevitably take me back to the question of irony, to its particular mode of expression and address, and to aspects concerning what can or cannot be adapted into audiovisual language. Eisenstein's concept of montage as collision and conflict will provide a parallel, in visual terms, to the dual and differential/inclusive structure of irony as proposed by Hutcheon.

Chapter V: Looking Through the Screen: A Study of Irony in Adaptations of Jane Austen's *Emma* consists of an analysis of how irony is generated in each of the films selected for discussion. Attention is paid, in a first moment, to the way the general ironic imagination and pattern that inform Austen's novel have been utilized and transposed to the films; but rather than expecting a one-to-one realization of novel into film (obviously an impossible task), the specific aim is to detect how the films create irony in a different way from the novel: different not only in terms of thematic material, but in technical terms (motivated by the difference of media) as well.

Although *Clueless* was released in 1995 and the other two adaptations (McGrath's and Lawrence's) were released in 1996, the discussion of the films is introduced with McGrath's *Emma,* followed by a consideration of Lawrence's version, and concluded with a reading of *Clueless.* This shows that rather than following a chronological criterion, the choice has been to consider the matter of complexity, or innovation, or originality as to the treatment that each film gives to the question of irony. Generally speaking, McGrath's adaptation is the least successful in terms of recreating Austen's ironic strategies, though specific examples will show that the director and screenwriter (McGrath himself) has not thoroughly ignored the issue. Interestingly, the "emptiness" one may find in the film's failure to recreate Austen's

ironic implications and effects has given rise to an investigation of other aspects which are also important for a comprehension of the film's final pattern and intent. Lawrence's version, no doubt because of the better quality and density of Andrew Davies' screenplay, manages to reproduce Austen's ironic meanings and interplays more convincingly and more substantially than McGrath's. Heckerling's *Clueless* is the most complex and original in terms of irony, mainly because of the intersection of past and present that the film plays with, which gives rise to an explicit ironizing look into both Austen's and our own contemporary world.

In **Chapter VI: Concluding Remarks,** several of the significant topics discussed throughout the thesis are briefly referred to again for the sake of summarizing the contribution of the research, and at the same time of admitting the necessity for further investigation.

Notes

1. Roger Sales provides several examples of the profits involving the adaptation of Austen's novels; talking specifically about the BBC (1995) adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, he says: "When the video priced at just under £20 was released in advance of the final episode, it sold 12,000 copies in just two days and 50,000 within the week. (...) Nearly 100,000 copies of the video had been sold by the end of October and the BBC had to abandon other projects in order to reissue it in time for the Christmas market; 20,000 copies of the BBC book, *The Making of Pride and Prejudice,* had been sold by the end of October and by December it was top of the non-fiction bestseller list." In: Sales, Roger. *Jane Austen and Representations of Regency England.* London and New York, Routledge, 1994, p. 228.

2. The abbreviations stand for: British Broadcast Corporation (BBC); Arts and Entertainment (A&E); Great Blue Hill (WGBH); Independent Television (ITV).

3. In their "Introduction" to *Pulping Fictions: Consuming Culture Across the Literature/Media Divide* (ed. by Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan, London and Chicago, Pluto Press, 1996) Cartmell and Whelehan denounce this tendency as what they call *cultural elitism* – a tendency that takes place "in both literary and media studies - to privilege the literary or the art-house movie over that which is consumed at a mass level" (2). As such, popular cinema is usually seen as a "threat to 'more worthy academic pursuits' (that is, the ultimate destruction of the book by the film)" (1).

Chapter II

Irony in Literary and Cultural Theory

"(...) language is involved in giving and taking both power and pleasure."

"Irony is an efficient mode: (...) like an impatiently rude interlocutor, irony questions a statement as it is made; a single sentence becomes in effect two, assertion cum contradiction."

(Brownstein, 57, 68)

1. Introduction: Images of Irony

Dealing with the reading and analysis of irony means a recognition both of the vastness of the subject and the number of approaches through which the topic may be studied. One may study irony from various perspectives, such as linguistics (pragmatics, speech-act theory, applied linguistics), philosophy, psychology, anthropology, literature and cultural studies, among others. The discussion of the topic may range from considerations regarding the semantic and pragmatic characterization of irony to actual experiments in reading texts so as to detect how readers attribute ironic meanings; another possibility is to discuss irony and the question of intention; irony and rhetorical strategy; irony as compared to other tropes, such as metaphor and metonymy, and so on. For the purposes of this research I have decided to organize the theoretical material on irony under the following headings, besides this (1) Introductory Section: (2) Ironic Imagination; and (3) Ironic Discourse, within which I intend to discuss: (3.1) definition of irony and types of irony; (3.2) the relationship between irony and context; (3.3) semantic and pragmatic characterization of irony; (3.4) the participants in ironic discourse, and (3.5) functions of irony. This

division, though artificial and initially arbitrary, serves the requirement of the texts I will analyze later on: Jane Austen's novel *Emma* and three of its filmic adaptations.

The texts that constitute my object of investigation – an early nineteenth-century novel (*Emma,* 1816) and three of its contemporary filmic and television versions (all released between 1995-1996) – already invite a reflection and a questioning of the peculiar features and functions of irony not only in terms of different artistic media, i.e., literature and film, but also in terms of what one may call – following Alan Wilde – different *ironic imaginations* or *sensibilities*, to be discussed below.

These texts (novel and films) already introduce another common aspect concerning the discussion of irony: its scope. Sometimes irony is perceived at the level of words, clauses and sentences. In dealing with literary texts, irony may be attributed, for example, to a poem's verse, or to a certain passage of a play/short story/novel; to the relation created between an epigraph and the text, and so on. Other times irony may be found *throughout* a whole text, clearly denoting an ironic style, tone and attitude on the ironist's part. Classic examples of this include Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal," in which irony explicitly serves a satiric purpose, being embodied mainly in the exaggerations of the proposal; and Jane Austen's novels, in which irony is generated in a much subtler way, being apparent mainly in the linguistic tone and address of Austen's narrators. I would mention as more recent examples Nabokov's *Lolita*, Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* and John Cheever's short story "The Swimmer." The fact is that, in dealing with irony's scope, I would like to align with Linda Hutcheon in *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony,* in her decision "to treat irony as a discursive strategy operating at the level of language (verbal) or form (musical, visual, textual)" (10). In borrowing

from Hutcheon I mean that at the same time that I will deal with specific passages in *Emma*, I will also relate them to the general ironic effect and pattern of the novel; in a later stage I will also examine the transposition of irony from page to screen, not only in each specific film but also in the ironic relations created by *Clueless* – the adaptation that displaces Austen from early nineteenth-century pre-Victorian England to contemporary Los Angeles and times.

Etymologically speaking, "irony" derives from the term "eironeia"; in Greek comedy "eiron" referred to the character acting as a "dissembler", who usually spoke in understatement and deliberately pretended to be less intelligent than he actually was. This strategy made the "eiron" triumph over the "alazon" – the self-deceiving and stupid braggart (Abrams, 91). Several considerations may arise from this "eiron/alazon" relationship. For one thing, this use of the term entails the meaning of "mocking pretense and deception", an aspect that made Plato consider the figure "a sort of vulgar expression and reproach" (Knox, 1961; qtd. in Barbe, 62). Yet, it is interesting to notice that this deliberate act of pretense also characterizes Socratic dialogues: Socrates' conversational strategy is exactly to pretend ignorance while ending up as exposing the ignorance of his interlocutor. Socratic irony, although inserted in a "dialogue-form" – a mode traditionally associated with the possibility of clarification and transparency (at least in its most elementary situation, as the interlocutors are *present*) – de-stabilizes the notion of language as such, working in favour of a constant refusal at closure or definitive conclusion, thus culminating in a never-ending conversation.

Irony and its use in dialogues can also be seen from a dialogic perspective. That is, if irony is conceived as a discursive strategy that contrasts two different, and sometimes, opposite, meanings – one on the surface, the so-called literal meaning, and

another underlying, more figurative, ironical meaning – irony may thus be seen as a *dialogized* mode of discourse. As Mary Ann Doane asserts, "ironic language (...) is a form of dialogism, since it superimposes two "voices": the voice associated with the "proper" meaning of the words and the voice which is aligned with their ironic meaning, opposing or contrasting with the first" (*The Dialogical Text*, 103). This dialogical nature of irony will be already perceptible in the analysis of irony in the novel *Emma* (to be presented in Chapter III), and will certainly be enhanced when we come to the analysis of the films, being further problematized by the ironical look of *Clueless* at Jane Austen's world.

The insertion of irony in a dialogical perspective contributes to unveil conflicting relationships characteristic of the ironical mode. Significantly, the strategy of pretense and deception has a particular purpose in Greek comedy: the "eiron" always *triumphs over* the "alazon". In other words, it is a relationship that entails notions of power and authority, in which one (the "eiron") feels superior to the other (the "alazon"). In this respect, Douglas Muecke's "Images of Irony" constitutes a relevant examination of "the ways in which irony, as a phenomenon, has presented itself to the imagination" (399). Muecke discusses the archetypal image of irony as related to archetypal images of knowledge and power (399). The symbolic representation of irony which results from his examination of texts (he quotes Thomas Mann, Balzac, Dante, Chaucer, among others) is one whose prevailing feature is "verticality, the axis of power (402)." As he says:

> (...) the archetypal ironist is God because he is omnipotent, omniscient, transcendent, absolute, infinite and free. The archetypal victim is man insofar as he may easily be seen as trapped and submerged in time and matter, blind, contingent, limited, unfree, the slave of heredity, environment, historical conditioning, instincts, feelings and conscience, while all the time unaware of his being in these prisons. (402)

Such an archetypal image manifests itself in several different relationships; some of the examples Muecke gives are the following: aristocrat and bourgeois; novelist and character; puppet-master and puppet; human and animal (or machine) (402). Other power relations, such as those between adult and child, teacher and student, producer and consumer, also come to mind. Moreover, one cannot help thinking how these relationships have changed throughout time. Muecke himself talks about "the loss of belief in a transcendent reality", a fact that has contributed to an "increasing relativization of values" (412), which in turn helps to problematize the ambivalence and relativity of irony in terms of such archetypal roles of ironist and victim. Based on these changes he elaborates on other potential relationships; for example, it is also the case that ironist and victim may be on the same level – originating what Muecke calls a "horizontal" image of irony, one in which the ironist (he mentions Mark Twain) has "a fellow-feeling for the victim" (410); or an image when the ironist may either see him/herself as a victim or actually be one (412). Muecke still mentions another image of irony – what he calls "labyrinthine" or "Protean" irony, in which there is "an *ad infinitum* of opposed mirrors, a labyrinth without exits, and an uncontrollable reproductivity" (411).

Muecke's archetypal image of irony reveals relations of knowledge and power and provides a relevant link to the notion of superiority and complicity shared by narrator and reader at the expense of characters' ignorance in literary texts. In other words, the effect of certain types of irony – and here I am thinking specifically of Jane Austen, in whose novels the narrator addresses the reader over the heads of the characters – depends on a mutual acknowledgement on narrator's and reader's part of where the true values and assumptions lie. This point will be further discussed (later in this chapter) in its relation to the relevance of context (Scholes's and Hutcheon's

principle) and discursive communities (Hutcheon's notion) for the attribution and comprehension of ironic discourse.

Interestingly, the images of irony presented and discussed by Muecke may be also related to parallel movements and trends in literary criticism: the "vertical" image of irony is one that values the author, the ironist as creator; it presupposes the existence of an "Author-God" as originator and controller of meanings; the "horizontal" image of irony already starts devaluing the ironist in favour of the victim; it also shows the possibility of a reversal of roles and functions: the ironist may be victimized. The third, suggestively called "labyrinthine" and "Protean" irony (from *Proteus*, the Greek sea-god who took various shapes), is an image of irony that materializes itself essentially in language, and one that resists final, totalizing interpretations. This "Protean" image of irony may be seen as representative of, or stemming from, a post-structuralist way of conceiving and characterizing the (literary) text. Muecke's "Protean" image of irony finds an equivalent in Alan Wilde's "suspensive" irony, characteristic of postmodernism, to be shown in the next section.

2. Ironic Imagination

In his *Horizons of Assent: Modernism, Post-Modernism and the Ironic Imagination* Alan Wilde elaborates on the question of irony in a diachronic way, considering how it has manifested itself in different literary periods. The title of his book already indicates that he privileges the analysis of modern and post-modern texts. The expression *Ironic Imagination* in Wilde's title significantly highlights the author's concern to go beyond the question of considering irony as a "series of techniques and strategies" so as "to treat irony as a mode of consciousness, an all-

encompassing vision of life, as a way of imagining the world" (3-4). This approach inevitably calls for a consideration of irony as it embodies itself in different literary, cultural, and "historical configurations" (2), an approach that applies substantially to this research, one of whose objectives is exactly to show the distinctions between the way(s) in which irony is generated in Austen's *Emma*, as well as for what purposes, and how it manifests itself in the late twentieth-century filmic adaptations, both the so-called 'straight' period-piece versions, and the loose adaptation *Clueless*.

Wilde's theoretical proposal (he is careful to remark that one should not employ his taxonomy in rigid and exclusive ways) encompasses three kinds of irony, that in turn correspond to three moments in literary history: 1. **Mediate Irony**, a form that characterizes a pre-modernist phase; 2. **Disjunctive Irony**, that characterizes a modernist phase; and 3. **Suspensive Irony**, that characterizes a post-modernist phase. According to Wilde, mediate irony, as the term says, has the purpose "to mediate a fundamentally satiric vision," and "it imagines a world lapsed from a recoverable (...) norm" (9). Irony in this sense functions as "a tool of satire or ridicule" (4), but the final aim is to recover the world from its erroneous paths into "an ideal of harmony, integration and coherence" (10). The ironist in this pre-modernist phase still believes "in the possibility of recuperation, of mending the fracture;" the moral, psychological, and interpersonal dream of wholeness still prevails and persists (10). Disjunctive irony can be associated with the fragmented world of the high modernists. In this case, "the ironist confronts a world that appears inherently disconnected and fragmented" (10); however, once such disconnections and fragments are recognized, there is still the belief in the aesthetic possibility to control them (10). As to suspensive irony, it is mainly associated with postmodernism, with "its yet more radical vision of multiplicity, randomness, contingency, and even absurdity" (10).

Suspensive irony expresses an acceptance of, and engagement with, the world in all its disorder, perplexities and uncertainties (10).

Wilde's diachronic consideration of irony provides a departing theoretical and critical tool for thinking about the distinctions and peculiarities of irony as embodied (and embedded) in Austen's *Emma* – a text that, following Wilde's typology, would be characterized by mediate irony – and irony as it actualizes itself in contemporary film adaptations, texts considered to be more popular, mass-culture productions belonging to a post-modern context. Clearly, Austen's novels and their adaptations do belong to distinct ironic imaginations or sensibilities.

An initial distinction has to do with the contexts in which these works are inserted. Jane Austen wrote her novels at a time when the English romantic poets (Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley) were also producing their romantic poetry. Though superficially her novels may be considered as "love-story" narratives, the romantic plots serve as pre-texts for an analysis of social and economic factors characteristic of the pre-Victorian world, such as the question of property, entailment, women's material poverty, and marriage. Austen's vision – though making use of romance – is essentially a realist one, since irony becomes a significant strategy to connect the private, romantic plots, to a more public and social realm. Furthermore, the ironies Austen creates and scatters throughout her narrative enable one to distance him/herself from the world apparently being portrayed so as to appreciate it in new nuances and meanings. For one thing, irony in Austen's novels constitutes a pervasive and subversive strategy, in the sense that it mocks the literary conventions of the times. For example, *Northanger Abbey* is a parody of the gothic romance and sentimental novel; *Sense and Sensibility* also satirizes uncontrolled emotional turmoil and overvaluation of feelings. Irony also makes the whole question of novel-writing

and reading more problematic, since it directly affects the role of the reader in making sense of the narrative. Because Austen's novels all possess this ironic vision of the world depicted, irony also helps to dilute the "all is well that ends well" notion characteristic of her endings and of the *genre* – comedy of manners – in which her novels may be inserted. That is, one should view Austen's "Cinderella" endings as an aesthetic requirement of the comedy tradition to which she belongs, and also as a "reward" for the process of maturation and self-knowledge that her protagonists, mainly women, usually undergo (though Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice* and Edmund in *Mansfield Park* would also fit this pattern, as they acquire self-knowledge as well). The possibility of recuperation, of mending the fracture, as well as the dream of wholeness – moral, psychological, interpersonal – that Wilde talks about in this pre-modernist ironic phase (10), at least as it concerns Austen's novels, must be also seen from the perspective of the aesthetic conventions within which she produced her works.

Wilde's notion of suspensive irony – characteristic of a post-modernist phase – will provide a starting theoretical point for an examination of the ways in which irony is generated in the films, particularly in the deliberately non-faithful adaptation, *Clueless*. An interesting aspect of this film stems exactly from its lack of compromise – unlike the other period-piece adaptations – in producing a faithful portrayal of Austen's world and times, a fact that clearly distinguishes it from the others. Rather than attempting to reproduce the "original," *Clueless* chooses to re-describe by dis-locating Austen to contemporary days and times, thus somehow making use of the ironic imagination that informs Austen, but expressing it in a different vocabulary.

This departure from Austen's *Emma* and from the "more faithful" versions of the novel illustrates a kind of ironic vocabulary that aligns with Richard Rorty's

conception of the ironist as discussed in his *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*. Rorty opposes the ironist to the metaphysician, and irony to common sense. The metaphysician is still attached to the belief in a final vocabulary, a vocabulary that may accurately represent reality, thus constituting a transparent medium (75). S/he believes "that we have the truth within us, that we have built-in criteria which enable us to recognize the right final vocabulary when we hear it" (76). The ironist, conversely, does not believe in such a final vocabulary, nor in the existence of notions like "'reality,' 'real essence,' 'objective point of view,' and 'the correspondence of language and reality'" (75). Rorty further characterizes the ironist as someone who is always doubtful and suspicious of existing vocabularies; one who is constantly re-describing his/her own vocabulary through the "playing off of figures against each other" (80).

Redescription is a key theoretical term/notion in Rorty's discussion of irony and the ironist. He claims that, for ironists, "nothing can serve as criticism of a final vocabulary save another such vocabulary; there is no answer to a redescription save a re-redescription" (80). For Rorty, "ironism (...) results from awareness of the power of redescription" (89). The task of the ironist – to redescribe – will always stem from his/her inability to "get along without the contrast between the final vocabulary she inherited and the one she is trying to create for herself" (88). Moreover, considering what Rorty himself puts – that "every description of anything is relative to the needs of some historically conditioned situation" (103) – the process of redescription will always entail a consciousness toward the contingency and historicity of language; which means that, differently from the metaphysicians' belief in timeless (or ahistorical) and immutable properties of objects, the ironist is characterized as one whose vocabulary is fragile, contingent, doubtful, always subject to change, and

attentive to the pluralities and precariousness of meaning. The following table provides a summary of Rorty's opposing characterization of the metaphysician and the ironist (73-82):

metaphysician	vs	ironist
↓		↓
old descriptions		redescription
common sense		doubts
real essence		historicity
permanent reality		no reality outside language
truth		historicity of language
final vocabulary		contingency
immutability		plurality
criteria for the right answers		metaphors of making, rather than finding

Significantly, Rorty's figure of the ironist – for whom there is no final vocabulary – and his view of irony as this constant search for a vocabulary attained through redescription, but that may only be provisional, links him both to Wilde's notion of suspensive irony and to postmodernism – characterized, in Wilde's terms, by uncertainties, perplexities, randomness, contingency, absurdity and a multiplicity of visions (10). In Leah Wain's words, "postmodernism suspends the idea that a text hides 'truth' or 'reality'" (360). But the author admits that

> Postmodernism does not prohibit the text from writing an answer to the question it asks. It answers questions with questions and defers any final answer, implying that all answers are relative and provisional. (362)

The consideration of irony and the ironist in a postmodern light will provide the necessary support for the reading of *Clueless*, a film that refers to Jane Austen by using a different vocabulary from that of the author; a film that constitutes, borrowing from Rorty's use of the term, a redescription of *Emma*. This assumption becomes

more complex when one considers that if to redescribe is already to ironize, what *Clueless* does is to redescribe an already highly ironic text (Austen's *Emma*), a fact that makes it doubly ironic. An interesting result is that, in *Clueless*, Austen constitutes an ironic quotation; in this film, the notion of celebration of the source text – somehow intrinsic to costume drama – gives way instead to mockery and parody.

3. Ironic Discourse

3.1 Definition and Types of Irony

It is not an exaggeration to state that every discussion on irony defines it as a figure that contrasts, or opposes two (sometimes, more) meanings. Norman Knox's "Irony," in the *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, provides the following definition of irony:

> Irony may be defined as the conflict of two meanings which has a dramatic structure peculiar to itself: initially, one meaning, the *appearance*, presents itself as the obvious truth, but when the context of this meaning unfolds, in depth or in time, it surprisingly discloses a conflicting meaning, the *reality*, measured against which the first meaning now seems false or limited and, in its self-assurance, blind to its own situation. (627)

Knox goes on to explain that "the degree of conflict between appearance and reality ranges from the slightest of differences to diametrical opposites" (627). At least two aspects are worth emphasizing in Knox's definition: the consideration of irony in terms of both opposition and difference; and the function of context to make the conflicting, ironic meaning disclose itself. Other definitions of irony will bring me back to the examination of these factors.

In "A Semiotic Approach to Irony in Drama and Fiction" Robert Scholes also characterizes irony as a contrast between appearance and reality. He says that "the contrast between what is said and what is done is the basis of ironic structure, since words are allied with appearances and deeds with reality" (76). Therefore, irony plays with the incongruity between surfaces and realities, the differences between words and deeds. This incongruity may be expressed through a juxtaposition of narrator's words (saying one thing) and characters' actions (contradicting what the narrator says); it may also be reflected by means of the differences between a character's words and her/his actions, that is, between what s/he says and her/his actual intentions; it may be further actualized through discrepancies among different voices, such as those of the implied author, the narrator, the characters, and what the reader believes to be the "true" voice, or at least, the most reliable voice. In Austen's fiction, as for instance in a novel like *Emma*, irony may be found in connection with other literary devices, such as (1) point of view: most of the narrative is filtered through Emma, but as she constitutes a 'fallible filter,'[1] the reader is deceived, with/like her, through a great part of the narrative; (2) plot: again, because Emma is a 'fallible filter,' the text of *Emma* is structurally ironic, that is, alternative interpretations are called for retrospectively; (3) characterization, or, to use Booth's term, in *A Rhetoric of Irony*, "ironic portraits:"[2] in *Emma* Mrs. Elton would certainly exemplify a character who is ironically portrayed. This is one way of dealing with irony – as a verbal, structural, and linguistic device.

Actually, these considerations engender two of the most common types of irony: verbal irony and situational irony. In *Ways of Reading* Montgomery et alii explain verbal irony as textual instances in which "there appears to be something odd or wrong with the words and what they literally mean; so we must interpret the text by

finding another meaning for it" (138). The authors further subdivide situational irony into dramatic and structural. They say that situational irony is "intended by an author but the characters are unaware of them" (139), as, for instance, when "the audience knows something significantly different from what the characters believe" (139). Dramatic irony is an action-based type of irony – based on *narrative action* – rather than *narrative address*, an aspect that is characteristic of verbal irony. As such, the comprehension of verbal irony and the attribution of its ironic meaning depend on the insertion of the figure in a wider notion of discourse, in which contextual aspects (both in terms of social and cultural values, as well as in terms of the participants of the ironic discourse) are accounted for. Verbal irony is the kind that most clearly enacts what Linda Hutcheon, in *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony*, names as irony's *relational* strategy: it directly *addresses* the reader, and in so doing, requires his/her complicity for connecting apparent, surface meaning, with the unsaid, thus resulting in the so-called ironic meaning.

In structural irony, still according to Montgomery et alii,

> the text as a whole, or a large part of the text, is unreliable if taken literally. Instead, an alternative interpretation, which is not made explicit (but is implied), is true. Often a text is structurally ironic because it is told by an unreliable narrator (...). (139)

Verbal, dramatic, and structural irony are all present in Jane Austen's *Emma*, as the next chapter will show. Parts of the novel, for example, are structurally ironic not because the narrator is unreliable, but because Emma – through whom most of the significant events in the narrative are filtered – misreads what is going on, thus failing to perceive and interpret the world surrounding her, and in turn inducing the reader to deceit as well.

The construction, and therefore, the perception of (mainly) verbal irony also depend on stylistic elements, such as punctuation, juxtaposition (of incongruous elements), cataloguing, exaggeration, shifts in stylistic registers. In *Flaubert: The Uses of Uncertainty*, Jonathan Culler refers to irony as "the procedures, the moves by which we distance ourselves from the language of the text and try to see it in a new light across that distance" (193). These procedures of detachment are usually aroused by the style employed in the text, and they constitute self-conscious instances in which the construction and artificiality of the text are brought to the foreground. Culler says that in such moments it is as if the text said, "I am literature, I am organizing the world for you, transmuting it into fiction, representing it" (201). Culler is more precise in this type of self-conscious irony, when he exemplifies "texts [that] throw up sentences which the reader finds it difficult to process and recuperate, and the assumption that this is the result of deliberate artistry opens a space of potential irony" (202). An interesting consequence of such self-conscious use of language is that very often it is not enough to recognize the text as artifact and construction in order to interpret the irony. As the analysis of *Emma* in chapter III will reveal, a common difficulty concerning the reading of irony consists of its "jelly-fish" nature, its refusal to be pinned down, its slipperiness, its postponing of interpretative closure.

3.2 The Relationship between Irony and Context

Besides the identification of the type of irony the reader detects in a certain text, several other factors are at stake in the attribution and interpretation of irony. In *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* Linda Hutcheon proposes a reading of irony that combines a formalist analysis with politics. She explains that "the 'scene'

of irony involves relations of power based in relations of communication" (2). In this way, dealing with ironic discourse inevitably means dealing with issues concerning "inclusion and exclusion, intervention and evasion" (2). In other words, the use of irony is intimately connected with relations of authority and power, in which questions of speech and silence are involved. As she explains:

> Because irony (...) happens in something called "discourse", its semantic and syntactic dimensions cannot be considered separately from the social, historical and cultural aspects of its contexts of deployment and attribution. Issues of authority and power are encoded in that notion of "discourse" today in much the same way that, in earlier times, they were encoded in the word "rhetoric." (17)

At least two aspects are worth remarking in Hutcheon's words: the expression *ironic discourse* already and inevitably invites a discussion of the relation between irony and context, the situation of interpreting, the background of assumptions, the reading experience and knowledge the reader brings to the text. The relevant notion of context is shared by Norman Knox (cf. his definition at the beginning of this section) and by Robert Scholes in "A Semiotic Approach to Irony in Drama and Fiction," in which he claims that, "of all figures [irony] is the one that must always take us out of the text and into codes, contexts and situations" (76-7). Scholes also argues that, unlike metaphor and metonymy, which are "expressed and understood primarily at the semantic level of discourse, irony depends to an extraordinary degree on the pragmatics of situation" (76). For irony is a strategy that *does* things through speech, as the title of Hutcheon's book – Irony's *Edge* – illustrates (Hutcheon must mean 'edge' as the sharp cutting part of a blade/knife). A relevant consequence of this is the fact that "in speech, irony will often be signaled by the non-verbal parts of utterance (intonation or gesture), while metaphor and metonymy are virtually independent of these features" (Scholes, 76). Hutcheon refers to these non-verbal features as

paralinguistic markers. And she corroborates Scholes's view by saying that "verbal irony is the only rhetorical figure that often has accompanying paralinguistic markers that function meta-ironically to signal reflexively that irony is either being intended or can be interpreted as present" (155). She classifies these markers as **gestural** (a smirk, a wink, a raised eyebrow); **phonic** (throat clearing, change of voice register, alterations of speed, the stressing of certain words, intonation, tone of voice); **graphic** (punctuation signs and typographical markers). Other ironic signals can be repetition, echoic mention and mimicry (155, 158). It is relevant to stress, however, following Hutcheon, that such markers are not indicators of irony in themselves, since they also constitute pragmatic entities – i.e., as Hutcheon claims, "whatever they are, to be called ironic markers, an interpreter has to have decided that they have worked in context to provoke an ironic interpretation" (154).

This pragmatic principle of irony applies substantially to the analysis of films, not only due to their dramatic property, but also for their potentiality to materialize aspects of body communication and voice, such as intonation, gestures, looks, whispers, silences. Such aspects are relevant to the extent that they affect other participants of the discourse situation (target and interpreter), i.e., they occur as ways of either relating to, or evading from, others.

Actually, these linguistic-pragmatic markers are part of the general notion of context, which is a decisive determinant not only for the attribution and comprehension of irony, but also for the understanding of meaning in all communication. In ironic discourse, however, contextual aspects become perhaps more relevant because they help to articulate what is textually, verbally said with what is simply implied or assumed – the unsaid. Hutcheon provides three elements that must be considered within the general notion of context: 1. The **circumstantial**:

related to the circumstances and situation of uttering and interpreting; it constitutes the "material ambience" or "communicative context" of the text in question. As such, it involves not only the participants (who/whom), but when, how, why and where, as related to the discourse situation (143). 2. The **textual**: in this case, "the actual formal or *textual* context of the work as a whole provides the frame for attributing irony" (144). 3. The **intertextual**: consists of all the other relevant texts and utterances that affect, and add to, the interpretation of a certain text (144). These contextual determinants – circumstantial, textual and intertextual – which are already significant for the analysis of irony in Austen's *Emma*, will be broadened when I come to the analysis of the adaptations; for one thing, adaptations constitute texts that are inevitably traversed by other discourses, such as the intersection between 'original' source and screenplay, that of soundtrack, those related to the star system, and so on.

Furthermore, Hutcheon's quote above can also clarify the association she foregrounds between discourse and rhetoric, the latter being also concerned with the use of language as a form of power and performance – after all, rhetoric also aimed at persuading, pleading, convincing, inciting. This notion is discussed by Terry Eagleton in his *Literary Theory* as well:

> [Rhetoric] saw speaking and writing not merely as textual objects, to be aesthetically contemplated or endlessly deconstructed, but as forms of *activity* inseparable from the wider social relations between writers and readers, orators and audiences, and as largely unintelligible outside the social purposes and conditions in which they were embedded. (179)

Such is an interesting and significant concept because it does not matter in which framework one situates irony – rhetoric, pragmatics, discourse; the discussion will inevitably address the relation between irony and context, the situation of interpreting, the background of assumptions, experience and knowledge we bring to

the text. That is why Hutcheon considers the semantics of irony in association with what she calls "discursive communities." She emphasizes that a discussion of the semantic properties of irony inevitably involves not only the issue concerning its plural meaning, but also "the conditioning role of context and the attitudes and expectations of both ironist and interpreter" (57). Such a perspective supports the fact that irony is a social act, that "happens" in a social and communicative context; as Hutcheon remarks, irony "'happens' in discourse, in usage, in the dynamic space of the interaction of text, context and interpreter (...)". (58) This premise will be a basic principle in the analysis of the four "*Emmas,*" which constitute the object of the present study.

3.3 Semantic and Pragmatic Characterization of Irony

Hutcheon further develops the association between irony and context both in her discussion of the semantic features of irony and in her analysis of the role of "discursive communities" to make irony happen. Starting with a consideration of irony as a communicative *process* (the italics is Hutcheon's), the author elaborates on the aspect that "ironic meaning possesses three major semantic characteristics: it is (1) relational; (2) inclusive; and (3) differential. She explains the first feature thus:

> Irony is a relational strategy in the sense that it operates not only between meanings (said, unsaid) but between people (ironists, interpreters, targets). Ironic meaning comes into being as the consequence of a relationship, a dynamic, performative bringing together of different meaning-makers, but also of different meanings, first, in order to create something new, and (...) to endow it with the critical edge of judgment. (58)

That reveals the impossibility of discussing the semantic features of irony dissociated from its pragmatic and communicative function. One aspect inevitably entails the other: not only are different, plural meanings involved in the reading of irony; different meaning-makers – and hence, different contexts of attribution – are also called into question.

Hutcheon's semantic characterization of irony as a 'relational' strategy clearly has theoretical affiliations with notions of Bakhtinian dialogism. And that comes as no surprise, since Hutcheon herself admits, in the "Introduction" to her *Irony's Edge*, that her methodology is supplemented by a conjunction of theoretical perspectives, among which, social semiotics, speech-act theory, enunciation theory and Bakhtinian dialogism (4). Indeed, dialogism helps to support Hutcheon's pragmatic view of irony if one considers that, in "The Problem of the Text in Linguistics, Philology and the Human Sciences," Bakhtin already claims that "the event of the life of the text (...) always develops on the boundary between two consciousnesses, two subjects" (106). And, as widely known, the self, or the subject for Bakhtin, is always dialogic, in the sense that it always comes into being as a relation – a relation with otherness, a relation that is always based on sharedness and very often on conflict. As such, the reading of a text, for Bakhtin, cannot happen in isolation from its surrounding, framing and traversing contexts – social, historical and cultural. Bakhtin says that

> The utterance as a whole is shaped as such by extralinguistic (dialogic) aspects, and it is also related to other utterances. These extralinguistic (dialogic) aspects also pervade the utterance from within. (109)

If Bakhtin already conceives the utterance in general in its social (because dialogic) aspect, one may conclude that the ironic utterance constitutes a highly loaded structure in terms of this demand for shared values and presuppositions between

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reader/ironist and target, between texts and contexts, and between apparent (said) meaning and ironic (unsaid, which is eventually said) meaning. That is why Hutcheon's 'relational' characterization of irony may be viewed as deeply influenced by Bakhtin's theoretical reflections on language and on the subject as social and dialogical – an aspect that has been referred to by other theoreticians as Bakhtinian dialogism.

Interestingly, this 'relational strategy' is particularly appropriate for a study of adaptations, since it can be operative at least on two levels: first, in each specific text – literary and filmic – and then in their comparison and relation with one another. In so doing, it is possible to analyze and compare the different effects and meanings of ironic discourse, as motivated by the different "ironists, interpreters, targets" characteristic of, and influenced by, each medium – literature, TV and cinema. For example, in dealing with Austen adaptations one immediately notices striking differences between a BBC TV adaptation of the 70s, for instance – which might have had a more restricted audience in mind – and an adaptation which aims at reaching the international public at large. Different publics, belonging to different cultural and historical contexts, will certainly attribute different interpretations to the films in question. And this may already be incited by the intents inscribed in the film, by either screenwriter or director. To be more specific, Emma Thompson's screenwriting of *Sense and Sensibility* (Columbia, 1996) may serve as an illustration: the emphasis put on the relationship between the two women, the two sisters Elinor and Marianne, reveals that some of the traps in which women found themselves in the 19th century somehow still sound up-to-date in the 20th century. As such, one may conclude that Emma Thompson was not only interested in keeping relevant nuances of the Austen

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atmosphere, but she also wanted to provide a critical commentary representative of her time, that is, our time, on the antecedent text.[3]

The next semantic feature of irony in Hutcheon's terminology is "inclusivity." She says that "the [inclusive aspect of ironic meaning] makes possible a rethinking of the standard semantic notion of irony as a simple antiphrasis which can be understood by a straightforward meaning substitution" (58). In this respect, Hutcheon's notion of "inclusivity" directly opposes Scholes's notion of "negation" and Booth's notion of "rejection" of literal/surface meaning, as associated with the process of reconstruction of irony (*A Rhetoric of Irony*, 10). In his "Semiotic Approach to Irony in Drama and Fiction", Scholes relates the concept of irony to negation – a negation, as he says, "that generates a new meaning." For Scholes, "the ironic process involves a creative activity or recoding beyond the initial negation" (73-4). One may initially notice the echoes between his discussion and Booth's. Scholes's association of irony to "negation" somehow echoes Booth's notion of "rejection" or "subtraction." Moreover, both refer to the ironic process as involving a creative activity of "recoding" (Scholes's term) and "reconstruction" (Booth's) that must replace the initial repudiation. Differently from both, however, Hutcheon argues for a "both/and" approach, since, as she explains, "ironic meaning is *simultaneously* double (or multiple) (...); *both* the said *and* the unsaid together make up that third meaning, and *this* is what should more accurately be called the ironic meaning" (60). Therefore, for Hutcheon, ironic meaning is obtained not through a process of "subtraction", or "substitution" of one meaning (the surface meaning) by the other (ironic meaning), but through a process of "addition" or, as she calls, "inclusivity."

The last feature of ironic meaning, for Hutcheon, is its "differential" nature. This aspect supports her elaboration of the similarities and differences between irony

and the other tropes, like metaphor, for instance. "Differential" should be understood in the sense that:

> Ironic meaning forms when two or more different concepts are brought together: ducks and rabbits. The unsaid is other than, different from, the said. (...) Put in structuralist terms, the ironic sign would thus be made up of one signifier but two different, but not necessarily opposite, signifieds. (64)

Hutcheon contrasts this "differential" aspect of irony to "metaphor's defining relation of similarity"(64). Although she agrees that both irony and metaphor are "semantically plural, bringing together more than one meaning to create a composite, different, interdependent one" (64), she emphasizes that "the basic semantic identity of irony is mostly in terms of difference and that of metaphor is mainly in terms of similarity" (65). At this point, Hutcheon's theory also sets in opposition to Booth's, who distinguishes irony from metaphor by saying that "in reading metaphors, the process does not involve repudiation or reversal of the literal meaning [as in the case of ironies], but an exploration or extension of it" (22-3). As already shown, Hutcheon sees, as contrary to Booth, both metaphor and irony as additive.

Hutcheon is not alone in this recognition that irony does not occur necessarily through *opposition* but through *difference* as well. This ironic feature had been pointed out by other theoreticians and critics before her. In much earlier times, Cicero held that some kinds of irony do not say "the exact reverse of what you mean" but only something "different" (qtd in Knox, 628). Myers Roy, in "The Function of Irony in Discourse," also criticizes this traditional notion of irony as meaning only opposition; to her, irony can also be characterized as "saying something other than what one means" (411).

Underlying Hutcheon's discussion of the semantics of irony, mainly as it refers to irony's relational feature, is the relationship between irony and context, already recognized by Norman Knox, emphasized by Scholes (as shown above), and further developed by Hutcheon in her study. As already sketched in the introduction to this section, Hutcheon considers irony as a speech act that actualizes itself in a social and communicative context, as the result of the interaction of text, context and interpreter. As the term "relational" already denotes, irony is a discursive strategy that happens through a relationship not only between said and unsaid meanings but also among different participants and "texts," i.e., irony happens through a "culturally shaped process" (89), in the sense that it is conditioned by "the particularities of time and place, of immediate social situation and general culture" (91). Accordingly, Hutcheon dedicates a whole chapter in her book to the role played by "discursive communities". This is how she defines the expression:

> (...) I want to define these "discursive communities" in general by the complex configuration of shared knowledge, beliefs, values, and communicative strategies. (91)

Hutcheon believes that it is not irony that creates the relationship between ironist and interpreter, but instead, "it is the community that comes first and that, in fact, *enables* the irony to happen" (89). This is a relevant "corrective" issue in previous theories about irony that attribute the comprehension (or failure) of ironic discourse to matters of interpreter competence (97). Booth, for instance, in *A Rhetoric of Irony*, talks about "the building of amiable communities" – between ironist and readers – resulting from the process of reading ironies, a process characterized by the emotion of "joining, of finding and communing with kindred spirits:"

> The author I infer behind the false words is my kind of man, because he enjoys playing with irony, because he assumes *my* capacity for dealing with it, and – most important – because he grants me a kind of wisdom; he assumes that he does not have to spell out the shared and secret truths on which my reconstruction is to be built. (28)

What if the reader does not join the irony? Would that mean a lack of "capacity" and "wisdom?" According to Hutcheon, the answer is "no." That may happen because, among other things, the reader does not share the same community – with its connotations of common beliefs, values – as that of the ironist. For Hutcheon, it is not irony that links ironist and reader in a "communal" way, but it is the community that precedes, thus somehow determining, the process of ironic comprehension; as Hutcheon concludes: "irony (...) might come into being because the communal values and beliefs already exist" (95).

By emphasizing the role of discursive communities in the attribution and eventual interpretation of irony, Hutcheon wants "to shift the terms of the discussion away from notions of elitism toward an acceptance of the fact that *everyone* has different knowledges and belongs to (many) different discursive communities" (97). Readers have different linguistic competence, and different social and cultural experiences. Therefore, failure in grasping the meaning of irony is intimately connected to matters of shared cultural knowledge – which, as Hutcheon herself illustrates through her analysis of ironic texts, is something that can be learned.

As a concluding remark, one may say that although Hutcheon draws from Booth's and Scholes's theories in order to elaborate her own, she goes beyond them in her assumptions and final conclusions. Such a difference is already perceptible through the titles of their works. Whereas Booth himself characterizes his *Rhetoric of Irony* as structuralist[4] and Scholes inserts his *Semiotics and Interpretation* – as the title already illustrates – in a semiotic tradition, Hutcheon is interested in

problematizing the social and political dimension of irony. Her theoretical framework ranges from semantic/pragmatic analyses of irony to speech act and enunciation theories, encompassing social semiotics and Bakhtinian dialogism, so as to culminate in a theory that accounts not only for formal features but also for ideological, cultural and political implications.

3.4 Participants in Ironic Discourse

Texts would have no function if they were not read. It is in the process of reading that texts actualize themselves, that they are in fact written, or re-written. In dealing with ironic texts this notion becomes even more complex, because for irony to happen it depends, as already discussed, on a whole pragmatics of situation and shared background and cultural knowledge on the reader's/viewer's part. That is, the interpretation of irony involves not only plural meanings but dynamic relations among text, context, ironist, interpreter, target, and the circumstances of the discursive situation (11). In Hutcheon's characterization of irony as a "relational" strategy, one way of understanding "relational" is exactly in this sense: irony as stemming from the relationship of different meaning-makers. However, though much theoretical material on irony acknowledges (sometimes even mentioning) the existence of different participants in the attribution and interpretation of ironic discourse, no theorists analysed so far address the question of irony with a clear definition of the roles and functions of the participants involved in the process.

In addition, the way the participants are referred to and defined by critics also presents variations and differences. Barbe, for instance, in *Irony in Context*, names the three participants in an ironic instance as follows: (1) the speaker or ironist, (2) the

hearer or victim, and (3) an audience or evaluator (16). She defines the victims as "participants who do not understand" the irony, and "those who are implicitly attacked" (17). Judging from her terminology (speaker/hearer) one can assume that Barbe is considering irony in oral forms of discourse. The fact that she refers to the audience as "evaluator" already reveals the subjective dimension of irony, i.e., it conveys attitudes and feelings, thus requiring an evaluation and a judgment (11). Barbe also mentions the dynamic roles of these participants and the fact that they can exchange places, depending on their relationship and power-status. The author points out that it is not necessary to have the three participants for irony to occur. She considers as obligatory, however, the presence of the ironist, and either one of the other participants – victim or audience (80). In my view, Barbe contradicts herself. In acknowledging that the audience may be absent, how can she still support her claim that "irony is not a property of text," but a matter of interpretation (15)? Perhaps Barbe views the roles of victim and audience as overlapping. In this case the victim would have the function to interpret. But this is not clear in her discussion.

In "Irony," Knox defines the participants as follows:

> Irony usually has an *author*, who by analogy is a superhuman power in some fields of observation; it always has an *audience*, even if it is only the author amusing himself; and a *victim*, who is deceived by appearance and enlightened by reality, although an author may turn himself into a pseudovictim. (627)

Again, we can notice the roles of participants not as static, but as exchanging positions, sometimes occupying more than one at a time. The reference to the ironist as an author (Jonathan Swift, Jane Austen) adds to the complexity of the topic, for several reasons, and needs to be considered from a contemporary narratological perspective: 1. In literature, besides the author[5], we also have the 'implied author' and

the narrator. In *Coming to Terms*, Chatman distinguishes implied author from narrator by saying that the former *invents*, whereas the latter *utters*, "articulates the words assigned to him by the implied author" (84). The implied author, to Chatman, is the agency that guides the reader to detect not only what the text says, but what it means; it constitutes "the text itself, in its inventional aspect" (86). 2. In many literary texts the author is anonymous; the reader has no access to the author but only to the 'implied' author and the narrating voice (the narrator) as inscribed in the text. Moreover, from anonymity we move to plurality, as it is the case with other texts, such as films, which do not have only one author, but a great number of professionals responsible for the final artistic product. 3. The existence of the implied author is mainly significant in ironic narrative fiction, as it shows the discrepancy between the implied author's stance and that of the narrator. Besides, Knox's definition of the participants in ironic instances also requires awareness concerning the "vertical image" he attributes to the ironist/author, whom he defines as a "superhuman power." This notion of 'author' as a 'super-human power' aligns with the traditional concept of an "Author-God" as originator and controler of meanings. In post-modern texts this 'superhuman power' is substituted by contingency, uncertainty, frailty, precariousness, disintegration, de-centering. As Hutcheon, in *The Politics of Postmodernism*, says, "postmodernism works both to underline and undermine the notion of the coherent, self-sufficient subject as the source of meaning or action" (108-9).

In *Irony's Edge* Hutcheon classifies the participants as follows: an intending ironist; his/her intended audiences, also referred to as targets and victims (notice that in Knox's classification above 'audience' stands for 'interpreter,' being thus different from 'victim'); and the interpreters. She considers the ironist and interpreter as the

most important participants in ironic discourse (10-11), an aspect already implied in her notion of the 'relational' property of irony, and emphasized in her discussion of 'discursive communities.' This complicity between ironist and reader/viewer gives rise to irony's tone of superiority in relation to the world of characters, for the ironist and interpreter know where the true values lie which the characters are stumbling to find.

Hutcheon defines the ironist as "the one who intends to set up an ironic relation between the said and the unsaid, but may not always succeed in communicating that intention (or relation)" (11). As already seen, the utterance and its context play a fundamental and decisive role in the process of ironic interpretation. If the circumstances of the discursive situation are either unknown or ignored by the reader/viewer, the complicity between ironist and reader/viewer will not happen; therefore, the irony will simply pass as unperceived. Hutcheon explains that "the interpreter may – or may not – be the intended addressee of the ironist's utterance, but s/he (by definition) is the one who attributes irony and then interprets it (...)" (11). The other participant invoked is the target or victim. As Hutcheon says, the connotations of these two terms already imply that irony has an edge and that it is often a cutting one (15).

3.5 Functions of Irony

Significantly, it is this edge that makes irony different from other discursive strategies: For Hutcheon, "irony *explicitly* sets up (and exists within) a relationship between ironist and audiences (...) that is political in nature (...)"(17). Not only political, but of shared responsibility and complicity as well. Such a political and

complicitous relationship between the user of irony and the audience has been discussed by Lori Chamberlain in an article dealing with the question of why irony does not usually make part of course/teaching plans:

> Even while provoking laughter, irony invokes notions of hierarchy and subordination, judgment and perhaps even moral superiority. It is subversive. (98)

Several critics are aware of the range of functions irony possesses and the various effects resulting from its use. As the quotation above shows, such functions and effects may range from provoking amusement and laughter to entailing social relationships where authority, power and subordination are at stake. In *The Compass of Irony*, Muecke (echoing the subversive aspect above) says that "irony turn[s] the world or oneself inside out" (qtd. in Gibbs, 360). In *The Poetics of Mind*, Raymond Gibbs calls attention to the presence of irony in our daily life, to how we actually conceptualize many of our everyday experiences in terms of irony (360). He says that "irony may be our most powerful weapon in everyday speech: a device for concealing our true intentions, for avoiding responsibility for what we say (...) (360). In this sense, as Barbe points out, one may use irony "to be aggressive in a seemingly unaggressive way (...) to keep conflict at bay" (89).

R. Chambers, in "Irony and the Canon," provides another interesting purpose irony serves: it may constitute a "possible model for oppositionality whenever one is implicated in a system that one finds oppressive" (qtd in Hutcheon, 1995, 16). Again, this reveals the multiplicity, and even apparent contradiction, involved in the functions of irony. On the one hand, irony is said to create hierarchies, to mock, to ridicule. On the other hand, because of its potentiality to destabilize, irony may be

seen, as Hutcheon claims, "as a powerful tool or even weapon in the fight against a dominant authority – which irony is said to work to destroy" (27).

Actually, much of the vocabulary used to talk about irony – significantly referred to, many times, as a *weapon* – already reflects, or creates, a context of conflict and war. Knox (above) refers to the ironist as being a *superhuman power* – a power which, apparently, is to be used at the expense of *victims* or *targets*. Hutcheon's choice of *Edge* implies that at the same time that irony can amuse, it can also "cut" and "hurt." In naming her book like this she wants to emphasize this distinctive feature irony possesses – its "pointed edge" (39). The vast range of occurrences of ironic discourse in the selected corpus will allow for an analysis of the different participants involved in the ironic process: who ironizes whom; who hurts whom; who subverts (if any) what.

For the sake of recapitulation, the several theoretical trends on irony discussed in this chapter aim at responding to the different peculiarities of the texts to be analyzed in the following chapters. Generally speaking, irony's relational strategy (as proposed by Hutcheon) will underlie not only the reading of irony in Austen's novel but in the filmic adaptations as well. As such, and more specifically, some basic principles will permeate the analysis: the unveiling of the competing of said and unsaid meanings; the dialogization of voices (the voice that speaks the apparent meaning and the voice that ironizes it); and the identification of textual and contextual markers and frames in which irony is disclosed, including the different meaning-makers – ironist, target, interpreter – responsible for the attribution and comprehension of irony, since these markers are inscribed in different ways in the novel and in the films.

The discussion of ironic imagination and ironic discourse serves to bridge the gap between two different ironic sensibilities: Austen's sensibility, and the one present in the films, particularly in Heckerling's *Clueless*. Both Wilde's notion of suspensive irony and Rorty's concept of redescription in opposition to the belief in a final vocabulary constitute relevant principles that help situate the ironic discourse of *Clueless* within a postmodern context.

Yet, I would like to emphasize that rather than using the theoretical discussion as a straitjacket for the analysis of irony in both the novel and the films, the movement is somehow made backward: it is the textual passages themselves (both verbal and audio-visual) that will dictate and guide which aspects of the theory should be explored and highlighted. This means that certain aspects of the theory will apply to certain ironic examples, but not to others, and vice-versa. Or better, that different aspects of irony will be given emphasis depending on the 'requirements' of the text analysed. For instance, some examples will call for an examination of irony in its stylistic features, others will demand a consideration of the power relations of the participants involved in the discourse situation, whereas still others will require attention to the functions irony possesses, and so on. In general terms, however, most of the topics discussed in the theoretical section are relevant, to a lesser or greater extent, for the analysis undertaken later on.

Based on that, what follows in the next chapter is a reading of irony in *Emma* that is intended as a contribution to previous critical discussions of the novel. I have chosen to introduce the section with general criticism on Austen and her use of details; this is followed by a review of specific criticism on the question of irony in *Emma*. I expect these introductory sections to set the context for the reading of irony in Austen's novel, the actual and final objective of the chapter.

Notes

1. Emma is a "fallible filter," in Chatman's terminology, for her "perceptions and conceptions of the story events (...) seem at odds with what the narrator is telling or showing." In: Chatman, Seymour. *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993. p.149.

2. See the section "Ironic Portraits" in Booth, W. C. *A Rhetoric of Irony.* Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1974, pp. 137-174.

3. See Thompson, Emma. *Razão e Sensibilidade: Roteiro e Diário.* Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 1996.

4. See, in this respect, Booth's own words provided in a footnote on pp. 35-6 of *A Rhetoric of Irony*: "(...) Because of the vogue, I want to insist that according to at least three separate definitions of the term this book is a work of structuralism."

5. See Roland Barthes' "The Death of the Author" in: *Image – Music – Text.* (Translated by Stephen Heath). New York: Hill and Wang, 1977. And Michel Foucault's "What is an Author?" In: Adams, Hazard & Searle, Leroy.(eds.) *Critical Theory Since 1965.* Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1986.

Chapter III

Irony in Jane Austen's *Emma*

1. Reading (in) Detail: Jane Austen's "little bit of Ivory"

> "Miniature is an exercise that has metaphysical freshness; it allows us to be world conscious at slight risk."
>
> (Bachelard, 161).

A general criticism directed at Jane Austen's novels, mainly in the 19th century, has to do with what some critics consider the "narrowness of experience" portrayed in her fiction. Although several of these opinions have already been quoted and criticized in, for instance, Donald Greene's "The Myth of Limitation" and in Gubar and Gilbert's "Shut Up in Prose: Gender and Genre in Austen's Juvenilia," I still want to refer to some of these views so as to connect them to Austen's use of details in her novels. A review of this criticism will set the ground for the investigation of Austen's use of details in connection with her ironical tone and mode of saying things. The assumption is that through the use of details on the one hand, and the use of irony on the other, Austen connects the private world of the house with that of a public domain; details as inscribed (and viewed) ironically link the particular with the general.

Edward Fitzgerald, for instance, once said of Jane Austen: "She is capital as far as she goes: but she never goes out of the Parlour" (qtd. in Gilbert and Gubar, 109). Elizabeth Barrett Browning has said something similar: "The novels are perfect as far as they go - that's certain. Only they don't go far, I think" (qtd. in Gilbert and Gubar, 109). Emerson is another writer who criticized Austen on the basis of what he viewed as her "narrowness:"

> [her fiction] is vulgar in tone, sterile in artistic invention, imprisoned in the wretched conventions of English society, without genius, wit or knowledge of the world. Never was life so pinched and narrow. The one problem in the mind of the writer in both the stories I have read, *Persuasion*, and *Pride and Prejudice*, is marriagebleness. All that interests in any character is still this one, Has he (or she) the money to marry with, and conditions conforming? (qtd. in Gilbert and Gubar, 109).

It is interesting to notice that the first two comments have to do specifically with space; both Fitzgerald's and Browning's criticism of Austen take into account what they see as her limited space, and the consequent limited experience related to such a space – expressed by the latter in the sentence "[the novels] don't go far" and specified by the former as "the Parlour" – a term that, in Austen's time, as the dictionary tells us, meant "a room in a private house used by the family for meeting guests, reading and other amusements."[1] The "Parlour," then, is metonymic of Austen's concern with the domestic world of the house, not only the one related to its amusements, such as dancing, playing games, talking, meeting relatives and friends (as the dictionary meaning wants us to see); but also to her concern with the relations among the people that inhabit the house, conflicting relations involving issues of power and authority, particularly as these affect women.

Emerson's comment not only corroborates Fitzgerald's and Browning's – cf. "never was life so pinched and narrow" – but clearly develops an opposition usually made between "Parlour/house/domesticity" (a private sphere, usually considered feminine) and "the world" (a public one, generally considered masculine). Though dealing with questions that affect society at large – i.e., money, marriagebleness – Austen's narratives lack, in Emerson's opinion, "knowledge of the world." But how should one understand this "world?" Which "world" is he talking about? Actually, the problem is not in identifying the world of the "Parlour" as "pinched and narrow,"

since in Austen, it is exactly this narrowness which is revealingly significant to express the constraints of physical space and lack of material conditions that stifle women; the problem lies in attributing value to this supposed narrowness. On the one hand there is "the world" – whatever that may be – with its variety, and its generalities; on the other, there are the narrow spaces of the house, that though expressing a "life," cannot be taken as representative of the world at large.

Furthermore, in saying that "[her fiction] is (...) imprisoned in the wretched conventions of English society," Emerson refuses to see the obvious, i.e., that language is actually, in Sara Mills' words, "a system with its own rules and constraints, and with its own determining effect on the way that individuals think and express themselves" (8). As Richard Rorty argues in his discussion of "The Contingency of Language," not only is the self contingent to his/her own times and contexts, but s/he is "*created* by the use of a vocabulary rather than being adequately or inadequately *expressed* in a vocabulary" (7; emphasis added). Rorty's claim acknowledges a break with the traditional way of viewing language as a medium for transparent representation and expression (10). In this sense, to say that Austen's fiction "is imprisoned in the wretched conventions of English society" must not be seen simply as an incapacity on her part to get free from that world – as if this attempt were possible. On the contrary, an underlying argument pervading this research relates to the ambiguity characterizing Austen's fiction: on the one hand, she is associated with romance, love-story narratives, happy-ends, virginity, marriage, propriety, and social refinement. On the other, and this must not be ignored, lest one runs the risk of doing Emerson's reading, Austen's narrative strategies enable her to somehow get free, or, if not, at least to get distanced from such conventions, so as to criticize and laugh at them through irony.

Furthermore, criticisms such as those of Jane Austen's "narrowness of perspective" clash with contemporary interest in her novels and biographical material as sources for television and filmic adaptations. The title of a recent book – *Jane Austen in Hollywood*[2] – reveals at least two interesting aspects: first, that contrary to these writers' opinions, not only has Austen transcended the "Parlour," but has gone even farther than that, as the geographical distance between Austen's Hampshire and Hollywood illustrates; second, and this comes as a consequence of the first, the variety of readings that the adaptations of her novels engender also reveals that Austen does possess a peculiar way of perceiving the world, and of constructing it through language, that make her novels widely appealing for contemporary readers and audiences in different places of the world.

Ironically, Jane Austen herself may have contributed to the assumption that her art is narrow and non-representative of the world at large, with some declarations she made on her own writings. Two of these references are very significant: "three or four families in a Country Village is the very thing to work on" (qtd. in Marsh, 230), she once told her niece Anna. In a letter to her nephew James Edward, answering about the mysterious disappearance of his manuscript of a novel, Austen wonders,

> What should I do with your strong, manly spirited sketches, full of variety and glow? – How could I possibly join them on to the little bit (two inches wide) of ivory on which I work with so fine a brush, as produces little effect after much labour? (qtd. in Marsh, 230)

Both of these declarations are revealing of the way Austen viewed her own literary possibilities. In choosing "three or four families in a Country Village," she consciously delimited her own literary territory – one of "two inches wide." But what I find further interesting in Austen's statement is the way she refers to her nephews' sketches – "strong, manly spirited," and "full of variety and glow" – as in opposition

to her "little bit of ivory," one that "produces little effect after much labour." Apparently, Austen's choice of vocabulary provides a relevant isotopy[3] for two kinds of aesthetics that seem curiously to align with the previous comments mentioned above – one "aesthetics" (her nephew's) is characterized by "strength" and "variety;" it is "manly-spirited;" the other (her own) is characterized by "narrowness" (cf. the repetition of terms to do with smallness and restriction, "little bit/two inches/little effect").

A crucial question thus emerges: how should one understand Austen's statement? Should one view it as a self-deprecating expression of her own writings? Certainly not. I prefer to consider it as a consciously responsible attitude towards her own materials. More than that, she is also being ironical and critical of contemporary aesthetic parameters. She herself says, "as produces little effect after much labour," which shows her sense of revision, re-writing, and cutting away (what she considered) the unnecessary. In fact, some of her novels have been re-writings, re-elaborations of previous "drafts." For instance, *Sense and Sensibility* existed first as *Elinor and Marianne*; *Pride and Prejudice* existed first in epistolary form, as *First Impressions*. Therefore, instead of considering her declarations as instances of what could possibly characterize a self-abased persona, they actually reveal an assertive attitude in relation to her art.

A passage from a letter Austen wrote to J. S. Clarke (the Prince Regent's librarian) explaining why she could not write a novel about "the Habits of Life and character and enthusiasm of a Clergyman – (...),"[4] as Clarke had suggested her to write, also provides a relevant illustration of the awareness she had about her own writing possibilities:

> A classical education, or at any rate a very extensive acquaintance with English literature, ancient and modern, appears to me quite indispensable for the person who would do any justice to your clergyman; and I think I may boast myself to be, with all possible vanity, the most unlearned and uninformed female who ever dared to be an author. (*Letters*, Parrish, 338)

Austen's statement not only denounces the lack of education opportunities available to women at the time, but already illustrates her ironical tone. Through the paradoxical combination of terms like "boast/vanity/dared" and "unlearned/ uninformed" she ironically asserts her decision, no matter under what circumstances, to write. She allows herself to dare. In choosing "three or four families in a Country Village" as her material, Austen consciously traces the boundaries of her literary territory – one intimately connected with early nineteenth-century English genteel domesticity. The picture we get is nothing but one of assertiveness and confidence in her own craft.

Another suggestion the Prince of Wales' librarian had made to Austen was that she should write a historical novel. Again, Austen explains why she cannot and justifies as follows:

> I could not sit seriously down to write a serious romance under any other motive than to save my life; and if it were indispensable for me to keep it up and never relax into laughing at myself or other people, I am sure I should be hung before I had finished the first chapter. (*Letters*, Parrish, 339)

Perhaps it was the reading of this passage that inspired Virginia Woolf to write, years later, about "the sound of laughter" in Austen's work (Woolf refers specifically to *Love and Freindship*) ("Jane Austen," 107). The passage also illustrates that Austen viewed her artistic possibilities in a playful way; laughter is not just an aesthetic

strategy "the author Jane Austen" employs, but a means to keep herself alive. Laughter is survival.

In *Jane Austen and Representations of Regency England*, Roger Sales elaborates on the argument that Austen's laughter and satirical look at the world inhabits not only her novels and other literary works, but also her letters. Sales shows that it was actually the account given by members of Austen's family – such as Henry Austen's "Biographical Notice" (1818) and J. E. Austen-Leigh's *Memoir of Jane Austen* (1870) – that manufactured the image of the writer as a domestic, virtuous and pious woman: "the image of quiet docility" of the sainted spinster (4-7). Sales carefully shows how the edition – actually the omission of key passages – of Austen's letters contributed with the construction of the mythology. One of the examples he gives is the following: Austen ends a letter she wrote to her sister Cassandra thus, 'Give my love to little Cassandra! I hope she found my Bed comfortable last night and has not filled it with fleas' (qtd in Sales, 7). Sales observes that "the Memoir removes the reference to fleas" (7). As he argues, omissions of references to vocabulary such as 'fleas,' 'bad breath,' 'cholic,' and 'bowels' revealed an anxiety on Austen's family's part that she could be associated with what they supposed to be "the Regency coarseness" (7).

Through other examples, Sales shows that these biographical accounts help to consolidate her image not as a Regency woman but as a "Victorian proper lady" (5). Another revealing example he gives is taken from Lord Brabourne's (Austen's great-nephew) publication of two volumes of *Letters of Jane Austen*, in 1884, which he dedicated to Queen Victoria. This is how he describes his great-aunt: 'In truth, the chief beauty of Jane Austen's life really consisted in its being uneventful: it was emphatically a home life, and she the light and blessing of a home circle' (qtd in

Sales, 8). Comments such as this have been responsible for the frequent association made by the critical tradition between Jane Austen and the narrowness and domesticity of her themes; as Sales argues, the editing of Austen's letters – including omissions and re-arrangements – as well as comments such as the one above, "deny [Austen's] rationality and playfulness" and her "knowledge of the world beyond home" (7).

This problematic association between Austen's alleged "narrowness" and "particularity" with her "lack of knowledge of the world" may be further explained and enhanced by the reading of Naomi Schor's *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine*. Schor traces the history of the detail from neo-classical aesthetics, taking Reynold's *Discourses on Art* as a point of reference and departure for her discussion. As Schor observes, the neo-classical period associated "great style in painting" with "avoiding the details, and peculiarities of particular objects" (12). Schor then considers the topic in realism, which legitimated the contingent detail; finally, she considers the twentieth century, with the problematization of the detail by modernity (15). To elaborate her argument, Schor considers writings as diverse as those by Hegel (*Aesthetics*), Wey, Loos, Lukacs, Freud and Roland Barthes. Though the whole of her book is relevant, for the purposes of this research I will make use mainly of chapter one ("Gender – in the Academy"), where she develops the association arising from the connection "details – deformity – particularity – the feminine," and chapter ten ("Details and Realism"), in which she discusses the relevance and function of details in realist fiction, within which I intend to (partly) situate Jane Austen.

Introducing her discussion with the question, "is the detail feminine?" – Naomi Schor moves on to an analysis of how the relationship between the general and the particular has always constituted a central issue in classical aesthetics (11).

Quoting specific passages in Reynold's *Discourses*, she shows how the use of general idea, on the one hand, and the use of details, on the other, have served as criteria for labelling an artist as Genius or second-rate: "Genius – Consists principally in the comprehension of a WHOLE; in taking general idea only" (qtd. in Schor, 12).

According to Schor, Reynold's oppositions to detailism may be grouped into two kinds: those justified by "qualitative" arguments, which align with the conception of the Ideal; and those justified by "quantitative" ones, which are harmonical with the idea of the Sublime. In the first kind, Reynolds argues that "because of their material contingency details are incompatible with the Ideal;" in the second argument he holds that "because of their tendency to proliferation, details subvert the Sublime" (Reynolds, as qtd in Schor, 15). In doing so, he actually opposes two forms of aesthetics: one belonging to the Genius, that avoids minute particularities so as to attain the Ideal and the Sublime and the Universal; and another that Schor interprets as "naive mimeticism," that is, a representation of Nature with its "imperfections, blemishes, accidental deficiencies, excrescences and deformities" (qtd in Schor, 15). Although Schor recognizes that Reynolds "never explicitly links details and femininity" (16), she notices that he refers "to the always imperfect nature" (16) as woman, and one which, to be represented in its Ideal Beauty, depends on "a (male) artist's trained eye" (16).

Schor draws from other sources to illustrate this association between "woman and (devalorized) nature" (16). She quotes Sherry Ortner, an anthropologist, who justifies the alignment of woman and nature on the grounds of woman's physiology (childbearing), social role (childrearing), and woman's psyche (16). Ortner further states:

> One relevant dimension that does seem pan-culturally applicable is that of relative concreteness vs. relative abstractness: the feminine personality tends to be involved with concrete feelings, things and people, rather than with abstract entities; it tends toward personalism and particularism. (qtd. in Schor, 17)

Indeed, one of the comments made by Virginia Woolf on Austen's artistic developments and features is crucial to illustrate the difficulty readers and the critical tradition have had in order to accommodate Austen in matters related to the particular and the general. Woolf's opinion also offers a contrast to those presented at the opening of this section:

> Jane Austen is thus a mistress of much deeper emotion than appears on the surface. She stimulates us to supply what is not there. What she offers is, apparently, a trifle, yet is composed of something that expands in the reader's mind and endows with the most enduring form of life scenes which are outwardly trivial. (114)

On the one hand, there are details, surfaces, trifles, trivialities – the particular; on the other, artistic proportion, balance, deeper emotion, most enduring form of life – the universal, the Ideal, the Sublime, as neo-classical thinkers like Reynolds viewed it. Woolf is thus able to summarize Austen's aesthetics as one that, though making use of details, does that with a sense of proportion and balance, without allowing details to deform the whole.

Another statement that reveals an awareness concerning Austen's portrayal of the private and the public in her fiction is provided by Walter Scott:

> The author's [Austen's] knowledge of the world, and the particular tact with which she presents characters that the reader cannot fail to recognize, reminds us something of the merits of the Flemish school of painting. The subjects are not often elegant and certainly never grand; but they are finished up to nature, and with a precision which delights the reader. (347)

At least two aspects are worth emphasizing in Scott's comment: first, the association of Jane Austen's style with the Flemish school of painting is rather significant and informs the visual quality of Jane Austen's narratives and characterization; an aspect that may partially support the long traditional interest that the theatre, television and the cinema have had in her novels for plays, series and filmic adaptations. However, as Schor (quoting Svetlana Alpers) denounces in her book, "the exclusion of Dutch art from the great tradition of art history is accountable to a covert association of Dutch art with the feminine" (20):

> Flemish painting... will... please the devout better than any painting of Italy. It will appeal to women, especially to the very old and the very young, also to monks and nuns and to certain nobleman who have no sense of true harmony. (qtd. in Schor, 20)

The association of Flemish painting with the feminine may account for the second point I want to consider in Scott's remark: that "[Austen's subjects] are certainly never grand." What is a "grand" subject? And what are Austen's (not "grand") subjects? Again, we are faced with the traditional notion that the particular and domestic realm of the house are "small," "minor" subjects. For, undoubtedly, Austen's narratives are constructed upon registers of daily life activities and experiences: conversations between children and parents; talks among sisters; visits to relatives and friends; balls, dancing and flirting; picnics; dinners; the possibilities of making friendship; letters exchanged by friends; illnesses; disillusions; courtship, love and marriage. Besides, all these subjects are described and "painted" (to continue with the "painting" metaphor) from an essentially feminine viewpoint. As Sarah R. Morrison puts it,

> In the novels the emphasis is insistently and unapologetically upon the personal. Her art is feminine in its very assumption that personal relationships define one's being, and a traditional feminine vision of success informs her novels. (341)

I would not put things so unilaterally as Morrison does, though I agree that Austen's emphasis on personal relationships constitutes a crucial aspect of her fictional world. But such relationships do not exist in isolation; they are always depicted by Austen in their relations to a wider social context. In *Pride and Prejudice*, for instance, Darcy at first plots to separate Mr. Bingley from Jane because of her poor connections – not only socially, economically, but intellectually speaking as well – mainly represented by her mother's and younger sisters' lack of (what he considered) decorum and propriety. Moreover, I am in doubt whether "a traditional feminine vision of success" actually "informs [Austen's] novels." Again, I would rather say that they partly do so; Charlotte Lucas's marriage to Mr. Collins, or that of Lydia and Wickham, in *Pride and Prejudice*, based on such different principles as those of Bingley/Jane and Darcy/Elizabeth, also serve as illustrations of Austen's complex depiction of relationships.

Considering, once more, Walter Scott's comment that Austen's subjects are "never grand," perhaps he does not mean, following Reynold's assumption, that if things are not 'grand' they must be 'trivial;' Scott seems both to accept the distinction of the general and the particular, and to recognize the virtue of each. But his words make one think about the traditional definition of a grand subject as one that deals with historical, public facts – like wars, or politics, or business. In other words, "male" subjects, at least in Austen's time. All this leads us to the question of value, and the criteria applied for one to say that a certain subject is grand, and another is

trivial, or that a certain subject relates to a female or a male world. In an essay entitled "Women and Fiction," Virginia Woolf comments on this matter arguing that

> It is probable that (...) both in life and in art the values of a woman are not the values of a man. Thus, when a woman comes to write a novel, she will find that she is perpetually wishing to alter the established values – to make serious what appears insignificant to a man, and trivial what is to him important. (49)

Though Woolf's words may not still apply to twentieth-century literature, when the distinctive roles and worlds of men and women have become less and less defined, or more blurred, so much have they exchanged places and dramatized personae, I believe that her words may shed light on the usually considered "trivialities" that permeate Austen's literary universe. For if there is a term, or an expression, that may define Austen at first hand, that will certainly be related to an "ideology of domesticity." And as we have been made to perceive – a perception that has been moulded by the Academy discourse itself, as Schor unveils in her book – the domestic realm and its activities, which are "made up not of great events but of small and perpetually recurring incidents," are most of times invisible or otherwise considered insignificant (Gisborne, qtd. in Kaplan, *Jane Austen Among Women*, 40-1). As Kaplan puts it, "domestic activities were, after all, not public, not part of the domain of history and of fame" (*Jane Austen Among Women*, 41).

All this shows that the risk of "misreading" Austen, including some adaptations of her novels, derives to a certain extent from the account of her literary production as generally and clearly identified with themes related to women and marriage. Superficially, her novels do constitute love stories that always culminate in the hero and heroine's wedding. But Austen's artistry lies mainly in her ability to weave these themes (women, marriage, domesticity, education) in the nuances

pervading and surrounding her manipulation of language, in her uses of irony. As the world she depicts in her fiction belongs to late-eighteenth and early nineteenth-century English society, a time when marriage was a *sine qua non* condition to endow women with existence – emotionally, materially, and socially speaking – these themes are elaborated within a general register and criticism of society, in which other relevant aspects emerge: power relations between men and women, and among individuals of different social classes; aspects regarding social conventions and propriety; considerations of wealth, property and social standing, among others. In fact, Jane Austen's novels are characterized by this constant dialogue between romantic and social-realist plots, in which the private world merges with public social matters; in other words, the private-romantic plots are embryonic and representative of macro-social relations and struggling forces. As such, the "domestic trifles" on which Austen's novels develop must be connected with the other so-considered "larger issues" or "grand subjects" of the social and political domains of Pre-Victorian times.

2. Previous Readings of *Emma* and the Question of Irony

Generally speaking, almost any piece of criticism written on Jane Austen's novels mentions, only if *en passant*, the question of irony as one of her narrative strategies. In respect to *Emma*, at least three major articles have been written on this issue: Marvin Mudrick's "Irony as Form: *Emma*;" Wayne C. Booth's "Control of Distance in Jane Austen's *Emma*;" and Wendy Moffat's "Identifying with *Emma*: Some Problems for the Feminist Reader." Moffat's article, though not dealing directly with the question of irony, discusses an experience she had with a group of students

"who approached the novel without irony" (45). Below I will give an account of (how I see) their readings, so as to contextualize my own reading of irony in Austen's *Emma*.

Mudrick introduces his discussion by inserting *Emma* in a paradigmatic relation with the other novels by Austen. Words such as "freedom," "triumph," "assurance," and an "achieved technique" (181) are used to describe both the author and the way she manipulates characters in the novel. In his view, "nowhere else is Jane Austen so relaxed, so certain, so skilled, and exact in her effects" (183). Claiming that irony is the primary "impetus" in *Emma*, Mudrick moves on to an analysis of the ways irony materializes itself in the novel. He considers "*Emma* (...) [as] a story of self-deception," whose primary large irony is, thus, "the deceptiveness of surface" (181; 201). As such, his reading concentrates on Emma's character and on how she is self-deceived throughout the narrative. Mudrick elaborates his argument by paying attention to the importance of Mr. Knightley (something like Emma's "savior") in her process of self-discovery and by considering her relationships with other characters, like Harriet, Mrs. Elton, Mr. Woodhouse, Frank Churchill and Jane. His reading follows the development of the plot itself. That is, nowhere in his discussion does Mudrick support his analysis of irony on theoretical grounds. His reading is restricted to a textual reading of the novel itself. Besides, although he admits that "[t]he irony of *Emma* is multiple" (206), he does not elaborate on this multiplicity, focusing instead on a discussion of irony in relation to Emma and to her blindness concerning her surroundings.

Wayne C. Booth's "Control of Distance in Jane Austen's *Emma*" centers on the question of irony as related to the matter of point of view. For Booth, in order to make her heroine (Emma), in spite of her faults, sympathetic to the reader, Jane

Austen had to choose a focus of narration that "would allow the reader to laugh at the mistakes committed by the heroine and at her punishment, without reducing the desire to see her reform and thus earn happiness" (244). This is made possible, Booth holds, through Austen's adoption of a third-person narration in which the heroine "feels" and "experiences" the events – at least those referring to her. The effect is that "[b]y showing most of the story through Emma's eyes, the author insures that we travel with Emma rather than stand against her" (246). Such an "inside view" of the character, in Booth's opinion, creates sympathy on the reader's part, since it provides evidence that the character is not what she appears to be on the surface.

Booth also emphasizes that "Jane Austen moves in and out of minds with great freedom, choosing for her own purposes what to reveal and what to withhold" (254). In his opinion, what may seem as a violation, is in fact serving the particular needs of Emma's story. Among these, he mentions the aspect of creating suspense and mystery. But the most important effect, as Booth views it, has to do with the construction of irony. As he states:

> [Jane Austen] works at all points to heighten the reader's sense of dramatic irony, usually in the form of a contrast between what Emma knows and what the reader knows. (255)

And, of course, the reader knows much more than Emma does. For the reader has access not only to the narrator's ironic voice, but to the whole construction of the narrative. However, in order to share the narrator's irony, a complicity must exist between narrator and reader; they must share a system of agreed values and presuppositions. In Austen's case, whose narratives are so ideologically tied to the situation of women in early nineteenth-century England, mainly as it relates to the question of marriage and female poverty, the reader will inevitably feel the necessity

to insert her texts, so as to contextualize them, within a wider frame of historical and cultural reference. Otherwise, the irony will simply be lost, will pass as unperceived. And that is exactly what happened to Moffat's group of students, who refused to see irony in their reading of *Emma*.

The title of Moffat's article – "Identifying with *Emma*: Some Problems for the Feminist Reader" – already alludes (in a reverse way) to Austen's famous reference to Emma as "a heroine whom no one but myself will much like." Contrary to Austen's predictions, Moffat's group of students not only loved Emma, but identified with her sense of autonomy, power and independence. But because they did so without contextualizing Austen – both culturally and historically – they failed to see what Moffat has named "the Janus-like quality of the double narration" (55) in the novel. In *Emma*, however, as Moffat argues, the sense of this "double narration" is heightened by Austen's use of a narrator who *ironically* speaks to the reader, thus inviting a complicity of shared cultural notions and values on the reader's part. In *Emma*, as Moffat says, "the narrator becomes a kind of ironic angel above the house, who can direct her chastening observations only toward the reader. She is the archetype of the reader in the text" (55). A significant consequence of the failure to perceive the doubleness of *Emma*'s narrative is, for instance, resistance in accepting that Emma cannot be taken as a representative of women's situation at the time. Nevertheless, as Moffat argues, "to recognize that Emma is an anomaly is to reveal a reality particular to women: the cardinal suppositions of eighteenth-century society concerning marriage, wealth, and class, are especially cruel for women; within these conditions, autonomy is chimeric" (49). The fact is that the ironical look directed, not only at Emma, but ultimately at the larger pre-Victorian society of which Highbury is representative, may only be grasped, and shared by narrator and reader, if the beliefs,

values and knowledge of that society are shared as well. Moffat's group of students were unable to perceive the ambiguities, ironies and tensions in *Emma* because they lacked a meaningful context of Austen's life, texts and times.

As one may notice, these three articles dealing with the question of irony in *Emma* recognize the explicit relation between irony and questions of narration, such as narrator and point of view. Mudrick's and Booth's readings constitute, respectively, a textual, and a formalist consideration of the novel, having Austen's text itself as their main support. Moffat's, on the other hand, goes much beyond them, as she associates form in the novel with both the culture and history that inform *Emma*; besides, she places her reading in a feminist framework. But she also acknowledges that the purpose of her article "is not to discuss the narrative structure of *Emma* in detail, but to suggest that the doubleness of this narrative places the feminist reader in an interesting spatial position in relation to the text, a position which heightens her sense both of sympathy and [differently from Booth] distance" (55).

Although these critical readings of Austen's use of irony in *Emma*, and several others that do not deal specifically with the question, help one to understand its function in the novel, it is my intention to discuss irony in *Emma* from a wider perspective. For instance, I want to analyze what purpose Austen's ironical mode of saying things serves. For it has become a commonplace in criticism on Austen to say that she presents her themes from an essentially comic and ironic perspective. Virginia Woolf's "Jane Austen," for instance, both emphasizes and muses into such an Austenian feature. In a significant passage in her essay, Woolf asks, "What is this note that never merges in the rest, which sounds distinctly and penetratingly all through the volume?" And she herself answers, "It is the sound of laughter. The girl

of fifteen is laughing, in her corner, at the world" (107). Woolf's expression, "laughing at the world," already invites an investigation into the address of Austen's irony. What world is this? At whom, or at what, is Austen's irony directed? Who/what is the target of Austen's irony? What about the other participants in the discursive ironical situation – ironist and interpreter? On what levels can one understand the relationship between ironist, target and interpreter in *Emma*? As my reading will rely mainly on Scholes' notion of context and pragmatics of situation, as well as on Hutcheon's discussion of the relational aspect of irony, and on the role of discursive communities (which acknowledges the existence of different meaning-makers for the interpretation of irony), my analysis of irony in the novel (as well as in the films later on) will be inserted in a discourse framework – that is, one that considers discourse, in Sara Mills' words, as consisting of "utterances which have meaning, force and effect within a social context" (13). In this sense, as the term discourse already denotes, the reading and eventual interpretation of Austen's ironic mode will be accounted for – to borrow from Jeremy Hawthorn – as a "transaction between speaker [or narrator] and hearer [or reader/viewer], as an interpersonal activity whose form is determined by its social purpose" (as qtd in Mills, 4). In dealing with ironic discourse, an understanding of "the meaning, force and effect" of Austen's irony will inevitably consider her own social and cultural context. Consequently, questions of narration and point of view will be inextricably linked to ideology and politics. Another meaning of discourse that I will take into account, and that Sara Mills calls attention to, is the one Bakhtin has developed in his writings: "he uses discourse to signify a voice, a double-voiced discourse" (7-8); as such, Mills concludes, "a discourse can be taken to represent a voice within a text or a speech position" (9). Apparently, this has been the rebellious voice – "the sound of laughter" – that Woolf identified when she read Austen's *Love*

and Freindship (Austen's adolescent way of writing it), a text written when she was fifteen, and which we can also see at work in Austen's other novels (with the exception, to a lesser degree, of *Persuasion*).

3. Mapping Irony in Jane Austen's *Emma*

> "Seldom, very seldom, does complete truth belong to any human disclosure; seldom can it happen that something is not a little disguised, or a little mistaken (...)."
>
> (*Emma*, 278)

There are several aspects that make *Emma* a paradigmatic text in relation to the five other Austen novels: for one thing, it has been elected Jane Austen's masterpiece by a considerable number of critics. Considering Austen's writing and publishing career, *Emma* locates itself in the peak of her literary maturity. The dates of publication of her other novels show this progression: *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1816); *Northanger Abbey* (1818; though one of the first novels to be written) and *Persuasion* (1818) were published posthumously.

Jane Austen herself referred to Emma as "a heroine whom no one but myself will much like" (Parrish, x). Such a statement raises a question: Why is that? Is not this statement already a kind of subdued, ironic challenge to the reader? For the way the novel starts apparently promises exactly the opposite – a character whom the reader will immediately fall in love with: "Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her" (*Emma*, 1). Considering most characterizations of women at the time and previously, constructed mainly upon patterns of the poor,

virtuous, pious and submissive housewife, or housewife-to-be, it is almost too good to come across such an introduction. Emma has beauty, cleverness and money, attributes to make anyone powerful, and that is exactly what she is – a powerful woman; at least to a certain extent.

In reading the novel further, however, the reader is gradually aware of the key-word in the passage above – "*seemed* to unite some of the best blessings of existence" (my emphasis). The verb "seemed" already creates vagueness and instability, somehow contradicting the first impression, of near perfection, that the description on the surface appears to allude to. Interestingly, the sentences – linked by coordination – are syntactically balanced; but what draws the attention is that this apparent "balance" may reveal an implied lack of balance in the character portrayed: things may be balanced on the surface, a fact that may be further supported by the way Austen punctuates the paragraph, with the semi-colon separating the two sentences. The punctuation helps to break the apparent balance, thus contributing to establish disjunction and irony.

Actually, because Emma plays the role of an "Author/God", by deciding who should marry whom, and who loves whom (though she herself has never fallen in love), and because she will eventually discover herself as completely wrong in her conjectures (which reveals that an "Author/God" is also fallible!), much of the novel's significance and pleasure arises exactly from the juxtaposition between "what is" and "what seems to be." Thus the general framework of *Emma* is, from its very beginning, an ironic one – which opens itself up to other more specific ironic frames. This "Author/God" figure, for instance, that characterizes Emma, generates a first general irony in the novel: Emma thinks she is the "Author/God" of other people's life only

because she does not know that Jane Austen is the "Author/God" of hers. This is where the irony lies – Emma does not know that she is being written.

The first chapter in the novel is full of references to the character's power and authority. Because her mother has died, her sister Isabella has married, and Emma now lives only with "a most affectionate, indulgent father" (1), she has been "mistress of his house from a very early period" (1). Even when Miss Taylor, their governess, lived with them, Emma was accustomed to "doing just what she liked" (1). To that first description of Emma, I would like to juxtapose another, provided by the narrator, lines below, that undermines the description of almost perfection with which the novel starts:

> The real *evils* indeed of Emma's situation were the power of having *rather* too much her own way, a disposition to think *a little* too well of herself; these were the *disadvantages* which *threatened* alloy to her many enjoyments. The *danger*, however, was at present so unperceived, that they did not by any means rank as *misfortunes* with her. (1; emphasis added)

The passage actually functions as a foreshadowing of what Emma will experience throughout the narrative. For it is "the power of having *rather* too much her own way" and "a disposition to think *a little* too well of herself" – notice how the italicized words set the narrator's ironic tone – that will give rise to the many misunderstandings and misfortunes she will go through. The passage is also relevant to set a contrast with Emma's positive attributes at the novel's opening, as the negative connotations of the terms emphasized reveal.

Furthermore, Emma's self-centredness and sense of superiority is attached to the social role the Woodhouses play in Highbury: "The Woodhouses were first in consequence there. All looked up to them" (2). All, perhaps, except for one, at least as it concerns Emma. Already in this chapter, we get to know that Mr. Knightley (whose

brother, John Knightley, is married to Isabella, Emma's sister) "was one of the very few people who could see faults in Emma Woodhouse, and the only one who ever told her of them (...)" (5). Apparently, however, Emma does not give importance to his tendency to lecture her: "Mr. Knightley loves to find fault with me you know – in a joke – it is all a joke. We always say what we like to each other" (5). For the reader familiarized with Austen's characterization of heroines, it becomes clear, from the novel's first chapter, that Mr. Knightley (see also his name, resembling "knight" – but how far from a gallant knight he is!) will have a definite function in Emma's process of growth and acquisition of self-knowledge. Not only is he characterized as sixteen years older than Emma, and consequently as a more experienced person, but he is a gentleman endowed with moral worth and so-called high values.

Another aspect that sets *Emma* apart from the other novels is that it is the only novel entitled after the heroine's first name – a fact that suggests intimacy and already creates an expectation of the character's importance as to her individuality; revealingly, unlike all other Austen heroines, who are socially deprived and thus dependent on marriage for financial security, Emma is rich enough not to depend on marriage for social standing. As she says,

> **I** have none of the usual inducements of women to marry. Were **I** to fall in love, indeed, it would be a different thing! But **I never** have been in love; it is not **my** way, or **my** nature; and **I** do not think **I ever** shall. And, without love, **I** am **sure I** should be a fool to change such a situation as **mine**. Fortune **I** do not want; employment **I** do not want; consequence **I** do not want: **I believe** a few married women are half as much **mistress** of their husband's house, as **I** am of Hartfield; and **never**, **never** could **I** be so **truly** beloved and important; so **always first** and **always right** in any man's eyes as **I** am in my father's. (55, emphasis added)

This is a key-passage in the novel. Besides the iteration of "I/my/mine," that confers to Emma the status of a subject, other terms are revealing of her assertiveness and

independence; such is the case with the use of "sure," "believe," "truly," "always," "ever," and "never." Emma is quite aware of the lack of need for her to marry. She already has what other women marry for: "fortune," "employment," and "consequence." Not only does she already have a house to rule and where she feels important, but she also has the certainty of being "always" (repeated twice) right and first in her decisions and authoritative command. Considering all other novels by Austen, in which women are always available in the marriage market, the passage above acquires a highly ironic overtone. While reading *Emma*, one could reach the conclusion that it is a truth, (perhaps not so) universally acknowledged, that a single *woman* in possession of a good fortune, must *not* be in want of a *husband*.[5] But the irony the passage creates is not only intra-textual, i.e., ironical in relation to other texts by Austen. As the plot of *Emma* develops, this passage will become structurally ironic, for, as the reader may guess, Emma will fall in love, and that is enough for her to want to change her present situation; by this time, the effect of her words will simply have vanished.

While Emma seems to believe that she will never marry, she plays the role of a matchmaker for others. In a way, this character functions, metalinguistically, as a sort of artist, somehow a surrogate for Austen herself. As Andrew Davies, the screenwriter of the 1996 ITV adaptation of *Emma*, has said, "[Emma] has an artistic sensibility, which is much like that of a novelist. In a way she doesn't want to be involved in life, she just wants to run it; she wants to be God and move the pieces around the board; she wants to plan the plot and create the characters" (Birtwistle & Conklin, *The Making of Emma*, 9). And it is in Emma's creation of romantic couples and plots, and the way this affects herself, that lie most of the comic and ironic effects

of the novel; from what she says and what eventually happens. The other ironic effects derive, of course, from the narrator's comments.

This association between Emma and God has already been noticed by other critics, like Marvin Mudrick: "Emma is moved to play God, but without tenderness or social caution (or the artist's awareness) she falls into every conceivable mistake and misjudgment" (194). Such an association leads to at least two related considerations: the equation "Emma = God" informs both Emma's authority and her "artistic sensibility." Claudia Johnson, for instance, considers female authority as the subject of *Emma*. In her opinion, in saying that Emma plays "God," critics actually mean that she plays "man," since her attributes of being independent, powerful, authoritarian and ironical do not correspond to the feminine stereotype of the period – a stereotype that can be illustrated through other female characters in the novel, such as Isabella (Emma's sister) and Miss Taylor (now Mrs. Weston), both submissive wives. As Johnson states:

> Emma assumes her own entitlement to independence and power – power not only over her destiny, but, what is harder to tolerate, power over the destinies of others – and in so doing she poaches on what is felt to be male turf. (399)

This aspect also makes *Emma* paradigmatic in relation to the other Austen novels, in which the heroines are materially deprived and thus unable to have any sort of independence or exercise any power, at least to the extent that Emma does. (However, of course, if one considers intellectual power, Elizabeth Bennet, Elinor and Anne Elliot – though they also undergo a process of self-discovery and self-adjustment – would also be illustrations of powerful heroines).

As to the other consideration deriving from the association "Emma = God", that grants Emma the status of an artist (on p. 215 Emma is referred to by the narrator

as an "imaginist"), it is relevant to point out that this metalinguistic aspect is not restricted to Emma's characterization, but extends itself to some narrative strategies used in the novel, as it has been analyzed by Susie Campbell in "The Significance of Games in *Emma*." In the first part of her essay Campbell draws an interesting parallel between playing literal games, like board and card-games, and playing the metaphorical games of "social relations" required for those belonging to Highbury society. She argues that similarly to literal games, which involve rules to which players must submit, and whose limits they must respect so that a specific order is maintained, such is the case with the "invisible" and unwritten set of rules that also imposes limits and order to the social organization of Highbury society. Campbell also pays attention to the word-games in the novel; games such as charades, conundrums, anagrams. Interestingly, she says that "what is important about [the games] is that they are about language and communication" (42). Therefore, "[t]he rules and disciplines of these games are directed towards ordering language and making it into messages that communicate a sense to someone else" (42). As such, the word-games – that "involve written words and letters" – end up being metonymic and representative of the process of reading itself. An example of such word-games is provided by Mr. Weston during the Box Hill picnic: "What two letters of the alphabet are there, that express perfection?" To which he himself answers: "– M and A. – Em-ma. – Do you understand?" (239). Ironically, the equivalence "Emma = perfection" was suggested immediately after Emma's rude remark toward Miss Bates. Thus, in a way, it also illustrates the naturalness with which the other characters have accepted Emma's impolite behaviour. The passage is even more ironical, from the reader's perspective, for s/he has known, since the first chapter of the novel, how distant from perfection Emma is. Therefore, as Campbell argues in her essay, through the games,

one has the chance to see the way characters relate one to the other, the way they communicate, and ultimately how the process of reading the games is symbolic of the process of reading the novel itself. I will come back to this point when I analyze the relevance of the games for the generation of irony.

Undoubtedly, any text may invite a discussion of the process of reading and interpretation. But in Austen's *Emma* the invitation is double because the story of Emma actually consists of two levels of stories: the one provided by the narrator, and the ones Emma herself (as being an "imaginist") invents. Terms like "fancy," "fanciful," "schemes," "plans," "imagination" are scattered throughout the narrative to refer to the character's propensity for creating stories, as the passages below may illustrate: "[Emma] was so busy in admiring those soft blue eyes, in talking and listening, and *forming all these schemes in the in-betweens*, that the evening flew away at a very unusual rate (...)" (13; emphasis added). This refers to her relationship with Harriet Smith, about whom she invents both a background (she imagines Harriet as the daughter of a gentleman) and future attachments. Emma decides to provide Harriet with both knowledge and elegance. Another illustration of the power of her imagination may be the following:

> The less worthy females were to come in the evening, with Miss Bates, Miss Fairfax, and Miss Smith; but already, at dinner, they were too numerous for any subject of conversation to be general; and while politics and Mr. Elton were talked over, Emma could fairly surrender all her attention to the pleasantness of her neighbour. The first remote sound to which she felt herself obliged to attend, was the name of Jane Fairfax. Mrs. Cole seemed to be relating something of her that was expected to be very interesting. *She listened, and found it well worth listening to. That very dear part of Emma, her fancy, received an amusing supply.*(137; emphasis added)

This quotation has to do with a dinner at the Coles, when Mrs. Cole tells the group about a present – a piano – Jane has been given. The fact that no one knows for sure

who gave it to her (they merely suppose it might have been given by the Campbells) – is enough to allow Emma to make a series of conjectures, including a love affair between Jane and Mr. Dixon. The ironies created here are mainly *dramatic*, i.e., based on narrative action. For the reader already suspects, on the basis of other superior clues the narrative provides, that the piano might have been Frank's present: Frank and Jane already know each other from Weymouth; Frank only comes to Highbury when Jane is there; as soon as he arrives in Highbury he pays a visit to the Bateses; he goes to London *only* to have his hair cut, and on the following day a piano arrives at Jane's.

In Schor's *Reading in Detail* – more specifically in her discussion of "Fiction as Interpretation/Interpretation as Fiction," there is a passage that, though alluding to her reading of Henry James' "In the Cage," applies substantially to Emma's role in Austen's novel:

> What is significant here is that interpretation is synonymous with imagination, it is a "creative" rather than critical activity; the young woman is not content merely to encode and decode, rather she delights in filling in the gaps, piecing together the fragments, in short, adding something of her own to the faulty, often trivial texts at hand. (Schor, 123)

Several significant instances of this "creative interpretation" take place in Emma. And they are responsible for the creation of irony, because Emma actually illustrates what Chatman, in *Coming to Terms*, calls "fallible filtration:" her perceptions and conceptions of the story events – basically linked to her habit of playing the role of a matchmaker, inventing love stories for others – do not align with what the narration at large is telling. In such instances, the reader shares with the narrator in their "superior knowledge" of what is going on. Here are some examples where this "creative interpretation" takes place in the novel: when Emma draws Harriet's sketch; when

Mr. Elton offers a charade and Emma (mis-)deciphers it; when Emma gets to know that Jane has been rescued by Mr. Dixon in a boat accident at Weymouth; when Jane gets a piano; when Frank, Emma, Harriet and Jane play with the box of letters in Hartfield.

These passages illustrate what Schor calls, in her discussion of "Details and Realism," *diegetic details*: "By diegetic details I mean that class of details which is situated on the evenmential plane of the text, and which involves those prosaic objects whose exchange and communication constitute the classical realist narrative" (142). These "diegetic details," Schor adds, may serve "both as agents of psychological revelation and as narrative catalysts" (142). This is precisely the case in *Emma*, where, besides bearing these functions, the diegetic details are also used as pre-texts for giving rise to irony.

Let me start with a discussion of the "Harriet-sketch-session." By this point in the narrative the reader is already aware that Emma's intention (or had I better say "presumption?") of improving Harriet, introducing her into "good" society and providing her with knowledge and elegance, is but a great irony in the narrative. The irony becomes evident in the next chapter (Chapter IV of Volume I in my edition) when the reader gets to know how useful to Emma Harriet will be: "As a walking companion, Emma had very early foreseen how useful she [Emma] might find her [Harriet].(...) She had ventured once alone to Randalls, but it was not pleasant; and *a Harriet Smith*, therefore, one whom she could summon at any time to walk, would be *a valuable addition to her privileges*" (14-15; emphasis added). Harriet's object-like role to Emma, already perceptible in this passage, is emphasized in the following: "Altogether, she was quite convinced of Harriet Smith's being exactly *the young friend* she wanted – exactly *the something which her home required*" (15; emphasis

added). In juxtaposing "the young friend" with "the something," the narrator not only denounces Emma's real interest in Harriet, one which is quite different from improving her and detaching her "from her bad acquaintance," but reveals Emma's snobbishness, arrogance, and the superficial and materialistic values of the society of which she is representative. Such passages immediately lead the reader to question the meaning of certain words: for instance, in chapter III, the narrator - via Emma – uses the terms "coarse and unpolished" (13) to refer to the Martins (tenant farmers in Donwell Abbey, Mr. Knightley's property); ironically, these may refer to Emma herself, when one considers the underlying nature of her intentions concerning the use she will make of Harriet. As such, the competing meanings these passages unveil end up establishing Emma, up to this point, as one whose elegance, good manners and gentility constitute simply an appearance, mere polish.

These introductory aspects are relevant for a proper understanding of the significance of the "Harriet-sketch-scene." Emma has convinced not only herself but also Harriet of Mr. Elton's interest in her. Even before Emma paints Harriet, Mr. Elton's praises of Emma as a "skilful hand" (26), based on what he views as "the striking improvement of Harriet's manner" (25), show Emma's role as an artist, and as such, as one who is free to "paint reality" as it pleases and suits her purposes. The following passage illustrates this point:

> The sitting was altogether very satisfactory; she was quite enough pleased with the first day's sketch to wish to go on. There was no want of likeness, she had been fortunate in the attitude, and as she meant to throw in a little improvement to the figure, to give a little more height, and considerably more elegance, she had great confidence of its being in every way a pretty drawing at last, and of its filling its destined place with credit to them both – a standing memorial of the beauty of one, the skill of the other, and the friendship of both; with as many other agreeable associations as Mr. Elton's very promising attachment was likely to add.
>
> Harriet was to sit again the next day; and Mr. Elton, just as he ought,

> entreated for the permission of attending and reading to them again.
> "By all means. We shall be most happy to consider you as one of the party."
> The same civilities and courtesies, the same success and satisfaction, took place on the morrow, and accompanied the whole progress of the picture which was rapid and happy. Everybody who saw it was pleased, but Mr. Elton was in continual raptures, and defended it through every criticism.
> "Miss Woodhouse has given her friend the only beauty she wanted," – observed Mrs. Weston to him - not in the least suspecting that she was addressing a lover. – "The expression of the eye is most correct, but Miss Smith has not those eye-brows and eye-lashes. It is the fault of her face that she has them not."
> "Do you think so?" replied he. "I cannot agree with you. It appears to me a most perfect resemblance in every feature. I never saw such a likeness in my life. We must allow for the effect of shade, you know."
> "You have made her too tall, Emma," said Mr. Knightley.
> Emma knew that she had, but would not own it, and Mr. Elton warmly added,
> "Oh, no! Certainly not too tall; not in the least too tall. Consider, she is sitting down – which naturally presents a different – which in short gives exactly the idea – and the proportions must be preserved, you know. Proportions, fore-shortening. – Oh, no! It gives one exactly the idea of such a height as Miss Smith's. Exactly so indeed!"
> "It is very pretty," said Mr. Woodhouse. "So prettily done! Just as your drawings always are, my dear. I do not know any body who draws so well as you do. The only thing I do not thoroughly like is, that she seems to be sitting out of doors, with only a little shawl over her shoulders – and it makes one think she must catch cold."
> "But, my dear papa, it is supposed to be summer; a warm day in summer. Look at the tree."
> "You, sir, may say any thing," cried Mr. Elton; "but I must confess that I regard it as a most happy thought, the placing of Miss Smith out of doors; and the tree is touched with such inimitable spirit! Any other situation would have been much less in character. The naïvete of Miss Smith's manners – and altogether – Oh, it is most admirable! I cannot keep my eyes from it. I never saw such a likeness." (pp. 29-30)

The whole passage is relevant both for a discussion of metalanguage, i.e., Emma's role as a painter and 'imaginist,' and also for an analysis of the question of realism, reproduction, and the process of creation. Similarly to the narrative gaps that Emma fills in relation to Harriet's and Jane's lives, here we also have an instance of such "creative interpretation." Emma does to the "Harriet-sketch" what she had proposed to do to the actual Harriet: "to throw in a little improvement (...)," "to give a

little more height" (socially speaking), and "considerably more elegance (...)." The passage immediately invites a questioning of the notion of the real, of the realist copy, principally in this case, where a *likeness* is at stake. In deciding to take Harriet's likeness Emma selects what to emphasize in her features, and also what to add. Emma moulds Harriet in a way that aligns with the "narrative life" she has created for Harriet and Mr. Elton. The other characters' observations about the picture acknowledge Emma's deliberate modification of the object. Mrs. Weston, for instance, says, "The expression of the eye is most correct, but Miss Smith has not those eye-brows and eye-lashes. It is the fault of her face that she has them not." Mr. Knightley also notices that Emma has made her too tall. Actually, Emma's "improvement" of Harriet serves to correct what she views as her "deficiencies."

But this passage is significant for the creation of irony as well. At least two instances in the passage might strike the reader as constituting the narrator's ironic stance: first, the reference to the picture as a "standing memorial of the beauty of one, the skill of the other, and the friendship of both." Though the ironic meaning does not arise from opposition, we know that Emma is not talented enough (more of this later) to produce a 'standing memorial.' As such, the context in which the reference to Harriet's beauty and to their friendship appears, as juxtaposed to Emma's skill – that we know to be lacking – makes such terms also devoid of the apparent meaning, which entitles us to view them as ironically loaded. The other example relates to the narrator saying, "the same civilities and courtesies, the same success and satisfaction, took place on the morrow (...)." The sentence draws the reader's attention not only for its alliteration and parallelism, but for its mocking of the 'sameness' inherent to the patterns of allegedly good social behaviour, as if being always constructed upon ready-made formulas of conduct and propriety. The repetition and balance of the

sentence cover – and at the same time, denounce – the hypocrisy conveyed by its underlying ironic meaning.

Irony is also perceptible in the way Emma (mis-)reads Mr. Elton's behaviour. For Emma interprets Mr. Elton's "raptures" at her drawing the sketch as being directed to the object of the painting – Harriet. However, a close look at his comments shows that they have to do with the picture, hence, they are all praises to the artist, Emma herself. Some lines previously, when the sitting begins, the narrator tells us that "Mr. Elton [keeps] fidgetting behind her [Emma] and watching every touch" (28). After the first day's sketch Mr. Elton "defended it [the likeness] through every criticism" (29). His opinions take into account the skill of the artist; he talks about "the effect of shade," "proportions," "fore-shortening." He is so blind to Emma's subjective copying of Harriet that he refers to it as "a most perfect resemblance;" the word "exactly" is repeated three times. And "I never saw such a likeness" is repeated twice.

But this is only one level of the irony. The other, more underlying level, has to do with Emma's supposed skill at drawing. Actually, in a way, Emma represents the accomplished eighteenth-century lady, so characteristic of Austen's universe. She knows how to draw, how to play the piano, sing and dance. An interesting passage that may add to the discussion of the topic in *Emma* is found in chapter eight of *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), in which the notion of the "accomplished woman" is thus defined:

> '(...) no one can be really esteemed accomplished, who does not greatly surpass what is usually met with. A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages, to deserve the word; and besides all this, she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions, or the word will be but half-deserved.'

> 'All this she must possess,' added Darcy, 'and to all this she must yet add something more substantial, in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading.'
> 'I am no longer surprised at your knowing only six accomplished women. I rather wonder now at your knowing any.'
> (...)
> 'I never saw such a woman. I never saw such a capacity, and taste and application, and elegance, as you describe, united.' (85)

The last two speeches in the passage are uttered by Elizabeth Bennet, the novel's lively and clever heroine, who criticizes this conception of the "accomplished woman," at least as one whose attributes would encompass all those qualities at once. No doubt this is exactly what Austen wants to do: to show the paradox between the way this notion circulates, the way it exists as *discourse*, and the impossibility of its actual realization. Before discussing the question of irony as it relates to Emma's painting accomplishments, let me develop further this aspect of artistic accomplishment and social refinement.

In *The Pleasures of the Imagination: British Culture in the Eighteenth Century* John Brewer makes a connection between the development of the so-called 'fine arts,' also referred to as 'elegant arts,' or 'arts of taste' – theatre, painting, music, literature – and the notion of social refinement. Though he acknowledges that such works have existed since classical antiquity, it was only in the eighteenth century, he holds, that they were treated as a whole, and were "given a special collective identity" (xvi). As such, Brewer asserts that "our modern idea of 'high culture' is an eighteenth century invention" (xvi). It is in this context that concepts like taste, refinement of manners and sociability develop. As Brewer says, "taste in the arts was considered a sign of refinement, cultivation and politeness (...)" (xviii). Besides taste, other attributes were also required. The passage quoted from *Pride and Prejudice*, for instance, mentions some more abstract and vaguer requisites, like "a certain something in her air and

manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expression (...)."As such, the 'sociable man' (as well as the 'accomplished woman') was characterized as one "who was literate, could talk about art, literature and music and showed off his [or her] refinement through agreeable conversation in company" (xviii).

Interestingly, the term "showed off" above already introduces a controversy, or at least an ambivalence, as to the 'marvels' and 'sophistication' of civilized life. The fact is that, following Brewer, the development and consumption of 'high culture' by ordinary individuals outside the limits of the court, to which it had been restricted up to the seventeenth century – i.e., this transition from the court to the city – resulted from the commercializing and urbanization of society, that in its turn gave rise to the appearance of coffee houses, reading societies, debating clubs, assembly rooms, galleries and concert halls. These were the places where politeness and refinement were put on display, were actually performed, for, as Brewer attests, these attributes acquired importance to the extent that they could be shared with others, and could be shown to others (107). Brewer says that "politeness concerned both the means of personal refinement and the techniques for displaying it to its greatest effect" (107).

However, terms like "show off" and "display" reveal a rather negative (thus contradictory) aspect of politeness and refinement. If it is true that these qualities had to be cultivated and shaped by both private self-improvement and public performance, they also came to be associated with a world of appearances, disguise, vanity, pride, greed, artifice, hypocrisy. London, the metropolis of the moment, was "a place of parade, somewhere to watch and be watched" (30), the place where "the fashionable world was on public display" (69). As Brewer puts it,

> At the theatre, in the pleasure garden, the exhibition room, even the lecture hall and the rooms of certain learned societies, audiences made publicly visible their wealth, status, social and sexual charms. (69)

To give another example, Anna Larpent, a cultured lady of late-eighteenth century London, whose private journals Brewer quotes and comments upon, once wrote: "I must learn to dissimulate in this world" (111).

This contrast between private refinement and public display, politeness and artifice, naturalness and dissimulation, is widely conveyed in Austen's novels. This aspect is also responsible for generating irony; an irony that stems exactly from the conflation of several discourses in her narratives. Most of times, what characters say, and what is said about them, are either contradicted by their actions and behaviour, or by their own words; or further, by the narrator's ironic stance. An interesting passage in *Emma* refers to the guests' arrival for a Christmas dinner at the Westons, when the narrator ironically comments: "Some change of countenance was necessary for each gentleman as they walked into Mrs. Weston's drawing-room; - Mr. Elton must compose his joyous looks, and Mr. John Knightley disperse his ill-humour. Mr. Elton must smile less, and Mr. John Knightley more, to fit them for the place" (75). The balance and parallelism used in the construction of the sentences seem at odds with, somehow masquerading, both the differences between the two characters and their change of attitude required by the place, where a social gathering (celebration of Christmas) is held. The irony is rather intricate here; not only does the narrator mock and laugh at the etiquette requirements for socializing, but she condemns, by the same token, too much flattery and artificiality (Mr. Elton) as well as too much sincerity (Mr. John Knightley's ill-humour). The irony also springs from the choice of the verb/action that could give the right measure to their change of 'countenance:' "smile." By smiling less and more, Mr. Elton and Mr. John Knightley will be fulfilling a social requisite.

The assumptions relating to the use of irony in the novel could be further illustrated through other characters; not only through Emma herself, perhaps the most substantial target, but through Mr. Elton, his wife (Mrs. Augusta Elton) and Frank Churchill. Significantly, the copy of *Emma* with which I have been working (1993, Norton edition, ed. by Stephen M. Parrish) brings the following front illustration: "The Cloakroom, Clifton Assemblyrooms" (1817-1818), a painting by R. Sharples. It shows – as one may guess from the painting's title – a group of more than twenty gentlemen and ladies, all elegantly dressed, perhaps getting ready for a dance, performing the rites of a social gathering. On the left side of the painting, in the foreground, a woman sits while another kneels down to put on her shoes. The notion of social class hierarchies is already introduced.

In *Emma*, this question of 'social refinement,' usually embodied by other terms, such as 'improvement of mind,' 'taste,' 'application,' 'manners,' 'style,' 'countenance,' is already addressed by Emma in the first chapters of the novel, when she talks to Harriet about Robert Martin: "Mr. Martin, I suppose, is not a man of information beyond the line of his own business. He does not read?" (16); and these values are used to support her persuading Harriet to refuse him.

> "How much his business engrosses him already, is very plain from the circumstance of his forgetting to inquire for the book you recommended. He was a great deal too full of the market to think of any thing else – which is just as it should be, for a thriving man. What has he to do with books? And I have no doubt that he will thrive and be a very rich man in time – and his being illiterate and coarse need not disturb us." (20)

Emma's words create a clear opposition between Robert Martin – Knightley's tenant farmer – and Mr. Elton, the Highbury vicar that Emma has selected as Harriet's would-be husband. The opposition between them is made not only on economic grounds – as a tenant farmer Mr. Martin must deal with business, profit, loss, market –

but on social terms as well. Because he does not read, Emma qualifies him as a coarse man, one who lacks education, manners and gentleness. But what is interesting to notice in Austen's texts, and in *Emma* specifically, is the chance Austen takes to show how fluctuating and relative these values are; her novels actually dramatize the opposition between true, genuine qualities and those which are disguised as good manners. As Juliet McMaster, in her reading of "Class" in Austen states, "the quality of humanity is to be judged by moral and humane standards (...), not by social status" (125). As such, ironically, Emma will painfully discover that "there is a littleness about Mr Elton" (*Emma*, 212) which she failed to perceive at first; indeed, his "superior manners" and "gentleness" inhabit only his appearance; they are mere polish, artifice.

Such considerations may offer support for the understanding of the second level of irony in the "Harriet-sketch" scene, which I left suspending above. Actually, all the raptures of praises Mr. Elton directs to Emma, as a painter, are at odds with Emma's poor skill at painting; Emma herself mentions she "was thought to have a *tolerable* eye in general" (26; emphasis added). Emma's accomplishments in reading, drawing, playing and singing seem all to be lacking. This aspect will be made more visible when Jane Fairfax comes to Highbury, and the reader is offered the opportunity to compare their skills in playing the piano and singing. A related example is Emma's wish to improve Harriet in matters of information and reading, because the reader already knows that "[Emma] will never submit to any thing requiring industry and patience, and a subjection of the *fancy* to the understanding" (22; emphasis added). Emma prefers to create her own narratives, her own stories. As the narrator says:

> It was much easier to chat than to study; much pleasanter to let her imagination range and work at Harriet's fortune, than to be labouring to enlarge her comprehension or exercise it on sober facts; and the only literary pursuit which engaged Harriet at present, the only mental provision she was making for the evening of life, was the collecting and transcribing all the riddles of every sort that she could meet with, into a thin quarto of hot-pressed paper, made up by her friend, and ornamented with cyphers and trophies. (44)

This passage actually constitutes a good illustration of what critics like Robert Scholes & Robert Kellog, as well as John Caughie refer to as the superior knowledge shared by narrator and reader at the expense of the characters' ignorance. In *The Nature of Narrative*, for instance, Scholes and Kellog say that "in any situation in which one person knows or perceives more – or less – than another, irony must be either actually or potentially present" (240). In case when this person is the narrator (and consequently the reader, if they belong to the same discursive community), the possibility for irony's effects is immense; and this is particularly true in a consideration of Austen. As John Caughie discusses in "Small Pleasures: Adaptation and the Past in British Film and Television," it is mainly the complicity between the narrative voice and the reader that allows for a comprehension of irony in Austen's novels, where the narrator often 'speaks' to the reader over the heads of the characters (45). In the novel's passage above, the expressions "literary pursuit," "mental provision," and "evening of life" are all ironically employed by the narrator. The irony is expressed first stylistically, through the repetition of "the only" (the reader wonders, how can one be intellectually improved by means of only one medium?); the irony is further developed through the equation provided by the juxtaposition "literary pursuit" and "mental provision" with "the collecting and transcribing of riddles" (the reader immediately questions, 'what do "riddles" provide the mind with, mainly when the reader has a novel by Austen in his/her hands?'), a piece of information which is

withheld for some time, actually delayed by the narrator, through the use of cataphoric reference. (Although the reader may already guess, given the previous narrative clues provided, not only earlier in this specific passage – such as the use of "sober facts" – but in others the narrative at large supplies, that the "literary pursuit" about which the narrator talks would be something similar to "riddles"). Moreover, the expression "the evening of life," which suggests the question of immortality, of permanence – clashes with the fleeting, shallow and anachronic nature of riddles, thus giving rise to irony; it also alludes to the differences between literature (the book by Austen in my hands) and sub-literature (Harriet's thin quarto of hot-pressed paper, full of riddles), and of the role women have played in the history of novel-reading and writing. The passage does not simply mock, but also denounces women's lack of (serious) reading at the time. After the paragraph quoted above the narrator continues, "in this age of literature, such collections [of riddles] on a very grand scale are not uncommon" (44), in which the expression "in this age of literature" is also ironically used. And yet, in saying that "it was much easier to chat than to study, to let her imagination range and work at Harriet's fortune..." the narrator also seems to celebrate the ludic aspect of life, rooted in fantasy and creativity – of which Emma is a representative – in opposition to studying and "soberness." All these competing notions generate the irony in the passage.

The riddle which Mr. Elton offers Emma also gives rise to several ironies, deriving mostly from Emma's attempt at filling in the gaps of this other text:

To Miss --------.

CHARADE

My first displays the wealth and pomp of kings,

Lords of the earth! Their luxury and ease.

Another view of man, my second brings,

Behold him there, the monarch of the seas!

But, ah! united, what reverse we have!

Man's boasted power and freedom, all are flown;

Lord of the earth and sea, he bends a slave,

And woman, lovely woman, reigns alone.

Thy ready wit the word will soon supply,

May its approval beam in that soft eye! (45-6)

Although Mr. Elton himself explains to Emma that this charade has been addressed by a friend of his "to a young lady, the object of his admiration (...), Emma was immediately convinced it must be his own" (45). He also tells Emma that he does not "offer the charade for Miss Smith's collection" (45). Emma is partially right in her *reading*: the charade is actually Mr. Elton's, but it is addressed to her, not to Harriet, as she immediately assumes. In this instance of "creative interpretation" (to refer once more to Schor's handy, but loaded expression) Emma literally *fills the gap*; the blank is quickly completed by Emma as "To Miss Smith." As she tells Harriet, "For Miss ------, read Miss Smith" (46). In reading the charade, Emma has no difficulty in "interpreting" it: "Very well, Mr. Elton, very well, indeed. I have read worth charades. *Courtship* – a very good hint. I give you credit for it. This is feeling your way. This is saying very plainly – 'Pray, Miss Smith, give me leave to pay my addresses to you. Approve my charade and my intentions in the same glance'" (46). It is true that Emma suspects something wrong in the line "Thy ready wit the word will soon supply." As she comments to herself, just to let the idea drop, "Humph – Harriet's ready wit! All

the better. A man must be very much in love indeed, to describe her so" (46). The irony here is strengthened by the fact that Emma feels intellectually superior to Harriet, as she indeed is – she is the one that has *deciphered* the charade, she is the one who has a "ready wit." And yet, the reader knows that Emma, despite her cleverness, has mis-read almost the whole thing.

A more substantial understanding of the ironies in this charade might be possible when the reader considers the scene of Elton's declaration to Emma. Before that, however, other clues are offered in the narrative that support Elton's interest in, and admiration for, Emma. Interestingly, it is through Emma that these suspicions are filtered:

> She [Emma] was vexed. It did appear – there was no concealing it – exactly like the pretence of being in love with her, instead of Harriet; an inconstancy, if real, the most contemptible and abominable! And she had difficulty in behaving with temper. (80)

Such instances certainly help to increase the ambiguity of the narrative, mainly when one reads the novel for the first time. Because up to a certain point in the narrative, the reader, guided by Emma's (wrong) conjectures, is as ignorant as herself. Up to a certain point – and it is difficult to say precisely what point that is, as it may vary from reader to reader – the narrator, in her superior knowledge, chooses to withhold information, staying in the same level of knowledge as Emma. Considering Emma as a "fallible filter" the reader could as well dismiss, in a hasty reading, her assumption above, concerning Elton's falling in love with her. The fact is that *Emma* is a novel that problematizes the question of reading and interpretative procedures, always inviting a careful look at its discourse, its construction. As Emma does in her "creative interpretation" of texts (literal or figurative) around her, we are also always

intimated to make connections, to go back, to go forward, so as to piece together the deliberate blanks Austen has scattered throughout her narrative.

Accordingly, let me return now to the moment of Mr. Elton's declaration to Emma, specifically to his comments on Harriet Smith and to how that might contribute to a further understanding of the ironies in the charade:

> (...) *I* think seriously of Miss Smith! "(...) *I* think seriously of Miss Smith! – Miss Smith is a very good sort of girl; and I should be happy to see her respectably settled. I wish her extremely well: and, no doubt, there are men who might not object to – Every body has their level: but as for myself, I am not, I think, quite so much at a loss. I need not so totally despair of an equal alliance, as to be addressing myself to Miss Smith! – No, madam, my visits to Hartfield have been for yourself only; and the encouragement I received" - (85).

Mr. Elton's speech reveals his concern with social and economic ranks, insofar as they also denote power – "Every body has their level" and "I need not so totally despair of an equal alliance, so as to be addressing myself to Miss Smith!" – a fact that, retrospectively, has been already implied in the words of the charade: "wealth/pomp of kings;" "Lords of the earth;" "luxury;" "monarch of the seas;" "power." Therefore, the improbability of an attachment between Mr. Elton and Harriet, whose common surname, "Smith," adds to her being a nobody, has long been suggested by the narrative.

The other instances which illustrate Emma's creation of narratives are all related to Jane Fairfax, who is "an orphan, the only child of Mrs. Bates's youngest daughter" (103), a character that serves as a counterpoint to Emma herself. Without parents and relatives to count on, Jane's whole education has been undertaken by the Campbells (friends of her father), with whom she has lived since she was nine, coming to visit her grandmother in Highbury only from time to time. Jane is a clever, beautiful, talented and accomplished woman, who knows how to play the piano, how

to sing, how to talk in society. But because she is poor, and her relatives cannot support her, she has two possibilities in life: either to marry or earn her living as a governess. In one of the discussions the novel provides about Jane's future, Jane herself refers to the offices that employ governesses as "Offices for the sale – not quite of human flesh – but of human intellect" (193). Juliet McMaster points out that "the alignment [of the work of a governess] with the slave trade is explicit; there is a passing hint, too, of prostitution." (126)

Jane comes to Highbury in a moment when most inhabitants of the village – specially Emma – have been anxiously expecting the arrival of Frank Churchill, Mr. Weston's son. This is how the narrative develops:

> (...) Highbury, instead of welcoming that perfect novelty which had been so long promised it – Mr. Frank Churchill – must put up for the present with Jane Fairfax, who could bring only the freshness of a two years absence.
> Emma was sorry; - to have to pay civilities to a person she did not like through three long months! – to be always doing more than she wished and less than she ought! Why she did not like Jane Fairfax might be a difficult question to answer; Mr. Knightley had once told her it was because she saw in her the really accomplished young woman, which she wanted to be thought herself (...). (...) but there was such coldness and reserve – such apparent indifference whether she pleased or not (...). (105)

It is interesting to notice that the first part of this passage mixes up the narrator's words with Emma's perspective and point of view, a fact that is made clearer when we come to the sentence "Emma was sorry." And yet – the expression "that perfect novelty" together with the way "Frank Churchill" is graphically disposed in the paragraph – visibly, but at the same time as if looming from the text, reveals an irony that seems to spring from the narrator only. The passage is also revealing of the importance, interest and effect that a gentleman's visit, in a village like Highbury, in early nineteenth-century England, might have on its people. It is thus only

comprehensible that Emma – dissatisfied with the limitations of the "text-world" presented before her – invents another.

In his discussion of irony in *Flaubert: The Uses of Uncertainty*, Jonathan Culler elaborates on certain narrative devices employed by authors – such as "the identification of a narrative posture, and the use of characters as reflectors" – that become vehicles for irony (202). Culler goes on to say that "the text throws up sentences which the reader finds it difficult to recuperate, and the assumption that this is the result of deliberate artistry opens up a space of potential irony" (202). Such is precisely the case of a text like *Emma*, mainly as it concerns the intricacies involving Emma Woodhouse-Frank Churchill-Jane Fairfax.

Even before Frank's arrival in Highbury, he is *the* topic of conversation. And although he has actually never been to the place, the narrator ironically informs that "Mr. Frank Churchill was one of the boasts of Highbury" (9). The comments and praises made about him, as well as the connections already existing between the Woodhouses and the Westons, immediately provide the expectation of an attachment between Emma and Frank. This is how the narrator, who mediates Emma's perceptions, describes their first meeting:

> The Frank Churchill so long talked of, so high in interest, was actually before her – he was presented to her, and she did not think too much had been said in his praise; he was a very good looking young man; height, air, address, all were unexceptionable, and his countenance had a great deal of the spirit and liveliness of his father's; he looked quick and sensible. She felt immediately that she should like him; and there was a well-bred of manner, and a readiness to talk, which convinced her that he came intending to be acquainted with her, and that acquainted they soon must be. (121)

Such conclusions on Emma's part are at the same time confirmed – Frank actually brings new breath to the monotony of Highbury, and to that of Emma's life, especially

after her disappointment for having been blind in relation to Mr. Elton – and, ironically, gradually undermined by the narrator: for, as the narrative develops, the reader gets to know that the degree of intimacy between Frank and Jane does not correspond to what appearances indicate. Not only that, but because retrospectively the reader gets to know – together with Emma – that Frank and Jane have been secretly engaged since their being together in Weymouth, it becomes clear that all those gallantries addressed at Emma have all been a way of hiding his real relationship with Jane. Not only does Austen play with the notion of first impressions – a recurrent motif in her novels (*Pride and Prejudice*, for instance, was originally entitled as *First Impressions*), but in *Emma* she takes the chance to use the 'Frank-Jane subplot' as a way to explicitly ironize the heroine. This aspect is responsible for transforming Emma from ironist into target (see the discussion of irony in the Box-Hill picnic scene below). Before Frank's arrival, Emma acts as puppeteer of other people's lives: at the opening of the novel, she triumphs for having been the matchmaker of the Westons' wedding; we also see her controling Harriet's life, a control that ends in disaster, to the extent of inducing her to refuse Robert Martin's offer of marriage. Frank's arrival problematizes this conception of Emma as God, or puppeteer, or ironist. For though Emma continues to give vent to her imagination, thus making conjectures about other people's lives – in this case specifically, Jane's life – she is thoroughly unaware of being now herself a puppet in Frank's hands. That is, Emma's initial suspicions about Jane's 'improper' attachment with Mr. Dixon are further developed and 'mis-threaded' by Emma through Frank's stirring of her imagination. This fact illustrates another instance of Emma's *creative interpretation*, this time concerning Mr. Dixon's rescue of Jane in a boat accident in Weymouth. Nevertheless, again as in the charade, Emma is only partially wrong. For Jane has in

fact a secret relationship – not with Mr. Dixon, as Emma has suspected – but with the very person, Frank Churchill, that has ironically shared all those conjectures with her.

In a retrospective reading, one becomes more fully aware of Austen's artistry in the weaving of this 'Emma/Frank/Jane narrative,' which, mediated by the arrival of the piano, is responsible for the generation of perhaps the most interesting instances of structural ironies in the novel. Several critics writing on Austen's *Emma* have called attention to the role of the piano, another *diegetic detail*, in Schor's sense, as it reveals, if even subrepticiously, the psychological complexities of the characters Jane and Frank; the piano actually constitutes an object which embodies erotic nuances. John Wiltshire, for instance, points out that "Frank's gift of the piano is (...) loaded with implications – cultural, social and erotic – that Emma cannot see" (72). In a re-reading of the key-passages dealing with Emma's conjectures about Jane-Mr. Dixon, "validated" by Frank, one may actually feel all the intensity of their passion, which must remain mute (though it is also enhanced) by its secrecy; a passion that must find another language through which to express itself. Their passion thus *speaks* through music, metonymically represented by the piano itself, the moments when Jane plays, and by their singing together – whose harmony is described by the narrator as "the sweet sounds of the united voices" (145). The structural ironies revealed by the narrative stem exactly from the fact that in agreeing with Emma's "discoveries," Frank actually communicates to the reader his real feelings towards Jane, as the following passage shows. Frank says:

> "Indeed you injure me if you suppose me unconvinced. Your reasonings carry my judgment along with them entirely. At first, while I supposed you satisfied that Col. Campbell was the giver, I saw it only as paternal kindness, and thought it the most natural thing in the world. But when you mentioned Mrs. Dixon, I felt how much more probably that it should be the tribute of warm female friendship. And now I can see it in no other light than as an offering of love."

> There was no occasion to press the matter farther. *The conviction seemed real; he looked as if he felt it.* (...) (139; emphasis added)

There is a whole gradation in the way Emma's conjectures have been formed: first, Col. Campbell – paternal kindness; second, Mrs. Dixon – female friendship; third, Mr. Dixon – an offering of love. Again, Emma only partially mis-reads the "piano-text." Perhaps, unlike what Wiltshire says, Emma *can perceive* the erotic and cultural implications inherent to the piano, otherwise she would have stayed with one of the previous 'guesses.' She just misses the giver. Some time later in the narrative, in an also significant passage concerning the piano, Emma not only notices Jane's "deep blush of consciousness" (155), but thinks, "- This amiable, upright, perfect Jane Fairfax was apparently cherishing very reprehensible feelings" (155). The choice of adjectives here clearly signal irony. Actually, because Emma is so sure of her centrality and importance in the world of Highbury, and in the always gallant way Frank addresses her; because she is so ignorant in matters of romance (how ironic that she should be a matchmaker!) she is unable to perceive the attachment between Frank and Jane.

Interestingly, in terms of irony, the narrator's words at the end of the passage above give rise to ambiguity, thus making it more complex. Considering that the words have been filtered through Emma, they mean that Frank's conviction is that the piano has been an offering of love by Mr. Dixon, as Emma believes. However, if one considers the passage as another instance of 'superior knowledge' shared by the narrator with the reader, as it also seems to indicate, then the sentence "he looked as if he felt it" (as we come to know later how much in fact Frank *feels* for Jane) actually contradicts what has been previously framed in the world of the characters (represented here by Emma and Frank). The irony in this passage is also constructed

stylistically so as to actually dramatize the unsaid: the lack of complement in "an offering of love" (by whom? Frank doesn't say); the contrast created by the initial assertiveness inherent to terms like "conviction" and "real," which is later diluted by the verb "seemed;" the vagueness and indefiniteness also corroborated by the pronoun "it," in "he looked as if he felt it" – all these linguistic aspects, because they result from, or better because they actually constitute, Austen's ironic mode of saying things, help to create a textual space of uncertainty for the reader.

Such a textual space of uncertainty is actually enacted, dramatized in one of the novel's chapters (in my edition, chapter 5 of volume III), that could well be entitled "Mr. Knightley as interpreter," or "Myself creating what I saw," a line Mr. Knightley has quoted from Cowper's "The Winter Evening." The chapter is not only emblematic of Austen's artistry in weaving her narratives through what Woolf refers to as "apparent trivialities," or details, but is highly interesting for the change it provides of *narrative-character focus*; by now, the perceptions, conjectures, assumptions are all filtered through Mr. Knightley, instead of Emma, as it occurs in most of the narrative. The fact that Mr. Knightley "began to suspect [Frank] of some double-dealing in his pursuit of Emma" (220) makes him decide to observe Frank, Jane and Emma, so as to unveil the "covert meaning" (224) of their actions. The chapter abounds in the employment of words related to, and derivative from, the same semantic field of "sight:" /look/, /looking/, looked/; /see/, /seen/, /saw/, /seeing/; /eye/, /eyes/; /observe/, /observation/; /glance/; /a glance/; /perception/, /perceived/; /watched/, /watching/; /sight/; /blinded/, making a total of thirty-eight occurrences. What people say here does not communicate enough for Mr. Knightley to stand firm on his hypothesis; the precariousness of verbal language entitles him to be attentive to

the non-verbal nuances of the characters – not only the way they exchange, but also the fact that they avoid, one another's looks or glances.

In fact, speech is as important as silence; expression as relevant as evasion. As the narrator – via Knightley – says early in the chapter: "That Emma was [Frank's] object appeared indisputable. Everything declared it; his own attentions, his father's hints, his mother-in-law's guarded silence; it was all in unison; words, conduct, discretion, and indiscretion, told the same story" (220). The irony created in the chapter arises from several sources, or sides, so pervasive it is: first, the discrepancy between what appearances indicate to Knightley (Frank's interest in Emma), and what reality seems to hide – "[Knightley] had seen a look, more than a single look, at Miss Fairfax, which, from the admirer of Miss Woodhouse, seemed somewhat out of place" (221); second, the reader's "superior intelligence" (224) – to use an expression the narrator herself uses – in relation to Knightley's interpretations; third, the fact that Frank unwillingly reveals a secret – relating to Mr. Perry's plan of setting up his carriage – a piece of information he had known through one of Jane's letters to him, which almost puts at risk his deeper secret, that of his engagement with Jane Fairfax; fourth, the contrast between the 'innocence' of the game they later play ("the quietness of the game made it particularly eligible for Mr. Woodhouse" [223]), and the "double-dealing" (an expression used twice in the chapter; other significant terms are "secret" and "to puzzle/puzzled") it coverts. As Knightley perceives, "these letters were but the vehicle for *gallantry* and *trick*. It was a *child's play*, chosen to *conceal a deeper game* on Frank Churchill's part" (224; emphasis added). And Knightley is right: the "letter-game" in which Frank uses the words "blunder" and "Dixon" constitutes an indirect way for Frank to tell Jane first of his foolish mistake (in commenting about a piece of information that he had known through one of her secret

letters) and second ("Dixon") of continuing to stir Emma's imagination as to the romance she has invented for Jane and Mr. Dixon.

To further illustrate the fact that Austen's style is at the service of irony I would like to turn now to two passages concerning Mrs. Elton, perhaps the most ridiculed and satirized character in *Emma.*

> When the visit was returned, Emma made up her mind. She could then see more and judge better. (...) she had a quarter of an hour of the lady's conversation to herself, and could composedly attend to her; and the quarter of an hour quite convinced her that Mrs. Elton was a vain woman, extremely well satisfied with herself, and thinking much of her own importance; that she meant to shine and be very superior, but with manners which had been formed in a bad school, pert and familiar; that all her notions were drawn from one set of people, and one style of living; that if not foolish, she was ignorant, and that her society would certainly do Mr. Elton no good. (173-4)

Interestingly, Emma's criticism of Mrs. Elton applies to Emma herself: after all, isn't Emma also "vain and extremely well satisfied with herself?" Doesn't she also think "much of her own importance?" Doesn't Emma mean "to shine and be very superior" in the Highbury world? Indeed, through Emma's negative observations of Mrs. Elton, the reader is also given a chance to evaluate Emma herself. But the irony here does not result only from the discrepancy between Emma's perceptions and judgments of Mrs. Elton and her lack of awareness in relation to her own negative qualities. The irony is already suggested by Austen's stylistic mode of cataloguing and enumerating.

The other passage selected, concerning Mrs. Elton, is the following. This time, Mrs. Elton herself speaks:

> "Only think! Well, that must be infinitely provoking! I have quite a horror of upstarts. Maple Grove has given me a thorough disgust to people of that sort; for there is a family in that neighbourhood who are such an annoyance to my brother and sister from the airs they give themselves! Your description of Mrs. Churchill made me think of them directly. People of the name of Tupman, very lately settled there, and

> encumbered with many low connections, but giving themselves immense airs, and expecting to be on a footing with the old established families. A year and a half is the very utmost that they can have lived at West Hall; and how they got their fortune nobody knows. They came from Birmingham, which is not a place to promise much, you know, Mr. Weston. One has not great hopes from Birmingham. I always say there is something direful in the sound: but nothing more is positively known of the Tupmans, though a good many things I assure you are suspected; and yet by their manners they evidently think themselves equal even to my brother, Mr. Suckling, who happens to be one of their nearest neighbours. It is infinitely too bad. Mr. Suckling, who has been eleven years a resident at Maple Grove, and whose father had it before him – I believe, at least – I am almost sure that old Mr. Suckling had completed the purchase before his death." (199-200)

The way Mrs. Elton refers to the Tupmans – as "upstarts," as "giving themselves immense airs, and expecting to be on a footing with the old established families" – immediately reminds the reader of Mrs. Elton herself, and of the way she behaves when she arrives in Highbury. Austen's criticism of this kind of society is conveyed by the criteria such characters base their assumptions upon: a family is important and respectable, following Mrs. Elton's values, to the extent that they have lived longer at a place; money, of course, is crucial, but one must know as well *how* the fortune has been obtained; they are also judged in terms of their place of origin. Earlier in the narrative, Emma is inclined to refuse an invitation for dinner at the Coles because though they "were very good sort of people – friendly, liberal, and unpretending" – they were, in Emma's opinion, "of low origin, in trade, and only moderately genteel" (132). As she arrogantly states, "The Coles were very respectable in their way, but they ought to be taught that it was not for them to arrange the terms on which the superior families would visit them. This lesson, she very much feared, they would receive only from herself (...)" (132). Ironically, the Woodhouses are the last families to receive the Coles's invitation to their dinner, and Emma, arguing at first that her anxiety was due to her wanting "the power of refusal" (132), finally accepts "the

insult," when it comes at last. It is not the Coles, but Emma, who, having to swallow her pride, receives a lesson.

The ironic reverberations that Mrs. Elton's speech above produces are enhanced by the consideration of previous descriptions of her, used either by the narrator or by other characters, such as Emma, or by passages written in free indirect discourse, i.e., passages that mix up narrator's words and Emma's perceptions. A relevant one is the following:

> *What* she [Mrs Elton] was, must be uncertain; but *who* she was, might be found out; and setting aside the 10,000l. it did not appear that she was at all Harriet's superior. She brought no name, no blood, no alliance. Miss Hawkins was the youngest of the two daughters of a Bristol – merchant, of course, he must be called; but, as the whole of the profits of his mercantile life appeared so very moderate, it was not unfair to guess the dignity of his line of trade had been very moderate also. Part of every winter she had been used to spend in Bath; but Bristol was her home, the very heart of Bristol; for though the father and mother had died some years ago, an uncle remained – in the law line – nothing more distinctly honoured was hazarded of him, than that he was in the law line; and with him the daughter had lived. Emma guessed him to be the drudge of some attorney, and too stupid to rise. And all the grandeur of the connection seemed dependent on the elder sister, who was *very well married*, to a gentleman in *a great way*, near Bristol, who kept two carriages! That was the wind-up of the history; that was the glory of Miss Hawkins. (116-7)

The echoes between this passage and the one quoted above, in which Mrs. Elton refers to the Tupmans, are quite clear: the concern about origins and connections; concern about *family* origins and *place* origins as well. The distinctions made, for instance, between Bath and Bristol are not merely geographical but embody social implications of Bath being a superior, because more fashionable, place than Bristol. Mrs. Elton uses the same criterion, or principle, of attributing value to a person/family based on her place of origin, when she says that Birmingham "is not a place to promise much" or "one has not great hopes from Birmingham" (199). The passage is

also representative of the way people's professional and work activities inform their class and economic status. The fact that Miss Hawkins's father was a merchant is seen by Emma as an aspect to be deplored. The same may be said in relation to her "guessing" (the verb is used twice in the passage) that Miss Hawkins's uncle must "be the drudge of some attorney, and too stupid to rise." The reader cannot fail to see an ironic touch here since John Knightley, Emma's brother-in-law, is also in the law line, and considered to be an important attorney in London. The verb "to rise" has a key role in the whole passage, that ultimately deals with both Emma's and (ironically) Mrs. Elton's refusal of, or resistance to, considering the inevitable mobility and eventual assimilation of less genteel families (as the Coles passage shows) in their social circles. As Juliet McMaster says in relation to trade, "it is not surprising that the gentry and professional classes felt somewhat threatened by the large changes that were coming with the Industrial Revolution, and tended to close ranks against the newly powerful and the *nouveaux riches*" (123). The way the novel's passage above finishes also draws one's attention both to the fact that Emma's and the narrator's ironic stances seem to overlap, and to the way in which irony is generated through exaggeration – "grandeur," "very well married," "great way," "two carriages," "glory." At the end, the 'history' of Mrs. Elton's is not hers, but of her limited (according to Emma) connections.

A comprehensive discussion of the different ways irony manifests itself in *Emma* is something unattainable. Not only because every passage selected refuses closure and resolution, a fact that attests to the elusive and mercurial nature of the figure, but because many other passages call for analysis, so pervasive is its use in the novel. But I would like to conclude this section with a passage that perhaps summarizes not only Emma's personality – one that is marked by intelligence, wit,

irony and subversion – but the whole pattern of the novel as a comedy both of romance and manners, in which the heroine, Emma, must undergo a process of self-discovery and knowledge. The scene takes place at the Box-Hill picnic, when Emma is cruelly unkind to Miss Bates. Frank is first speaking:

> "(...) Ladies and gentlemen – I am ordered by Miss Woodhouse to say, that she waves her right of knowing exactly what you may be thinking of, and only requires something very entertaining from each of you, in a general way. Here are seven of you, besides myself, (who, she is pleased to say, am very entertaining already,) and she only demands from each of you either one thing very clever, be it prose or verse, original or repeated – or two things moderately clever – or three things very dull indeed, and she engages to laugh heartily at them all."
>
> "Oh! Very well," exclaimed Miss Bates, "then I need not be uneasy. 'Three things very dull indeed.' That will just do for me, you know. I shall be sure to say three dull things as soon as I ever open my mouth, shan't I? – (looking round with the most good-humoured dependence on every body's assent) – Do not you think I shall?"
>
> Emma could not resist.
>
> "Ah! ma'am, but there may be a difficulty. Pardon me – but you will be limited as to number – only three at once".
>
> Miss Bates, deceived by the mock ceremony of her manner, did not immediately catch her meaning; but, when it burst on her, it could not anger, though a slight blush showed that it could pain her.
>
> "Ah! – well - to be sure. Yes, I see what she means, (turning to Mr. Knightley,) and I will try to hold my tongue. I must make myself very disagreeable, or she would not have said such a thing to an old friend." (238-9)

This passage is perhaps the richest in the novel in illustrating a piece of ironic discourse where we have not only a clear role of the participants (Emma = ironist; Miss Bates = target and interpreter; all the others present in the picnic = audience, interpreters; though the role is really enacted by Mr. Knightley), but also of the functions of irony. The dramatic power of the scene is increased by its taking place during a picnic, in the open air, where everybody is supposed to entertain themselves and one another. The indirectness inherent to ironic strategy – that makes Emma be aggressive in a seemingly unaggressive way – prevents Miss Bates from "immediately

catch[ing] her meaning." The narrator's choice of words – "but, when it *burst* on her, it could not anger, though a slight *blush* showed that it could *pain* her" – are significant to reveal Hutcheon's assumption that irony has an edge, and that it is often a cutting one (15). Indeed, the relationship between ironist (Emma) and target (Miss Bates) is certainly one that invokes notions of hierarchy and subordination; the central protagonist takes advantage of her social and intellectual superiority to mock and ridicule the other character (Miss Bates). As Knightley tells Emma later on, "Were she your equal in situation – but, Emma, consider how far this is from being the case. She is poor; she has sunk from the comforts she was born to; and, if she live to an old age, must probably sink more. Her situation should secure your compassion. It was badly done indeed!- (...)" (242). Knightley's reprimand entails a criticism of the use of irony as a strategy that *does* things through speech – irony as such is a negative weapon, a knife that hurts.

Hutcheon's discussion of the subject, however, allows for a more positive way of conceiving irony mainly when she considers it as a "powerful tool in the fight against a dominant authority – which irony is said to work to destroy" (27). Though every reader (or most of them) might share with Knightley's opinion of how cruel to Miss Bates Emma has been, I believe that unlike Knightley the reader might not so readily chasten Emma for her improper behaviour. That is, one might also view Emma's outburst as an expression of her impatience with stupidity and intellectual, creative limitations, an aspect denounced by Austen early in the narrative when the narrator describes Miss Bates: "Miss Bates stood in the worst predicament in the world for having much of the public favour; and she had no intellectual superiority to make atonement to herself, or frighten those who might hate her, into outward respect" (11).

These considerations lead one to think about the general uses of irony in the novel, in which it plays such a dominant role, that one could say that irony actually constitutes Austen's very principle of discourse. As the analysis of irony in *Emma* reveals, Austen's use of the strategy is both very subtle and varied in its manifestations and functions. In saying that irony constitutes Austen's very principle of discourse I mean that the way she constructs her narrative, the way she delineates plot, characterization, dialogues, and how all of these inform the ideologies at work in her novels – threaded as they are by means of irony – constitutes a challenge for the reader in the sense that the words on the page always communicate more than what they appear to say. The examples chosen for discussion are all significant to show how Austen's narrative actually consists of a "charade," a "puzzle." In this sense, I started the analysis with the novel's opening (always remarkable in Austen) and showed how irony is created by her stylistic devices – lexical choice (as in the verb "seemed"), the parallel construction of the sentences and the punctuation.

The definition of irony as a conflict of two meanings – one apparent and another underlying – is already perceptible in the way the novel opens, and it is further developed in the narrative. Attention to the way the novel is generally structured has revealed that irony in *Emma* also arises from the discrepancy between "what is" and "what seems to be." For example, irony is achieved by the simultaneous, though competing, development of two narratives in relation to Emma: at the same time that the narrative refers to Emma's power, authority, assertiveness and independence – an aspect which is mainly perceived in the way she relates to her father and to women – it also provides indications that Emma must develop and grow in emotional and social parameters; such an aspect is mainly perceived in her relationship with Knightley.

The diegetic details – Harriet's portrait, Mr. Elton's charade, the piano, the letter-games – are elaborated in a way that two parallel 'stories' get narrated: the one provided by the narrator, and the other by the character herself, as a result of her 'imaginist' tendencies. The dialogic, or double-voiced narrative is also characteristic of the way the narrator introduces new characters, as in the case of Frank Churchill and Mrs. Elton: competing meanings (because ironic) usually derive from the gap between what the narrator says about a certain character, what the character says about him/herself, and what other characters say about him/her. Such is the case with the passages in which Emma evaluates Mrs. Elton (Emma's words 'force' the reader to evaluate Emma herself) and in which Mrs. Elton evaluates the Tupmans (her words also make the reader judge Mrs. Elton herself). Underlying these ironic reverberations one finds a pattern characteristic not only to *Emma*, but common to all Austen novels: the depiction of a social microcosmos in its appearance, but also, and at the same time, the undercutting of its apparent values and manners. The use of the diegetic details, for instance, that would pass as trivial for an inattentive reader, bear the function to reveal wider questions of class distinctions, power relations, propriety, decorum and hypocrisy. In this sense, the analysis also shows how irony is generated by the contrast between private refinement and social display, by politeness and artifice, and by naturalness and dissimulation.

Culler's argument that there are certain *narrative devices* that become vehicles for irony was observed in several passages: sometimes through the use of free indirect discourse (the mixture of narrator's words and character's perspective and point of view), sometimes by the use of Emma as a fallible filter, and other times by what he calls "deliberate artistry." In some examples, because of the difficulty in recuperating

the ironic meaning, both my comments and conclusions are offered as tentative, as possibilities.

Furthermore, two images are significant to indicate the functions of irony as employed in Austen's novels. That of the author, as Woolf says, in her corner, laughing at the world, and that of Austen saying that she would prefer to be hung were she forbidden to never relax and laugh at herself or other people. I believe this is what Allan Wilde means by "irony as a mode of consciousness, an all-encompassing vision of life" (3). Austen's use of irony should thus be seen *not* as separate from the way she imagines the world. Irony, in this case, constitutes her very strategy in the fight against a society with so scant opportunities to women, if there are any at all. As Kate Fullbrook says in "Jane Austen and the Comic Negative," "[Austen] speaks precisely in the voice of the culture she mocks – hers is one of the most civilised voices in English fiction, and one of the most subversive" (41). It is mainly such a duality that characterizes her writings, and which makes critics uneasy to accommodate her in terms of labels: romance and reason/realism; details and balance; sense and sensibility; the parlour and the world; domesticity and politics; order and irony. The "all is well that ends well" notion does not fit Austen, though as a writer of comedies, her plots always end in marriage, the so-called happy end. But the fact is that, as Brooke Allen aptly argues in "Jane Austen for the Nineties," "even her Cinderella endings imply a lifetime of sustained moral effort beyond the longed-for marriages" (17). An account of these tensions must be due for a portrayal of Austen and her fictional world. Therefore, the challenges Austen poses for being transposed to the screen also encompass a consideration of such aspects.

Notes

1. *Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture.* Harlow: Longman, 1992.

2. Troost, Linda and Greenfield, Sayre (eds.). *Jane Austen in Hollywood.* Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1998.

3. Isotopy is a term that denotes "the repetition of an idea in a text on *different levels* and through *different signs.*" In: Childers & Hentzi (eds.). *The Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1995, p. 161.

4. *Jane Austen's Letters*, as reprinted in: Parrish, Stephen M. (ed.). Jane Austen: *Emma.* A Norton Critical Edition. New York: Norton, 1993, p. 337.

5. Compare this view with the one presented in the opening paragraph of *Pride and Prejudice*: "It is a truth, universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife."

Chapter IV

Adaptation and Irony

"Irony is no joking matter ."

(Friedrich Schlegel, as qtd. in Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony*, 230)

Hutcheon says that "irony 'happens' (...) in all kinds of discourses (verbal, visual, aural), in common speech as well as in highly crafted aesthetic form, in so-called high art as well as in popular culture" (5). She provides examples of irony in music, exhibitions, films. Likewise, Raymond W. Gibbs, in *The Poetics of Mind*, talks about the generation of irony in parades and in clothing fashions, as well as in popular films that "mock the high seriousness of [previous] films" (369). This is certainly the case of Heckerling's *Clueless* in relation to more 'straight' adaptations of Austen's *Emma*. Very often we also come across ironic meanings in advertisements, the news, and music videos. Based on this premise, one would not think of irony, at first, as constituting a hindrance for the transposition of verbal ironic texts – such as Austen's novels – to the screen. But this does not seem to be the case. Perhaps irony does not constitute an impossible obstacle to be overcome by adapters; but the fact is that the relationship between adaptation and irony is far from being a non-problematic one.

Considering such a problematic relationship, the aim of this chapter is first to account for the aspects which are involved in the process of adaptation, and how that relates to the question of irony; second, to investigate the possibilities the cinema may have, as distinct from literature (specifically the novel), for the creation and expression of irony.

Andrew Davies, who wrote the screenplay of the 1996 British television version of *Emma* (and also of the 1995 television version of *Pride and Prejudice*) says

that "the novel [*Emma*] offers a brilliant variety of characters and a rich seam of humour and irony, which [he] believes lends itself wonderfully well to a dramatic treatment" (Birtwistle & Conklin, *The Making of Emma*, 7). Indeed, it is exactly for their humorous and ironic vein, among other aspects, that Austen's novels have been greatly and widely admired throughout these two centuries. But instead of recognizing the difficulty that (Austen's) irony poses for the screen, Davies's words reveal that – together with "a brilliant variety of characters and a rich seam of humour" – irony constitutes an asset to be dealt with by the screenwriter. He views irony as belonging to the same level as that of characters and humour, and, consequently, as amenable to be transposed to the screen as those elements.

Such is an interesting point of departure for the discussion here, for, unlike Davies's optimism regarding the transposition of irony to the screen, other analyses of the relationship between irony and adaptation have shown how contentious the issue is. In this respect, Wallace S. Watson, writing about "Conradian ironies and the Conrad films," says that "the difficulties of translating a literary to a cinematic narrative are many, and they are compounded when the literary text is as introspective, as complex in narrational technique, and as ironic as the typical Conrad novel" (16). After analyzing, for instance, three film versions of Conrad's novel *Victory*, Watson concludes that "these adaptations all transform what is perhaps Conrad's philosophically bleakest novel into sentimental love stories with facile endings" (21).

Likewise, in an article on "Adaptation and the Past in British Film and Television," John Caughie refers to "texts whose central defining ironic trope resists easy translation into the visual" (45). In order to illustrate his argument, Caughie considers, as an example, the case of the famous opening paragraph of Jane Austen's

Pride and Prejudice – "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" (51) – words which, in the novel, are ironically uttered by the narrator. Due to the challenge posited for the adaptation of this opening, that sets the whole ironic tone of the novel (some lines below, the reader confronts a desperate Mrs. Bennet, in need of marrying her five daughters), but at the same time unwilling to lose the chance of using Austen's famous words, adapters of plays, series and films – also perhaps moved by a sense of faithfulness to Austen – tend to make the narrator speak, in this specific case of *Pride and Prejudice*, through the character Elizabeth Bennet, the novel's lively and intelligent heroine. In so doing, as Caughie aptly asserts, "[the transference] assigns to [the character] a knowledge of her social and historical situation (...) which in the novel is shared between author and reader over the heads of the characters" (45). This film version is exactly the 1995 television adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, also scripted by Andrew Davies. In the film, which does not start with these words, Elizabeth (after knowing about the arrival of two eligible men in the Longbourn village) says, in a kind of aside, "a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife."

Caughie's argument alludes to another aspect concerning adaptation, besides the question of faithfulness to the 'original,' source text (a more general question in dealing with adaptations). More specifically, adapters have a tendency to endow some of Austen's heroines (as Elizabeth Bennet above) with the knowing irony inherent to Austen's narrators. The most recent adaptation of Austen, *Mansfield Park* (1999), scripted and directed by Patricia Rozema, constitutes a very interesting case. Drawing on material not only from Austen's novel, but also from her early writings, journals and letters, the film creates a Fanny Price that resembles and embodies the author Jane

Austen herself, whereas in Austen's novel she is only the heroine. The opening of the film – in which gigantic pieces of paper cover the screen, and the very action of writing, with ink gradually producing words, is shown – is already symptomatic of the adapter's intention to transcend the limits of *Mansfield Park*, not only geographically, but intellectually speaking, so as to encompass aspects related to creativity and literary production. The film emphasizes Fanny's habit of reading and writing since her childhood and adolescence; when she becomes an adult, this habit is not only enhanced, but the viewer is confronted with a character that looks directly at her/him, uttering witty remarks (taken from Austen's biographical material), thus also laughing at the world surrounding her. In this film, Fanny is portrayed as both the heroine and, in some parts, the narrator. Paradoxical as it may seem, some of the 'infidelities' one finds in Rozema's adaptation derives from her deliberate intention to expand on the limits of Austen's novel by means of materials belonging to Austen herself. In other words, she 'violates' the world of the novel by being faithful to the author.

These are some of the contradictions one comes across when dealing with the matter of adaptation. Though it is common sense to consider that to adapt is to change, to modify, so as to make it anew[1], most of the discussions on adaptations revolve around questions of fidelity to the 'original.' George Bluestone, in his *Novels into Film*, mentions some of the statements usually made by such 'fidelity' critics: "The film is true to the spirit of the book;" "It's incredible how they butchered the novel;" "It cuts out key passages, but it's still a good film;" "Thank God they changed the ending" (5). However, as Morris Beja, in *Film and Literature*, pondering over the 'guiding principles' the filmmaker would have at her/his disposal when adapting literature, questions: "What relationship should a film have to the original source? Should it be "faithful?" Can it be? To what?" (qtd. in McFarlane, *Novel to Film*, 9).

In "Adaptation," Dudley Andrew discusses the concept of transposition of one medium into another in relation to the matter of interpretation. He remarks that "in a strong sense adaptation is the appropriation of meaning from a prior text" (421). This appropriation of meaning has several gradations: it may vary from, in one extreme, a relation of fidelity to the "original" text, or it may have a relation of simply "referring," or alluding, to the earlier text, in the other extreme (420). In any case, the process of adaptation not only involves "appropriation of a prior meaning," but also a process of selection, choice, substitution, addition, cuts, and certainly an interpretation as well as modification of the material to be translated and represented in the other medium. Andrew explains that "the adaptation can feature the original sign as its signified or its referent. Adaptations claiming fidelity bear the original as a signified, whereas those inspired or derived from an earlier text stand in relation of referring to the original" (420). But considering that to adapt is to appropriate a prior meaning, it is crucial for the screenwriter and filmmaker to have a general understanding of the text to be adapted in order to decide which aspects of the 'original' text's signified should be foregrounded in the adapted text. In other words, the process of adaptation already constitutes an *a priori* reading; as such, as Andrew argues, "it can put into play the intricate mechanisms of its signifiers only in response to a general understanding of the signified it aspires to have constructed at the end of the process" (421). It is exactly this fact that makes it so difficult for one to accept the so-called fidelity principle to the source text, when dealing with adaptations. Beja's "Can it be faithful? To what?" keeps echoing in our minds. Even if the adaptation claims to be faithful, it will always be a partial faithfulness. As Peter Reynolds reminds us, "What the spectator sees and hears is what he or she is allowed to see, and to set the agenda by foregrounding one issue or set of issues is to marginalize others" (1).

Another significant reason for highlighting one issue at the expense of others relates to the process of adaptation as involving other *texts* surrounding or permeating the more tangible text of the novel to be visually translated. In "The Literary Adaptation: An Introduction," John Ellis refutes this common and traditional assumption that to adapt is "to reproduce the contents of the novel on the screen" (3). For him, the real aim of adaptation lies elsewhere; as he claims, "the adaptation trades upon the memory of the novel, a memory that can derive from actual reading, or, as is more likely with a classic of literature, a generally circulated memory" (3). As such, a discussion of adaptation will always entail a consideration of the source text itself, plus the way that text is viewed and inserted in a wider cultural and historical context, i.e., the circulated discourses accompanying the source text.

The aspects the adapter chooses to foreground and neglect are guided by several other factors, including the demands of the market, the reputation of the author to be adapted, the existence of a ready-made audience, the different ways the author has already been read by the critical tradition, the way the adapter understands the source text and the peculiarities of the media through which the texts are expressed. Such aspects are responsible for locating adaptation at a crosscutting of dialogues, which are enacted and actualized among different authors and media, different texts, different audiences, different cultures and different times. Awareness concerning these issues provides a relevant basis for a discussion of the effects that the adapted text creates. In this sense, the process of adaptation also involves going beyond the "question of representing the written work in relation to [its] time," so as to "bring to representation the time that knows them – that is our time – in the time when they originated" (Benjamin, qtd. in Jauss, 165). Considering Austen adaptations, Troost and Greenfield say that, because some of "the concerns at the center of [her] plots –

sex, romance, and money – are central concerns in our era," these adaptations are also perhaps more symptomatic "of our own moment in time than about Austen's writing." As they conclude, "in watching them, we watch ourselves" (3, 11).

These considerations point to the impossibility and inefficacy of using the fidelity principle as a guide and criterion for the reading of adaptations, since the intrinsic value of a film does not necessarily depend on its faithfulness to, or deviation from, the source text. More fruitful readings might result from the investigation of how verbal concepts are translated into visual language and what (new) effects are generated – as well as for what purposes – from the transformations, accommodations, and negotiations that the process of adaptation entails. I certainly side with Brian McFarlane in his *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation*, when he says that:

> The insistence on fidelity has led to a suppression of potentially more rewarding approaches to the phenomenon of adaptation. It tends to ignore the idea of adaptation as an example of convergence among the arts, perhaps a desirable - even inevitable - process in a rich culture; it fails to take into serious account what may be transferred from novel to film as distinct from what will require more complex processes of adaptation; and it marginalizes those production determinants which have nothing to do with the novel but may be powerfully influential upon the film. Awareness of such issues would be more useful than those many accounts of how films 'reduce' great novels. (10)

McFarlane goes on to talk about the issue of intertextuality as "represent[ing] a more sophisticated approach, in relation to adaptation, to the idea of the original novel as a 'resource'" (10). An interesting case concerning the several adaptations of Austen's novels is Emma Thompson's use of Shakespeare's sonnet "Let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments,"[2] in *Sense and Sensibility*, a sonnet that does not appear in the Austen novel. The poem is first used to metaphorically establish the love between Marianne and Willoughby and to convey what they

supposed to be its perennial nature. After their separation (Willoughby has changed her for a rich partner), when a desperate Marianne goes up the hill, in the rain, to remember the time she had spent together with Willoughby and to give vent to her suffering, the poem is used again, through voice-over. This time, the poem acquires a highly ironic overtone: "Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds; or bends with the remover to remove. Oh, no, it's an ever fixed mark, that looks on tempests and is never shaken." The parallelism created between this scene, with a stormy and rainy setting symbolizing Marianne's pain and despair, and the scene when she first met Willoughby – also on the hill, with fine weather, and Willoughby on horseback, the very incarnation of a promised prince – adds to the generation of irony. The use of the sonnet not only helps to structure the narrative – even if to contradict, by ironizing, a previous assumption – but aligns with the emphasis given by Emma Thompson's script to the romantic relations depicted in the film.

Significantly, Douglas McGrath, screenwriter and director of Miramax *Emma*, though recognizing Austen's humour, and the sparkling, vivacious quality of the novel, attributes its "timeless theme" to what he considers the love-story narrative: "For all the old dresses and the horses and the carriages, at the heart of it, all it's about is trying to find the right person to spend your life with. And that's all anybody cares about anyway – after hunger and illness. I would say it's number three on the wish list" (Masters, G7). It is an irony in itself that McGrath conceives the material in *Emma* in this way. The problem is not only that he reduces Austen's novel to the love-story narrative. It is rather that by doing so he subverts the relevance attributed to the issues that determine the very (im)possibility of the final "happy end." McGrath actually trivializes such issues – for the old dresses and the horses and the carriages constitute significant metonymic representations of the kind of society Austen's

novels not only depict but criticize. And he justifies his choice by aligning it with the general demands of the public ("And that's all anybody cares about anyway - after hunger and illness"). Austen's detailed realism and criticism of Pre-Victorian society – constructed mainly through her uses of irony – is substituted by, or better, reduced to, romance, Hollywood love-stories.

This aspect is certainly in consonance with the demands of the market, in which adaptations have always constituted a profitable commercial enterprise, as the following passage very well illustrates:

> The process of making *Pride and Prejudice*, though very hard work, was hugely enjoyable. There were many treasured moments. Perhaps one from early pre-production days will serve here to give a flavour: there was much interest from America in investing in the project and I was telephoned by one potential backer (it was not, I hasten to add, Arts and Entertainment Network, New York, who did eventually become our welcome co-producer). The call went like this:
> 'We're very interested in putting £1 million into *Pride and Prejudice.* Can you tell me who's written it?'
> Assuming that, if they were prepared to invest so much money, they would have already read the book, and just wanted to know who had adapted it, I said: 'Andrew Davies,' and then added as an afterthought: 'from the novel.'
> 'Novel? What novel?'
> 'Er... the novel. By Jane Austen.'
> 'How are you spelling that?'
> 'A.U.S.T.E.N.'
> 'Is she selling well?'
> 'Er... yes. Very well.'
> 'How many copies has she sold?'
> 'You mean altogether?'
> 'Yeah. Since publication.'
> 'Since... er... 1813?'
> There was a long pause. 'You mean she's dead?' (Another pause). 'So she wouldn't be available for book signings?' (Birtwistle & Conklin, viii).

The extract constitutes an interesting example of verbal irony because the reader soon joins the passage's narrator in their knowledge about Austen, her novel(s), and her place in canonical literature; this enables both to laugh at the backer's ignorance, to

whom the name "Austen" does not even ring a bell. The text is also relevant to show that adaptations (or films in general) tend to erase the boundaries between 'classic' and 'popular' works, as well as notions of authorship and originality. The backer's interest is mainly guided by the possibilities of profit and commercial success, as his questions indicate: "Is she selling well?;" "How many copies has she sold?;" "So she wouldn't be available for book signings?."

Mark Axelrod, in an article about "The Commodification of Form in the Adaptation of Fictional Texts to the Hollywood Cinema," discusses another aspect that walks hand-in-hand with the issue of profit (perhaps its very determinant) when one considers the 'cinematization' of fiction: the telling of a linear narrative. Axelrod claims:

> (...) the works that generally tend to be adapted are the types that easily lend themselves to adaptability in both story line and character. (...) They are simplified linear narratives, with well-constructed story-lines, and rounded characters; they are easy to open, easy to close, and easily understood. (204)

Even when the works are not restricted to that, they tend to be commodified so as to respond to such features. McGrath's choice to highlight the romantic relations in *Emma* (as discussed above) illustrates this most common vocation that the cinema holds: the tendency to visually tell stories, its propensity to visualize narrativity. McFarlane, for instance, says that "[cinema's] huge and durable popularity is owed to what it most obviously shares with the novel. That is, its capacity for narrative" (12). In this respect, Keith Cohen also asserts that

> narrativity is the most solid median link between novel and cinema, the most pervasive tendency of both verbal and visual languages. In both novel and cinema, groups of signs, be they literary or visual signs, are apprehended consecutively through time; and this consecutiveness gives rise to an unfolding structure, the diegetic whole that is never fully *present* in any one group yet always *implied* in each such group. (92)

These aspects have been discussed by several other film theoreticians. For instance, in "What Novels Can Do That Films Can't (And Vice-Versa)" Seymour Chatman introduces his discussion by pointing out that narrativity "is a deep structure quite independent of its medium. (...) It is basically a kind of textual organization (...) that needs to be actualized (...)" (403). Filmic narrative is just one among other actualizations: short stories, comics, novels, plays. Like Cohen – who mentions the consecutive apprehension of literary and visual signs through time – Chatman also elaborates on the double time structuring of narrative, i.e., the time sequence of plot events (story-time), and the time in which the events are presented (discourse-time) (404).

The distinction between the contents of the narrative (its story) and the way they are organized (its discourse) constitutes a crucial determinant when considering the transposition of verbal material to the screen. For it is exactly in the process of actualization of narrative material into discourse that lie the differences between, for instance, novel and film. Chatman's study addresses two of such differences: description and point of view. In the present discussion the differences will be accounted for in relation to irony.

Irony in Jane Austen's novels is found in the double structure of her narrative: more obviously in the dialogue of the characters, in their characterization (ironic portraits), in the way the action is gradually delivered; and irony is also a significant part of the discourse of the narrator. In fact, it is this *discursive irony* – unlike a *thematic irony*, which we find in the 'contents' of the story, or in the world of the characters – that makes it challenging to be transposed to the screen.

Obviously, the screenwriter and the filmmaker have the resource of adapting the narrator's discourse as voice-over, a term which Doane – in "The Voice in the

Cinema"[3] – distinguishes from voice-off. The difference is kept in the USA (differently from France and Brazil, where the terms are used interchangeably), and Doane explains it in the following terms: voice-off refers specifically to the voice of a character who speaks without being seen, but who is present in the diegetic space; s/he is absent just temporarily, but the viewer knows the origin of the voice, the body to whom it belongs. Conversely, in voice-over, there is a discontinuity between the space shown on the screen and the space from which the voice is originated. Such is the case with the use of voice in documentaries or in fiction films where the speaker's voice does not correspond to the scene presented.

The discontinuity between on-screen space and the space from which the voice is originated endows voice-over narration, according to Doane, with "the power to manipulate the image, either interpreting it, or producing the truth about it" (456-7). Traditionally associated with "the voice of Knowledge and Power in the cinema" (qtd. in Vanoye & Goliot-Lété, 109), this voice has generally been male. These aspects will enlighten the discussion of the use of voice-over at the beginning of McGrath's *Emma*, in the next chapter, and the role it plays for the generation of irony.

Other films have used voice-over as an effective device for the transposition of irony from page to screen; such is the case with Scorsese's adaptation of Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*, where irony is quite heavily dependent on the transference of the narrator's voice through voice-over. Since the beginning of the film, when Archer arrives at the Beaufort ball, this device becomes very visible for the effects of irony. The camera shows the mansion, the detailed mise-en-scène, and introduces some of the characters from Archer's perspective. There is a sharp contrast between the apparent sophistication and elegance of that New York aristocratic society, and the hypocrisy underlying its conservative values and rituals. In a key

example, the voice-over says: "This was a world balanced so precariously that its harmony could be shattered by a whisper." In other words, all the solidity that the mise-en-scène suggests is contradicted by what the voice ironizes. At another significant moment, when the whole social circle to which the Newlands belong refuse to go to a party for the introduction of Ellen Olenska, the voice-over narrator says, "They all lived in a kind of hieroglyphic world; the real thing was never said or done or even thought, but only represented by a set of arbitrary signs." While we listen to the voice, the image shows, through close-up, piles of cards with 'explanations' and 'justifications' for the refusal.

Concerning Austen adaptations, however, some critics have doubted the effectiveness of this resource. In this respect, Deborah Kaplan, in "Mass-Marketing Jane Austen," says: "although Austen's ironic narrators are central to the reader's encounter with her books, most filmmakers wisely reject the amount of voice-over that would be necessary to produce the experience of a narrator" (178).

The "amount" of voice-over is a decisive element for the effectiveness of such a device. If it is used too much, it may lose its function, since it competes with other 'discourses' on the screen. Thus, I would say that the point is not just to *transfer* the narrator's words from novel to screen – a strategy that would still sound mostly literary, instead of filmic. If cinema also possesses the resources for communicating ambiguity and irony – as I believe it does – what is at stake is not simply to *transfer* the narrator's irony only through voice-over, but to *adapt* it for screen language, by using other cinematic potentials.

I have been using the words *transference* and *adaptation* in italics because they constitute key theoretical principles in McFarlane's discussion of adaptation of novel to film. McFarlane makes a distinction between what he calls *transfer* and

adaptation proper. *Transfer*, as he explains, refers to "those elements of the original novel which are transferable because not tied to one or other semiotic system – that is, essentially, *narrative*;" the latter refers to "those which involve intricate processes of adaptation because their effects are closely tied to the semiotic system in which they are manifested – that is, enunciation" (20). Irony can be located halfway through both narrative and enunciation. For there are certain uses of irony, as for instance, the verbal ironies present in the characters' dialogues, that are transferable, and there are others which require adaptation – as those which are rooted in the narrator's discourse. An essential function of this research is exactly to examine the ways irony is generated in Austen adaptations – specifically *Emma* – through cinematic means and strategies.

Scholes's distinction (see Chapter II) between irony and other figures – like metaphor and metonymy – provides some relevant support for the consideration of irony in films. As he explains, "metaphor is rooted in the naming function of language, while irony is based on the communicative function" (76). This makes irony be, in speech, frequently signaled by non-verbal parts of utterance – like intonation, gesture, exchanging looks. This aspect that relates irony to situations and contexts is certainly helpful and fruitful in a discussion of films, which are characterized by both narrative and dramatic aspects. Besides, as irony may be found both at the narrative (story) and enunciating (discourse) levels, special attention must be given to the way shots are angled and framed, that is, to aspects of mise-en-scène, photography and editing.

A key theoretical text in the tradition of literary/film studies concerning the way narration (with its connotation of 'story' and 'discourse' levels) is organized in both classic novels and films is Colin MacCabe's "Realism and the Cinema: Notes on

Some Brechtian Theses." MacCabe's discussion centers on the matter of metalanguage and object language, which, in his view, are connected to each other in a hierarchical relation. To MacCabe, the metalanguage is the narrative prose "that can state all truths in the object language - those words held in inverted commas (...)" (217). As such, following him, it is the metalanguage which stands in a position of dominance and knowledge in relation to the characters' discourses. MacCabe goes on to say that the same relationship between metalanguage (narrator's discourse) and object language (characters' discourses) found in prose, may be "taken up in the cinema by the narration of events" (219). As he explains it:

> Through the knowledge we gain from the narrative we can split the discourses of the various characters from their situation and compare what is said in these discourses with what has been revealed to us through narration. The camera shows us what happens - it tells the truth against which we can measure the discourses. (219)

What sounds most striking in this postulation is an attempt to simplify the matter of narration, as if the metalanguage and object language always appeared neatly as such – even in relation to what he calls classical realist texts. Considering the specific case of Jane Austen, for instance, whose narrative voice usually tends to mingle with that of the characters, thus making itself somehow effaced, not explicitly dramatized, how can one trace the boundaries between the dominant-narrator's discourse and that of the characters? And what about a novel such as *Emma*, that uses a *fallible filter* (to use Chatman's term again) to narrate most part of the narrative? If one brings the issue to the context of film studies, how about a movie like *The Big Sleep*, which, though inserted in a tradition of "classic realism", deliberately plays with the matter of restricted knowledge, thus making "what the camera shows" not matter that much? Such questions reveal that MacCabe's theory, while proposing the

hierarchy of discourses – an aspect that certainly provides some support for the understanding of irony, for instance – seems to ignore significant varieties of point-of-view narration, mainly in what concerns aspects of omniscient and restricted knowledge, as well as the different sources of such knowledge.

This discussion may lead to a comment by the English writer D. H. Lawrence, who once advised his readers "never to believe the narrator – but to believe the story instead" (qtd. in Sontag, 18). As Bordwell, in a critique of MacCabe's, aptly puts it:

> (...) such narrators, whether first or third person, need offer no unhampered passage to truth; (...) the author can use them to create error, distraction, irony, inadequate grasp of an action's significance, and other effects. (19)

The hierarchy of discourses proposed by MacCabe also differs from Bakhtin's conception of the novel as a set of discourses. In this respect, Bordwell points out that "whereas MacCabe thinks of the nineteenth-century novel as monologic, pinned under one dominant discourse, Bakhtin proposes that the principal novelistic tradition is that of dialogue or heteroglossia" (19):

> Even when we exclude character speech and inserted genres, authorial language itself still remains a stylistic system of languages; large portions of this speech will take their style (directly, parodically, or ironically) from the languages of others, and this stylistic system is sprinkled with others' words, words not enclosed in quotation marks, *formally* belonging to authorial speech but clearly distanced from the mouth of the author by ironic, parodic, polemical or some other pre-existing "qualified" intonation. ("Discourse in the Novel," 415-6)

Besides *Emma*, *Persuasion* is the Austen novel that best illustrates this dialogization of discourses, an aspect that is enhanced by the fact that Austen's narrative mode – the centralizing narrative authority, that of the impersonal narrator – characteristic of earlier novels, is almost totally replaced in *Persuasion* by Anne Elliot's subjectivity.

This aspect affects the mode of narration directly and crucially. The use of *showing* – expressed through dialogues – so characteristic, for instance, of *Pride and Prejudice*, is replaced in *Persuasion* by *indirect telling/narration* – having mainly Anne Elliot as a subjective filter. And it is exactly here that irony is given a significant place: Anne Elliot hardly exists for the other characters. In a significant passage in the novel, after saying that Sir Walter Elliot's "two other children were of very inferior value," the narrator adds,

> (...) but Anne, with an elegance of mind and sweetness of character, which must have placed her high with any people of real understanding, was nobody with either father or sister: her word had no weight; her convenience was always to give way; - she was only Anne. (12-3)

In re-reading the passage carefully, however, what the narrator tells us, ironically, and through indirect comparisons, is that Anne is ultimately *somebody*, as contrasted to both her father and sister, who lack "elegance of mind", "sweetness of character" and "real understanding." So, whose voice overlaps with the narrator's in saying previously that Anne is of "very inferior value"? Such an example illustrates what Bakhtin refers to as "dialogized" discourse – here, as in so many examples in Austen's narrative, the discourse belongs *formally* to the narrator's metalanguage, but *semantically* it takes Sir Walter's perspective, which originates the irony later on.

A significant illustration of this dialogized discourse in the filmic version of *Persuasion* (BBC, 1995, scripted and directed by Roger Mitchell), relates to the day when Anne and Wentworth finally meet. The discussion of this scene should be introduced here with the corresponding passage from the novel, so as to allow comparison of linguistic-verbal material with visual expression:

> Mary, very much gratified by his attention, was delighted to receive him; while a thousand feelings rushed on Anne, of which this was the

> most consoling, that it would soon be over. And it was soon over. In two minutes after Charles's preparation, the others appeared. They were in the drawing-room. Her eye half-met Captain Wentworth's; a bow, a curtsey passed; she heard his voice - he talked to Mary, said all that was right; said something to the Miss Musgroves, enough to mark an easy footing: the room seemed full - full of persons and voices - but a few minutes ended it. (60)

This passage illustrates, in a rather vivid way, the fact that it is Anne's subjectivity that filters the reality portrayed: it is actually "the thousand feelings [that] rushed on Anne" which guide the narrator's report of her perception and impressions of the scene. The narrator *tells* the experience – but this is combined with Anne's feelings and perspective; it is mainly her embarrassment that sensitizes and accelerates the report, a report characterized stylistically, in the words of Claude Rawson, by "an idiom of quick summarizing dispatch" and a "directness in both observation and style which looks forward to some later women novelists" (ix).

It is interesting to point out that as in the novel, in which Anne is (mainly in this passage) the one who sees, hears and feels – and all this in an intense way – she is also the subjective filter in the corresponding filmic scene; or, to use Chatman's specific term for cinematic practice, Anne constitutes a "perceptual filter", i.e., a term denoting the instance when the images conveyed on the screen are filtered "through some character's perceptual consciousness" thus "lock[ing] the audience into a character's perception" (157). Such is exactly the case here: the tension of the moment, when Anne first re-meets Wentworth after eight years, is mainly expressed by acting and framing: the close-up on Anne's hand, while she grasps for a chair, so as to feel firmer when seeing Wentworth, the expression of her dark wild and wide eyes slightly meeting his – all this ironically contrasts with the other characters' ignorance of, and indifference to, what is going on. Such a double-voiced, or dialogised, discourse, resulting from the fusion of different perspectives, is

responsible for the generation of irony; but it is difficult to say, in this example, what is the metalanguage (the metadiscourse of knowledge) that guides the viewer; what we have is rather an amalgam of voices.

In terms of cinematic resources, editing plays a decisive role in the expression of this dialogization, or conflation, of different discourses in films. Because depending on the way shots are connected, and on which shot comes after another, the effect may be of continuity, linearity, or of contrast, disjunction. Therefore, a few remarks about the way editing works in films are due here. In *Aesthetics of Film* Jacques Aumont et al. discuss the functions of montage as follows: 1. Editing used for narrative purposes: it "assures the connection of the elements of an action according to a principle that is, quite globally, a relationship of causality and/or diegetic temporality" (46-47). In this case, the film elements are combined in a way so as to create a sequence; the combination has the effect of liaison, or linearity. 2. "Expressive montage: a tactic that, according to Marcel Martin, is not a means but an end... aiming to express by itself - and by collision of two images - some emotion or idea" (qtd. in Aumont, 47). In this case, the elements are combined in a way so as to create an effect of disjunction, of contradiction, of confrontation of different elements. The relation generated lies in a connotative, metaphorical level. Irony – a strategy that involves contrast, superimposition of incongruent ideas, the duality of said and unsaid meanings – may be certainly produced through this kind of *expressive* editing.

This notion of montage as collision, as conflict, owes to Sergei Eisenstein's theoretical discussions, presented both in "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form," and in "The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram." In the latter text, Eisenstein argues:

> The shot is a montage *cell.*
> Just as cells in their division form a phenomenon of another order, the organism or embryo, so, on the other side of the dialectical leap from the shot, there is montage.
> By what, then, is montage characterized and, consequently, its cell - the shot?
> By collision. By the conflict of two pieces in opposition to each other. By conflict. By collision. (133)

Eisenstein opposes his principle of collision to Pudovkin's understanding and defence of montage as linkage (133). He says that, whereas for Pudovkin shots are linked into pieces as chains, as bricks – which, arranged in a series, creates an idea; for Eisenstein, the principle of collision creates a concept (133).

These two viewpoints of montage constitute the two opposing ways of defining cinema itself. Eisenstein says that considering montage as a means of description (he is of course referring to Pudovkin's approach), in which shots are placed one after another, like building-blocks (hence, the 'brick' analogy above), montage serves the function of "unrolling an idea with the help of single shots;" Eisenstein names this the "epic" principle (140). On the other hand, montage as Eisenstein himself proposes it – as an idea that arises from the collision of independent and opposite shots – would characterize what he names the "dramatic" principle (140).

These two principles – the "epic" and the "dramatic" – are also associated by film theoreticians as different ways of representing reality in films. The former is identified with André Bazin and the so-called "cinema of transparency." Jacques Aumont et al. say that "the notion of the transparency of film discourse designates a specific (though widespread and even dominant) film aesthetic according to which film's essential function is to present the represented events to be seen, rather than presenting itself as a film" (55). In this case, emphasis is given to continuity and

homogeneity, and attempts are made to preserve the effacement of shot transition (56). As to the "dramatic" principle, the analogy is made with the "dialectical cinema," a term also coined by Eisenstein (see the title of his essay above). Aumont et al. explain that whereas in the cinema of transparency the aim is to reproduce the film without intervening – or, at least, without leaving explicit marks of the intervention – "Eisenstein considers film to be less a representation than an articulated discourse, and his reflections on montage consist precisely in defining this articulation" (60).

Considering that every film constitutes an act of discourse, the actual difference between these two montage practices would thus be related to how explicitly articulated a certain filmic discourse is. A consideration of the question of irony in Austen's novels, and the (im)possibility of translating them to the screen, encompasses an investigation into the ways the filmic versions articulate both the *narrative/transferable* material of her novels, as well as her ironic discourse – the one that requires, in the words of McFarlane, *adaptation proper*. The transposition and articulation of verbal narrative and discursive materials into the audiovisual medium necessarily call for an examination of the two kinds of montage practice discussed previously, i.e., montage as linkage or as collision.

It may also be the case, however, that screenwriters create completely new situations, independent from the novels, to express irony in the films. A relevant example is the harvest-engagement scene, added by screenwriter Andrew Davies, and conceived as a felicitous solution to conclude the ITV version of *Emma* (to be commented in the next chapter). Additions such as this may come as a consequence of the inevitable mediation between Austen's world and ours. The film versions are not only responses to, and readings of, pre-Victorian England, but responses and readings as mediated by our late twentieth-century perspectives and expectations. It is exactly

in this intertextual web of historical and cultural dialogues that irony might find a fruitful place. In this sense, both Hutcheon's semantic associations for the comprehension of irony – irony as relational, inclusive and differential – and Doanne's consideration of ironic language as a form of dialogism, as the superimposition of two voices, can be enlarged in the analysis of the films by the use of added scenes, soundtrack, poems, props, photography. Moreover, Hutcheon's inclusive and differential aspects of irony, i.e., the notion that both the said and the unsaid work out together to generate the ironic meaning – one which is most of times not the opposite of the apparent meaning, but something different – may find a correspondent, in terms of cinematic resources, in Eisenstein's notion of montage as collision and conflict. That is, the collision and conflict principle that Eisenstein generally associates with his own conception of montage might be used more specifically for the generation of irony – which, ultimately, also engenders this notion of different, conflicting meanings – into visual language.

It is the peculiarity of each film to be analyzed that will bring to light the theoretical notions pointed out here. Their reading will benefit not only from crucial principles discussed in Chapter II – as those associated with the relational and dialogic nature of irony; the relevance of context for irony's deployment; the participants in ironic discourse; and the functions of irony – but will also take advantage of what lies at the intersection of the adaptation process.

Considering that irony may be thematic and discursive (and here I am being specific to the double structure of the literary text) – and Austen's irony is greatly attached to the narrator's discourse – the film's felicity will depend on both the *transference* of narrative/thematic material, as well as on the *adaptations* undertaken so as to visually construct Austen's discursive ironies. It is here that peculiar aspects

of the cinematic grammar must be investigated, such as montage (both narrative and expressive), voice-over/voice off, the characters' performance, props, and mise-en-scène in general.

In this sense, the order in which the films are considered for analysis reflects the degree of complexity that they hold, not only in relation to how the source material was adapted, but also to how irony was utilized and constructed on the screen. Bearing this in mind, the following chapter will start with an analysis of McGrath's adaptation, followed by Lawrence's and then by Heckerling's films. McGrath's *Emma* is mostly committed to reproducing the narrative events of the novel, while almost ignoring its ironies; Lawrence's *Emma* finds a certain balance between the narrative material and the ironic implications at work in the novel; Heckerling's *Clueless* redescribes the narrative material, and in so doing, uses the present to ironize the past, and vice-versa.

Notes

1. "adapt: make sth suitable for a new use, situation, etc; modify sth; alter or modify (a text) for television, the stage, etc." In: *Oxford Advanced Learner's Encyclopedic Dictionary.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

2. Shakespeare's sonnet:

   CXVI
   Let me not to the marriage of true minds
   Admit impediments. Love is not love
   Which alters when it alteration finds,
   Or bends with the remover to remove:
   O no; it is an ever-fixed mark,
   That looks on tempests, and is never shaken;
   It is the star to every wandering bark,
   Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
   Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
   Within his bending sickle's compass come;
   Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
   But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
   If this be error, and upon me prov'd,
   I never writ, nor no man ever lov'd.

   In: Stanley Applebaum (ed.) *William Shakespeare. Complete Sonnets.* New York: Dover, 1992. p. 51.

3. The text I read was the Portuguese translation: Doane, Mary Ann. "A Voz no Cinema: A Articulação de Corpo e Espaço." In: Xavier: Ismail (Org.). *A Experiência do Cinema.* Rio de Janeiro, Graal, 1983, pp. 457-475. The translation to English is mine.

Chapter V

Looking Through the Screen:

A Study of Irony in Adaptations of Jane Austen's *Emma*

"I always deserve the best treatment, because I never put up with any other."

(*Emma*, 306)

1. Douglas McGrath's *Emma* (1996)

Introduction

A brief survey of the reviews written on McGrath's *Emma* shows that the film received a considerable amount of positive criticism at the time of its release. Actually, the positive reviews on the film seem to conflate compliments not only to the American writer-director Douglas McGrath, but to Gwyneth Paltrow as well, the American actress who played Emma's role. To illustrate that, the lead paragraph of Jeff Giles' "Earth Angel" (*Newsweek*, 1996) reads in the following way: "Gwyneth Paltrow breaks through in a sparkling adaptation of 'Emma.' Brad Pitt already adores her. Now it's America's turn" (66). Besides other references in the text to the Hollywood couple's love relationship, the review is also illustrated with pictures of Gwyneth alone and with her boyfriend Pitt. To give another example, in "Mismatch Maker," David Ansen refers to "Paltrow's swan-necked, elegant mischievousness [as] just one delicious flavor (albeit the most important) in McGrath's very tasty ensemble" (67). He also finds Douglas McGrath's *Emma* "fine, funny and deeply charming" (67). Janet Maslin, in "So Genteel, So Scheming, So Austen" (*New York Times*, 1996) also comments on how "Gwyneth Paltrow makes a resplendent Emma, gliding through the film with an elegance and patrician wit that bring the young

Katharine Hepburn to mind" (C1). In "Raising Jane" – a diary of the making of *Emma* – (*Premiere*, 1996) McGrath himself talks about the process of choosing Paltrow for the role: "I'd never seen her, so I rented *Flesh and Bone*. She was completely mesmerizing; you can't keep your eyes off her, and her voice has the same intoxicating mix of honey and whiskey as that of her mother; she has theatre training, and she's the right age" (74).

Such pieces of information are significant to the extent that they reveal the influence of the discourses about the star – Gwyneth Paltrow – on the appreciation of the character Emma herself. As discussed in Chapter III, most of the ironic effects in the novel stem from the discrepancy between Emma's sense of superiority (not only economically and socially speaking, but in intellectual terms as well) and her (almost) complete misreading of reality around her. Emma's snobbery and deep concern with issues of class distinction and manners are also determinants for the narrator to use irony at her expense and at other characters'. As Emma says about Robert Martin's intention to marry Harriet: "What! Think a farmer, (and with all his sense and all his merit Mr. Martin is nothing more,) a good match for my intimate friend! (...) Mr. Martin may be the richest of the two, but he is undoubtedly her inferior as to rank in society. – The sphere in which she moves is much above his. – It would be a degradation" (*Emma*, 39). But the narrative is organized in a way so as to 'force' Emma to learn to acknowledge her faults and to accept the necessity of self-reform. She is such an ambivalent and complex character – considering that she is also intelligent, powerful, and full of vivacity – that it is not difficult to imagine why Jane Austen assumed no one but herself would much like her heroine. Irony in the novel results, among other aspects, from the juxtaposition between the narrator's account of

what Emma is, what some characters think about her, and Emma's own account (what she says, her actions and behaviour) of herself.

In McGrath's film, however, not only does the character Emma lack psychological depth to reveal these aspects, but the film has chosen to construct her in a way in which the star's beauty and other physical attributes are so highlighted and foregrounded that they certainly interfere in the viewer's evaluation of the character's process of self-knowledge. This aspect has been noted by several other critics as well. In her article entitled "As If!: Translating Austen's Ironic Narrator to Film," Nora Nachumi points out that in McGrath's film, "Paltrow is often dressed and posed like a Greek Goddess. (...) Unless she is at church or visiting the poor, Emma tends to show a substantial amount of bosom and neck. She frequently wears only one color, a device that reinforces the sense that she is a complete entity unto herself. Her upswept hair is never allowed to curl near her face, and she is often bareheaded. Dressed thus, she resembles a statue brought to life or a girl on a pedestal" (135-6). As such, following McGrath's comment that "Gwyneth was perfection" (*Premiere*, 1996, 76), the viewer also tends to transfer that "perfection" to the character Emma herself. Ironically, it is exactly this sense of perfection that Austen's novel undermines, and subtly ironizes in her narrative.

Another relevant aspect that draws one's attention in many of the reviews written on McGrath's film relates to what critics consider as the fidelity principle between the film and Austen's text. Significantly, in "'Emma' Rings True To Jane Austen's Novel," David Sterritt states that "this version is faithful to the letter and the spirit of Austen's book. It's also cinematic enough to succeed as an engaging experience in its own right" (*Christian Science Monitor*, 1996, 11). Although there are different ways of being 'true' to Austen's sensibility, McGrath's version cannot be

seen as a faithful transposition of *Emma*, though he maintains the main characters, the dialogues (at least partially) and some (superficial) aspects of the novel's plot. Indeed, if there is a feature that qualifies this *Emma* filmic version, *that* is its superficiality and therefore failure to reproduce the effects of the themes and the multiplicity of viewpoints deriving from Austen's ironies in the novel. Most of this superficiality owes to the poor screenplay, which, for instance, does not convincingly dramatize the Frank-Jane subplot, and to the director's commitment to producing a romantic and comic, i.e., light version of the novel. These aspects become even clearer when one compares this film with the British television version, written by Andrew Davies and directed by Diarmuid Lawrence, also released in 1996 (to be commented on in the next section). Caryn James, writing about "An 'Emma' Both Darker and Funnier" (Lawrence's adaptation) is able to pinpoint some of the distinctions between the two versions: "Though both are faithful to Austen's plot, the earlier film [McGrath's] was all about brightness and pretty gardens. It was a slick commercial "Emma," whose appeal depended on Miss Paltrow's graceful looks; not a bad idea, but not nearly what Austen had in mind" (*New York Times*, 1996, 28).

Other aspects concerning the context of production of McGrath's *Emma* might help the understanding of the general pattern and intent of the film. Rebecca Hodgson's review of "Emma" quotes Stephen Haft, a friend producer of McGrath's, who comments on the necessity of making the film appealing to both American and international audiences: "While the majors will finance a comedy that will pull in no one outside the US – but will play very well in the US – Harvey will only finance pictures that have an international appeal. Emma might play in the US as an effervescent comedy, but at the same time, Doug's script is consistent enough with the book to meet European critical expectations" (*Screen International*, 1995, 40). The

passage shows that McGrath had to compromise in order to attract the attention of both publics. In this way, he chose to emphasize the romantic and comic misunderstandings of the narrative. If it is true that "his script is consistent enough with the book," it is consistent enough with a superficial and unilateral (or monologic, in Bakhtinian terms) reading of the novel. McGrath himself justifies the contemporary appeal of *Emma* in the following terms: "Everything that happens in the movie could happen today in London or New York. It's all about finding the right person to fall in love with. Emma is the worst matchmaker in the world because she doesn't know her own heart. At the end of the day, when you take away major problems such as hunger or crime, the real thing we all worry about is who am I going to fall in love with?" (*Screen International*, 1995, 40).

Again, it is hardly possible for one to consider such a reductive appreciation of Austen's novel without perceiving its ironic effects. One wonders if Austen would really have lived this far if her novels were restricted to that. Actually, she is far from being the cosy writer of romantic comedies that McGrath, among others, has helped to forge. As Gerrard Nicci significantly points out in "Mistress of the Scalpel," not only is Austen "a formidable opponent of hypocrisy and sentimentality, romanticism and too much hope" but she also "looks at her world with a cool, undressing gaze (...). A chilling dislike of the society in which she seemed to be so comfortably embedded can appear like an iceberg in her novels and her often scathing letters" (*The Observer Review*, 1995, 4). The fact is that many of Austen's readers (among whom screenwriters) have "preferred" to stay on the surface, instead of digging out the iceberg. And this attitude has given rise to a version of Austen that denies her duplicitous and ironic tensions, and that instead associates her with the beauties of the English verdure and countryside, stable estates, country houses and mansions,

astonishing landscapes, elegant manners, decorum and propriety, aspects that, in her novels, are always linked to restraint, hypocrisy, the issue of male inheritance, entail and female poverty. Again, following Nicci, Jane Austen has been transformed into an icon – "a piece of middle England, like the National Trust, the village green, the cream tea" (*The Observer Review*, 1995, 4). Indeed, the many television and filmic adaptations of her novels – as well as other books written for the common, non-specialized, or non-literary reader (as for instance, Maggie Lane's *Jane Austen's England* [1989] and Susan Watkins' *Jane Austen's Town and Country Style* [1990])[1] – have been responsible for contributing to the formation, and even consolidation, of such a myth.

Undoubtedly, of the three adaptations of *Emma* that appeared between 1995-1996 (Heckerling's *Clueless*, McGrath's *Emma*, and Lawrence's *Emma*), McGrath's *Emma* is the one that best illustrates this notion of Austen as a representative of a nostalgic and pre-industrial England, thus inserting itself in the so-called heritage film industry, as characterized, among others, by Andrew Higson's arguments in "Re-presenting the National Past: Nostalgia and Pastiche in the Heritage Film" and "Heritage Film and British Cinema." The strengths of McGrath's version – somehow promised at the film's opening, and in other few scenes – are not materialized when one considers the film as a whole.

Irony in McGrath's *Emma*

McGrath's adaptation of *Emma* (1996), when compared to the previous 1972-BBC television adaptation (dramatized by Denis Constanduros)[2], is sensitive to the way focus of narration is dealt with in the novel. As we know, in Jane Austen's novel,

Emma is the focalized character (to use Genette's term) or filter character (to use Chatman's term) through most of the narrative. In watching McGrath's film, one is immediately aware of a first-person cinematic narrator who will deliver the information according to the heroine's point-of-view. This strategy is established at the very beginning of the film, which has a rather interesting opening.

The film opens with a night image of the universe, where we can see a planet, surrounded by many stars. These are firstly shown at a distance and, simultaneously with the presentation of credits and non-diegetic music, we are little by little approached to a globe (identified now as the Earth) rolling at a high speed. By means of a close-up, and the globe now at a slower pace, we are shown the maps of the continents, up to a close-up image of the United Kingdom as a magnified map on the screen, with an indication of London and Highbury on it. This shot is followed by the presentation of several miniature paintings of late eighteenth-century English houses – actually, representative of the various settings where the action will take place (Hartfield, Randalls, Donwell Abbey) – and characters, sometimes shown as couples. All this is shown during the presentation of credits. And yet, narration has already begun. After the introduction to these family portraits and paintings of English country houses, there appears the title of the film – *Emma.* Afterwards, we are shown the globe again, moving very quickly, but the movement is now made backward, followed by a dissolve and fusion with other images of people dancing. The movement is at such a speed that we cannot identify them. Simultaneously to that, we listen to a voice-over narration saying:

> In a time when one's town was one's world and the actions at a dance excited a greater interest than the movement of armies, there lived a young woman who knew how this world should be run.[3]

The end of the voice-over narration coincides with the introduction of Emma Woodhouse to the viewer – and this is just the first aspect that justifies her as the focus heroine in the film, or according to Chatman, filter character. McGrath, who also wrote the screenplay, does not use Austen's opening to introduce his film: "Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her" (*Emma*, 1). But I find his introduction very significant as well. The words are in consonance not only with the visual use of the globe – in Austen's time, Highbury, for instance, constituted the 'world' for most of its inhabitants, principally the women – but they also refer to a recurrent motif in her novels – the balls. Moreover, the words "there lived a young woman who knew how this world should be run" will acquire a level of structural irony, as the film develops, since Emma reveals herself to be incapable of knowing her own emotional attachments, as well as the attachments of others surrounding her. Thus, the sentence structure of his voice-over opening is similar to the sentence structure of the novel – with the ironic edge coming in at the close of the sentence.

The use of voice-over narration at the very beginning of *Emma* generates several relevant implications, and they are linked to the meaning of the term. First of all it is a voice-over because it is dissociated from a body; as such, as Doane explains, "[this voice] is necessarily presented as outside the diegetic space" (456-7), an aspect that grants voice-over narration "the power to manipulate the image, either interpreting it, or producing the truth about it" (456-7). Traditionally associated with "the voice of Knowledge and Power in the cinema" (qtd. in Vanoye & Goliot-Lété, 109) this voice has generally been male. In *Emma*, however, the voice is not only

female, but the discourse it utters (quoted above) also contributes to the creation of irony; as it will be clear later, this voice – supposed to hold the truth – is fallible, unreliable. In this case, it is hardly possible not to create a parallel with the ironical voice found in Austen's novels (and that must have been the screenwriter's intention), a voice which is essentially feminine, and which tells of a domestic and everyday world, so familiar to women, mainly the women of her time. This aspect is also justified by the fact that the voice transcends the image – as it is characteristic of voice-over – by commenting more generically on other Austen novels and their time.

It is also interesting to perceive that the backward movement of the globe in the opening of the film is harmonic to the idea of setting the story in a remote and specific past time and place. The image of the globe when fused into Emma's painting of the globe, creates a parallel meaning in relation to the abstract/universal globe shown before. It also sets the globe within *story* level: Emma is a drawer/painter. Furthermore, it informs the fact that Emma is a character who, as the introduction asserts, "[knows] how this world should be run" – an early reference to her taking control of other people's lives, and to "a disposition to think a little too well of herself" (*Emma*, 1).

The opening of the film is already rather significant and revealing not only of some strategies of narration, but of how mise-en-scène may be used to contribute to the telling of the narrative. Although it is *discourse* which prevails during the presentation of credits, several components of the *story* may be already inferred: the setting is Highbury, England, and the miniature portraits stand for early nineteenth-century gentlemen and ladies: an atmosphere of family tradition is invoked. The story actually begins with Emma talking to Miss Taylor – once her governess – and now Mrs. Weston, as they celebrate her wedding. Moreover, the opening of the film also

presents a time gap between the present moment, when the story is narrated, and the past, when the story occurred. The swirling of the globe has a metadiegetic function in this sense.

The film thus begins with a cinematic narrator, who provides a voice-over narrator to introduce the story. This voice-over narration is used throughout the film and also at the end. Emma, who is the filter character, also has her thoughts rendered through voice-off sometimes, or through the "excuse" (as differently from the novel), of writing (and "reading aloud") her conjectures and impressions in a diary.

Similarly to the effects generated in the novel, the handling of point-of-view in the film is responsible for creating several ironic instances, because we – viewers – can see how mistakenly Emma interprets certain situations, and how blind she is at what is going on around her. Emma actually illustrates what Chatman calls "fallible filtration," for her perceptions and conceptions of the story events – basically linked to her habit of playing the role of a matchmaker – do not align with what the narration at large is telling. Emma's misreadings of her own surroundings may be illustrated by the film sequence in which she draws Harriet's portrait.

The viewer immediately perceives that Mr. Elton responds enthusiastically to the opportunity of Emma's painting Harriet's portrait, not because of the painted object – Harriet – but because of the painter. However, not only is Emma blind to that, but she persuades Harriet to think so as well. The irony reaches its climax when Emma tells Mr. Elton that "[she] resolved to give up portraits forever - at least where there are husbands and wives in the case." To which Mr. Elton answers, "Ah, yes. But there are no husbands and wives in this case! Or I should say - no husbands and wives at present, Miss Woodhouse!" At this moment, the viewer shares with Mr. Elton in his reference to Emma; Emma, on the other hand, shares with Harriet the idea that the

reference is to her. Much of the significance of this scene is expressed by the characters' exchanging looks and smiles: Mr. Elton to Emma, and Emma to Harriet. I would say that the music also adds to, somehow commenting on the comic situation Emma has put herself into. And the misunderstanding continues: Mr. Elton praises the picture for Emma's sake, while she thinks it is for Harriet's, etc.

If one brings back that notion of irony as a mode of the unsaid, and as a mode that implies power relations, the meaning of this scene enlarges itself in the whole context of the film. The most basic ironic meaning here has to do with the relationship established among "different meaning-makers" (Hutcheon's expression) – Emma, Mr. Elton, and Harriet (persuaded by Emma). This difference, however, is only perceptible, at this level, to the narrator and the viewer. Each of the characters involved think there is a reciprocity in their interpretation of the others' feelings. But as the narrative develops, the ironic meaning will be endowed, to borrow from Hutcheon, "with the critical edge of judgment" (58). Emma – who initially has the pretence to provide Harriet with elegance, social polish, and knowledge – will painfully discover that it is she who must undergo a process of self-knowledge. Ironically, not only does she fail in her "improvement" of Harriet, but it is through Harriet that she learns to improve herself. Moreover, the viewer discovers (and this is another irony) that Emma is far from being that woman "who knows how this world should be run."

Besides the film opening, and the portrait scene just commented on, there are other scenes and strategies in McGrath's *Emma* that deserve attention as to the question of irony. The way Emma and Frank Churchill get to know each other is one example. In the novel (the passage is analysed in chapter III) Frank is introduced to Emma by his father, in Hartfield. In the film, they meet by accident, outdoors, in one

of Emma's frequent (at least McGrath's version makes them frequent) carriage-rides alone. While Emma is crossing a river, one of her carriage wheels gets stuck, when a 'stranger' suddenly appears from the bush, on horseback, saying: "Is your horse just washing his feet or are the darker forces at work here?" To which Emma answers, "The latter, I'm afraid." Their talk does not take long for them to discover each other as Frank Churchill and Emma Woodhouse. Their meeting also reminds the viewer of Willoughby's (also on horseback) first seeing/meeting Marianne Dashwood's in Ang Lee's *Sense and Sensibility*. Both meetings promise the expectations created of a romantic attachment, though they will not be fulfilled; in this way, both subvert the stereotypical way of constructing romantic couples and of suggesting the possibility of romantic relationships. In this sense, though romanticized, they align with Austen's also recurrent theme of how *first impressions* might disguise reality.

Another strategy McGrath employs that adds to the general pattern of his film relates to the question of editing and to the rendering of Emma's thought through voice off. The scene in which Emma and Harriet visit the Clarks (the poor family they visit for charity), when she induces Harriet to lie to Mr. Elton about her participation in the visit, constitutes an interesting example of irony expressed through editing. The flashback scenes that "register the truth" about Harriet's actual behaviour there (Harriet does not know how to act or what to do; she is clumsy and drops pans on the floor) contradict Harriet's telling of the same event, thus generating irony to the viewer. Irony is then created by the juxtaposition of shots that belong to different times, and by the contradictory effect that results from the discrepancy between "telling" and "showing."

In a scene at the Bateses, to provide another example, both strategies – editing and voice-off – bear the function to create irony, since they are responsible for a

conflation of distinct and contradictory discourses. In other words, voice-off contradicts what we see. Using Eisenstein's vocabulary, collision is created between the aural and the visual, thus giving rise to irony. By this time the viewer has already watched a previous scene when Emma and Harriet deliberately escape from Miss Bates' sight and consequent endless talking, by hiding themselves behind their umbrellas. Therefore, when Emma and Harriet visit the Bateses, it becomes evident that Emma's ladylike behaviour and good manners are merely fulfilling a social requisite, since the expression of her thoughts through voice-off – as for instance when she thinks, "Please do not let it be a letter from that meaning Jane Fairfax" – generates a contrast, hence the irony, between her apparent refined behaviour and what she truly thinks about Miss Bates and her niece. Another device used in this scene at the Bateses reinforces the discrepancy between appearance and reality: the transition, through editing, between their present moment, when they refer to Jane Fairfax through a letter, and a future moment, when Jane has already arrived, and Emma has to 'represent' to her as well. Though Jane's arrival sounds very abrupt, this almost lack of mediation – from letter to the very Jane Fairfax in person – adds to the artificially good-mannered way Emma treats her, though her words imply the opposite: "We're so glad to have you here with us. How were you able to get away?"

Another instance of irony in McGrath's film relates to a scene when Emma and Mr. Knightley are talking outside Donwell Abbey, about their going to the ball at the Crown. Emma is actually trying to persuade Knightley to go, when he argues, "I'd just want to stay here, where it's cosy." While he is uttering these words, the camera moves in a way so as to visually encompass, besides Emma and Knightley, formerly in medium shot, a view of Donwell Abbey as well, a grandiose country mansion, an

aspect that certainly denies, by contradicting, the supposed "cosiness" Knightley refers to.

Although these examples show that McGrath was not totally unaware of the importance of irony in Austen's novel, these examples in which irony is at work in his adaptation are rare and not enough to characterize the film pattern as a whole. In this way, these scarce moments get diluted within the romantic and comic project that seems to characterize his film as a whole.

McGrath's film also suffers from the poor screenplay. Viewers that have not read Austen's novel will not understand why Emma has to invent those stories, or what lies behind the triangle Emma-Frank-Jane. This subplot dealing with the secret engagement of Frank and Jane is very important for the creation of irony, and it is subtly and masterly elaborated by Jane Austen, but this is not developed in McGrath's film. Therefore, the viewer feels unable to tie the plot, to make sense of the intricacies underlying Frank's relationship with the Bateses and Jane Fairfax.

The Question of Setting

A first striking aspect of McGrath's *Emma* is the loss of boundary between the inside, domestic world of the house, and the outside world. The great quantity of scenes that take place outside – in the countryside, in the gardens – clashes with the knowledge that rather than being a novelist of place, Austen is a novelist of manners and ideas. Biographical material informs that "due to her alleged short-sightedness, Austen tended to avoid describing the scenery, and turned her attention, instead, to the elaboration of dialogues, a fact that makes some of her novels be considered as potential screenplays" (*Veja*, 1996, 94-5).

Another consequence of this over-valuation of outer space is that the film also denies the issue of women's confinement in pre-Victorian times. In his reading of Austen's novel, John Wiltshire asserts that "*Emma* is a novel in which circumscribed settings, limited spaces, and confinement (comforting and enabling, but at the same time imprisoning and suffocating) are crucially important" (67). The novel presents several instances that reveal how the apparently simple action of taking a walk in the countryside, or even in the streets of Highbury, is gender-conditioned, thus being considered inappropriate for women. Perhaps the most famous passage is the one when Harriet and Miss Bickerton (in the film Harriet is walking with Emma) are attacked by a group of gypsies:

> About half a mile beyond Highbury, making a sudden turn, and deeply shaded by elms on each side, it became for a considerable stretch very retired; and when the young ladies had advanced some way into it, they had suddenly perceived at a small distance before them, on a broader patch of greensward by the side, a party of gipsies. A child on the watch, came towards them to beg; and Miss Bickerton, excessively frightened, gave a great scream, and calling on Harriet to follow her, ran up a steep bank, cleared a slight hedge at the top, and made the best of her way by a short cut back to Highbury. (*Emma*, 214)

Though Austen does not elaborate further on the presence of the gypsies, by for instance contextualizing their cultural origin and social conditions, so as to justify their attitude, their poverty aligns with other "poverties" or gradations of poverty in the novel, such as that of the Clarks (the poor sick family that Emma and Harriet visit at the beginning of the novel), that of the servants, that of the Bateses, Mrs. Weston (once Emma's governess) and Jane Fairfax. And though the gypsies' appearance is sudden and their presence is not further developed in the narrative, they are described as "trampers," as being "clamorous," "impertinent" and as constituting a "gang" (*Emma*, 214); this description contrasts with the apparent placidity and harmonic

balance of the English countryside, and with the notion of a romantic, idyllic, pre-industrial England. Actually, the contrast allows one to see the gypsies as bearing the function of a stain, a *social stain*, in the exuberant and verdant surroundings of the Highbury village. The 'incident' also shows that they constitute a menace to women's vulnerability, thus attesting to the fact that women were not so free to walk wherever and whenever they wanted, even if the place was symbolic of a peaceful haven (or heaven). But perhaps this reading could not have been possible if one had seen McGrath's film – with the camera travelling so often in the English gardens and countryside – in isolation from a wider contextualization of Austen, the Austen industry, and the question of irony. In fact, this specific scene seems to emphasize the presence of Frank Churchill as Harriet's 'saviour' from the attack of the gypsies, thus giving rise to Emma's conjectures about a possible love relationship between him and Harriet. For an inattentive viewer, the most visible reading of the 'gypsies incident' is its consonance with McGrath's choice to highlight the romantic and comic relationships in the novel.

The apparent freedom promised by what McGrath's film constructs as a vast, open, safe and 'fairy-tale' landscape is embodied in the many scenes that take place outside. For instance, when Harriet first tells Emma about Mr. Martin, they are walking in a beautiful countryside, with a river nearby, and their talk is punctuated by the singing of birds; revealingly, while they walk and talk, we listen to their voices in the background, as the camera moves away from them and *chooses to show* the natural beauties of their surroundings. Other examples include Emma and Harriet embroidering in the garden, while Emma tries to persuade Harriet to forget about Robert Martin. The sequence in which Emma draws Harriet's portrait also takes place outside, in the gardens of Hartfield. There is also a scene when Emma and Mr.

Knightley practice bow archery at Donwell Abbey (actually an added scene, not present in the novel) while they argue about their different opinions concerning Robert Martin; after the archery session, Emma and Mr. Knightley have tea, not inside Donwell Abbey, but in the Donwell gardens. Emma and Harriet read Mr. Elton's charade (a substantial passage in the novel, as shown in chapter III, which takes place inside Hartfield) also in the open air. Emma and Harriet play with the puppies (another added scene) outside Emma's house. Mrs. Weston, Emma and Mr. Knightley talk in the garden when Mrs. Weston mentions her suspicions of Mr. Knightley's interest in Jane Fairfax; while they talk, we also listen to birds singing; and several others. The frequency with which characters (and their dialogues) are placed outside is highly representative of McGrath's adaptation, and characterizes the film pattern since the very beginning, an aspect that goes against the way setting is used by Austen, thus diluting, or even erasing, many of the effects created in the novel. To quote John Wiltshire again,

> Confined to Hartfield for most of the first volume, the narrative then gradually expands its horizons with an increasingly far-flung series of outings, visits, and the ball at the Crown, until it climaxes in the two excursions, one a day after the other, to Donwell and to Box Hill (69).

Thus, the way setting is used in the novel serves to dramatize its relationship with the issue of female poverty and domestic confinement. Following John Wiltshire again, "in *Emma* women's imprisonment is associated with deprivation, with energies and powers perverted in their application, and events, balls, and outings are linked with the arousal and satisfaction of desire" (69). It is not by chance that the "events, balls, and outings" are all promoted by the most prominent families in Highbury, or by those that have risen to gentility, as the Westons and the Coles; for instance, Christmas dinner takes place at the Westons, and the event culminates in Mr. Elton's

sudden love declaration to Emma; the Crown ball is organized by Emma and Frank Churchill. It is here that several glances, smiles, and compliments lead the reader to further suspicions of a secret attachment between Frank and Jane; it is also at this ball that Mr. Elton humiliates Harriet by deliberately refusing to dance with her. The Crown ball is also responsible for promoting the first dance between Emma and Mr. Knightley, an important clue for their future attachment, since dances in Austen are potentially loaded with emotional and sexual meanings. Other events that take place outside include the picking of strawberries and the Box Hill picnic – both in Mr. Knightley's property (Donwell Abbey).

Austen's novel makes the issue of setting complex by relating it both to gender and economic/social status. Going out – depending on the distance and weather conditions – also requires having the means of transportation for that. The novel presents at least two instances that associate the (non)-possession of carriages with economic poverty/prosperity/social mobility. As it is typical with Austen, these pieces of information are usually scattered throughout the narrative in a way that they sound as irrelevant, though they serve to express relevant facts about the characters' economic and social conditions/milieu. On one level, for instance, Frank's revelation (known through a letter from Jane, though this is only alluded to) of "Mr. Perry's plan of setting up his carriage" (*Emma*, 221) enhances both Mr. Knightley's and the reader's suspicions of a secret attachment between Frank and Jane; on another, deeper level, it also informs Mr. Perry's (who is an apothecary) rising social status, since carriages constitute economic and social status symbols. At the Coles' dinner, we are informed by an exultant Miss Bates that it was "Mr. Knightley's carriage [that] had brought, and was to take them home again" (*Emma*, 142). Similarly to the previous example, the most visible reading is that this functions as a pretext for Mrs. Weston to

suspect that Mr. Knightley is possibly interested in Jane Fairfax. The dialogue between Mrs. Weston and Emma is also used to provide further information on Mr. Knightley, as when Emma says: "I know no man more likely than Mr. Knightley to do the sort of thing – to do any thing really good-natured, useful, considerate, or benevolent. He is not a gallant man, but he is a very humane one; and this, considering Jane Fairfax's ill-health, would appear a case of humanity to him; – and for an act of un-ostentatious kindness, there is nobody whom I would fix on more than on Mr. Knightley" (*Emma*, 143). Although Emma's words align with the general characterization that the narration at large offers of Mr. Knightley, they also reveal Emma's resistance to accept a probable attachment between them, perhaps because of her dislike for Jane. Besides, Emma's definition of Mr. Knightley's "un-ostentatious humanity" also contrasts with Augusta Elton's declared boasting and ostentation of her brother's and sister's "barouche-landau" (*Emma*, 175). But the passage also implicitly informs the Bateses' inferior economic conditions – referred to by the narrator, at the beginning of the novel, as "the very worst predicament in the world for having much of the public favour" (*Emma*, 11) – thus their dependence on others' benevolence.

McGrath's film is in general so unilateral in the way characters are constructed, in the way setting is used, and the dialogues are so shallow and the 'events' that tie the plot so committed to the romantic and comic relationships of the narrative, that the film does not problematize, or play with, these competing meanings, present in the novel all the time. To provide another interesting example, the film shows Emma driving her carriage alone several times. If on the one hand these moments reflect not only her social status, but her independent mind – she herself tells Harriet, "(...) mine is an active, busy mind, with a great many

independent resources" (*Emma*, 55) – they also ignore, by denying, the 'gendering' of space, commented on above. In addition, Mr. Woodhouse (Emma's father) – characterized as an easily alarmed person in terms of health and safety – would never allow Emma to go out alone the way she does. The film explicitly contradicts itself in this matter: although Mr. Woodhouse is shown sometimes to be fearful of certain types of food (as for instance his aversion to cake, at the beginning of the film, in Mrs. Weston's wedding), and to be a rather complaining person, nothing is made of his reactions to Emma's going out and driving their carriage alone. Moreover, because the film does not reproduce Emma's subjective life – though her writing in the diary and a few instances of her talking aloud constitute an attempt to replace the way her imagination works in the novel – we have no access to the tensions and contradictions of her personality; nor is the ironic undermining of Emma's actions and behaviour, mainly provided by other characters' opinions about her (such as Mr. Knightley), by the novel's narrator – and by the filtering of action through her – brought into play (at least in a substantial way) in this version.

In the criticism of film studies, this aspect of gendered space (both interior and exterior) in 1990s Austen adaptations is substantially investigated by Julianne Pidduck in "Of windows and country walks: frames of space and movement in 1990s Austen adaptations" (*Screen*, 39:4, 1998). Symptomatically, McGrath's *Emma*, though a 1990s film, is not included in her corpus, an exclusion that she justifies as follows:

> I have chosen not to discuss one 1990s Austen adaptation, Douglas McGrath's *Emma* (1996) with Gwyneth Paltrow. Although many of my observations pertain to this film, I find it (...) stylistically divergent from the dominant British realist aesthetics of adaptation that unite the other texts. (384, see footnote 9)

I notice a certain contradiction here, which I will try to explain in the long run. Pidduck's analysis of the question of space-movement, and its connection with issues of "gendered, class and colonial relations of power" (385) is substantiated and illustrated by three specific images, and the relevance they hold in the adaptations: the woman at the window (discussed mainly in relation to *Sense and Sensibility*), the country walk (supported by scenes of *Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice* and *Persuasion*) and the sailing ship (illustrated through *Persuasion*). In relation to the window, she argues that "the spatial confinement of Austen's interiors, so achingly and self-consciously framed by the window, gains resonance only in relation to some 'outside'" (385). Likewise, one would conclude that the scenes that take place outside – both the country and sea walks – and the possibilities of mobility and freedom that the 'sailing-ship' may offer, also acquire a further potential significance to the extent that they may be related to the inside and its confining and stifling properties. Actually, this dialogical inter-connection between inside and outside, between interior spaces and the countryside/the sea depend on one another to be effective.

That is why I actually doubt whether the use of space/movement in McGrath's *Emma* could be analysed on the terms suggested by Pidduck in relation to the other films. She herself admits the film's divergence from what she considers "the dominant British realist aesthetics of adaptation" – one which is defined, supposedly, by a critical treatment of setting and space. As previously pointed out, McGrath's film erases the boundaries between the house and the countryside; in this sense, if there is no wall separating them, the issue of confinement and constraint loses all resonance, unless one considers the matter in relation to its approach in the novel.

Images of Englishness: Setting and Mise-en-scène as Commodity and the Question of Irony

In "Re-presenting the National Past: Nostalgia and Pastiche in the Heritage Film" Andrew Higson theorizes on a strand of contemporary British cinema – mainly dominant between the 1980s and 1990s (he mentions, as examples, *A Passage to India*, *A Room With a View*, *A Handful of Dust*, *Maurice*, *Howards End*, *Shadowlands*, *The Remains of the Day*, among others) – in which "the national past [is] used as a prime selling point" (109). The past in these films is intimately connected with the question of space and the recreation of period details. Higson argues that in these films, "Heritage culture appears petrified, frozen in moments that virtually fall out of the narrative, existing only as adornments for the staging of a love story. Thus, historical narrative is transformed into spectacle; heritage becomes excess, not functional, not something to be used, but something to be admired" (117). A significant consequence of that is the substitution of a critical perspective of history and of culture – imbued in the conception of the national past – by surface and style: "the past is reproduced as flat, depthless pastiche, where the reference point is not the past itself, but other images, other texts" (112).

In "The Heritage Film and British Cinema" Higson reflects on the argument developed in his previous text (mentioned above) and attempts to answer some of the critical responses that his text raised. The criticisms include what some critics consider as an over-generalization of his principles to the analysis of such films, by leading him to ignore the films' specificities and thus obscure other relevant issues at stake in those works – such as the expression of marginal voices, as those of feminists, gays, and the consideration of, for instance, identity concerns (244).

Another criticism relates to what such critics conceive as Higson's overlooking of the traditional association of costume drama, usually seen as lightweight and feminine, with "mere decoration and display," therefore "lacking the seriousness of real history (...)" (245).

The question of irony is also a neglected issue in Higson's consideration of the heritage film. The section revealingly entitled "Narratives of instability, images of stability" provides an interesting point of departure for the discussion of this subject, mainly when he claims that,

> (...) at the level of the image, narrative instability [is] overwhelmed by the alluring spectacle of iconographic stability, providing an impression of an unchanging, traditional, and always delightful and desirable England, the England of 'English Heritage,' where social difference but also the possibility of making connections across social boundaries, are replaced by social deference, each person in their allotted place and transgression forbidden (239-40).

In his previous text, "Re-presenting the National Past," Higson mentions that "it is the tension between visual splendour and narrative meaning in the films that makes them so fascinating" (110). I would argue that part of this fascination arises exactly from the ironies stemming from the contrast between heritage setting and narrative complexity. Although, surprisingly, Higson does not consider the adaptations of Jane Austen's novels in his analysis, they would also serve as illustrations for the argument. As Moyra Haslett, in her reading of Jane Austen in the 1990s, says, "the images of a heritage England are associated primarily with Jane Austen" (202). In this respect, Monica Lauritzen's study of *Jane Austen's Emma on Television* (1972 version) already exemplifies the period research involved in the production of television series and films; the books *The Making of Pride and Prejudice* and *The Making of Jane Austen's Emma* also attest to this concern. So much attention is given

to the reproduction of authenticity in terms of hairstyles, costumes, make-up, wallpaper, fabrics, drapes, that a certain object may be recreated so as to be authentic in relation to the period, while being devoid of the meaning it has in the novel, thus acquiring a different function, or simply no function at all, in the film. Lauritzen mentions a very interesting case: Harriet's riddle book (see chapter III above for the discussion of the function it plays in Austen's novel), which, she explains, "was made very lovingly by a woman prop-maker and appears in the serial as a beautiful volume decorated with pressed flowers and a variety of pictures. It is a convincing replica of scrap-books from the period. What is lost in the process of adaptation, however, is Jane Austen's gentle mockery at the expense of the shallowness of Harriet's 'literary pursuit'" (115). This is an illustration of the fact that costume drama tends to value the visual aspects of the mise-en-scène, by making them authentic, though too splendid and sumptuous, thus without aligning them with the conflicts and meanings expressed in the source narrative. Another example that shows the contradictions linked to the effort at recreating period details in terms of visual splendour and authenticity is related to the clothes that Gwyneth Paltrow/Emma Woodhouse wear. In his diary of the making of *Emma* McGrath also gives attention to clothes. He says: "Ruth Myers, our costumer, has a number of great ideas: She will use softer fabrics to give the clothes a more flowing, sensual quality. (...) Ruth sees clothes as an extension of the characters and has designed them accordingly. Emma's gown for the ball is golden and soft, with budding flowers all over it, a perfect emblem for Knightley's perception of her as changing from girl to woman" (*Premiere*, 1996, 77). Although in this case the visual aspect (costume) reflects the character's development (sexual maturation), the aspect of faithfulness to the period is ironically undermined by the presence of Giorgio Armani in the film's credits. Moyra Haslett says that "even though most

costumes were hired from the London's costumiers Cosprop, who specialize in period dress (...) Armani, among the most expensive and chic of contemporary fashion designers, was ultimately preferred for the costumes for Emma/Gwyneth Paltrow" (210).

All this shows that if at first McGrath's film fails in recreating the ironies of Austen's novel, the failure, paradoxically, gives rise to other kinds of irony, or other levels of irony. But this reading certainly depends on the familiarity with Austen's novel, its values, and contextual frames (aspects actually required for the reading of any work), so as to make one identify and attribute the ironic interplays resulting from the intersection of both texts. For this purpose, not only the relational semantic association of irony (said and unsaid meanings; relations created between ironist, interpreter and target) proposed by Hutcheon is important, but the inclusive association (both the said and unsaid are important to create the ironic meaning; the unsaid does not substitute the said) is relevant as well.

In this respect, the way McGrath's film represents social relations and the question of propriety and order almost totally denies the social gradations and distinctions found in Austen's novel. At least two scenes, at the beginning of the film, are significant: the positions that Emma and her father take at the table – one very near the other – seems not only very twentieth-century but erases the question of hierarchical relation and order that one finds, for instance, in the television version (to be commented on later). Another relevant question concerns the way Emma relates to Harriet and Robert Martin (both her inferiors in terms of social ranks). The novel makes clear that Emma wants to order people's lives, and this ordering about is mainly reflected in their ritualized relations and behaviour. The passage about their first meeting shows this aspect:

> They met Mr. Martin the very next day, as they were walking on the Donwell road. He was on foot, and after looking very respectfully at her, looked with most unfeigned satisfaction at her companion. Emma was not sorry to have such an opportunity of survey; and walking a few yards forward, while they talked together, soon made her quick eye sufficiently acquainted with Mr. Robert Martin. His appearance was very neat, and he looked like a sensible young man, but his person had no other advantage; and when he came to be contrasted with gentlemen, she thought he must lose all the ground he had gained in Harriet's inclination. Harriet was not insensible to manner; (...) Mr. Martin looked as if he did not know what manner was. (*Emma*, 19)

Whereas Mr. Martin *talks* to Harriet, the contact between him and Emma is made only in terms of *looks* (he looks very respectfully at her, and her 'quick eye' sufficiently [makes her] acquainted with Mr. Robert Martin). She also keeps away from them, and it is this spatial distance that allows her to *survey* him. The passage is significant for several reasons, but mainly for the creation of irony: Emma's evaluation of Mr. Martin is all based on his appearance, on what her *quick eye* (notice that the expression 'quick eye' overlaps the contradictory meanings of "deftness" and "precariousness of first impressions") manages to perceive. The choice of the term 'survey' informs the generality of the 'acquaintance,' and yet, Emma considers it to have been sufficient. Retrospectively (as discussed in chapter III in relation to another example) this passage acquires a level of structural irony as well, as Emma will discover that the 'other gentlemen' with whom she contrasts Mr. Martin (for example, Mr. Elton and Mr. Churchill) do not correspond to what they appear to be on the surface.

In McGrath's film, however, the viewer does not have this sense of class distinctions – so full of nuances – as one does in the novel. Considering the relations between Emma, Harriet, and Mr. Martin, such distinctions do not exist at all. When Emma and Harriet, for instance, are walking in the countryside around Highbury, and they meet Mr. Martin (the filmic equivalent to the novel's passage above), Harriet

introduces Emma to him and they talk. The sense of distance and hierarchy implied in the novel is diluted in the film. Besides, Emma is so often seen together with Harriet – even their framing includes them side by side, thus suggesting an egalitarian relationship – that the viewer believes they are actually 'intimate' friends. The ironic undermining of Emma's intention to reform Harriet (as also discussed in chapter III) is all absent from this version.

2. Diarmuid Lawrence's *Emma* (1996)

Expressive Montage, Class Distinctions and Irony

Several aspects in Diarmuid Lawrence's 1996-ITV/A&E version of *Emma* call one's attention to irony in a first viewing. The way the film starts – with a moon-night image in which thieves are dimly shown stealing hens from Hartfield (though we can perfectly hear the noises made by the hens and by a gun-shot) – already makes the viewer question, for some seconds, whether that is really an Austen film. In her reading of "Class" in Austen, Juliet McMaster says that "Dickens might give us scenes of the unleashed fury of the mob in the Gordon riots or the French Revolution; but in Austen's novels, by and large, law and order prevail" (128). I have an argument that already in Austen's world this 'law' and 'order' might prevail only in appearance; Austen's irony and implicit tensions undermine such an order, contradict its neatness, thus inviting a careful look into the *double-dealings* of narration at large. In the novel *Emma*, for instance, the reference to 'pilfering' comes in the very last page, as follows: "Mrs. Weston's poultry-house was robbed one night of all the turkies – evidently by the ingenuity of man. Other poultry-yards in the neighbourhood also

suffered. – Pilfering was *housebreaking* to Mr. Woodhouse's fears" (313). The use of the passive voice and also of the vague, indeterminate expression "ingenuity of man" (used ironically) endows the act with an indirectness and a certain distance or abstraction that contrasts with the more tangible and frightening (because enacted and shown) corresponding visual scene.

Significantly, the novel shows other poverty-scenes and several gradations of poverty as well: when Emma and Harriet visit the poor and the sick (this scene is absent from Lawrence's version); and when Harriet is attacked by a group of gypsies (a scene that is maintained in both versions). Besides, as Mary-Elizabeth Tobin shows in her reading of impoverished gentlewomen in *Emma*, this is a novel in which Austen "explores (...) [women's] depression over their loss of social status and the shame they experience at all the small indignities accompanying their social exclusion" (415). Miss Taylor (once Emma's governess), Mrs. Goddard (mistress of Highbury Boarding-school), Miss Nash (a teacher at Mrs. Goddard's school), Mrs. and Miss Bates (widow and spinster daughter of a vicar) and Jane Fairfax (the Bateses' niece, a would-be governess) are examples of such impoverished gentlewomen. What Lawrence's film does, actually, is to bring the scenes of poverty and those showing the working class to the foreground, or even when they appear in the background (throughout the film servants are shown as if they were merely part of the decor), the film often gives them more visibility, perhaps more emphatically or explicitly, than Austen does. The 'hen-stealing' scene, for instance, is chosen to provide the framework for the film's construction: the film ends the way it starts, with an exterior night shot in which hens are also stolen. In her reading of "Austen, Class, and the American Market," Carol M. Dole comments on the sequence by saying that

> The chicken-theft scenes, with their strutting cocks and stolen hens, invite an alternative comic reading through their positioning near marriage/engagement sequences, especially in light of Mr. Woodhouse's lament that he has lost "six good hens and now Miss Taylor." (71)

Differently from Cole, I argue that this framework is highly ironic, not only because it reminds us of the frailty of that apparent order, but mainly because of the subject of Mr. Knightley's speech in the next-to-last scene in the film (which has no equivalent in the novel, being thus an addition to the film), a speech where he emphasizes "continuation and stability." The alternating of this scene (taking place inside the 'cosy' Donwell Abbey – notice the word connotation – with people eating, drinking, celebrating, dancing) with that of the thieves stealing hens in Mr. Knightley's poultry-yard generates the irony for the viewer.

In the film's opening, irony is created mainly through editing procedures: there is a clear opposition between the peace that the night promises, and the fear that hunger and social injustice might bring. Andrew Davies' screenplay already juxtaposes information that it is "a clear night in the country (…). There is some moonlight" with "shadowy figures, three or four of them, running across the grass." He adds, "(…) We can see the silhouette of the house in the background, but the thieves are making for the chicken coops" (*The Making of Jane Austen's Emma*, 78)[4]. The juxtaposition of these two scenes – thieves stealing hens from Hartfield, and that of Emma sleeping, and later waking up with the noise the thieves and the chickens make – clearly illustrates an instance of expressive montage: here, no words are used (except for, "Ho! Ho there! Stop thief!" by the gardener), the effect resulting mainly from the combination of incongruent elements (an apparently peaceful and moonlit night and thieves stealing hens), that in their turn give rise to disjunction and irony. Of course the attribution of irony at the film's opening also depends on some

presuppositions concerning Austen's (textual and contextual) world; as Fay Weldon, in "Jane to Rescue" (rather ironically) says, "When we say 'Jane Austen' everyone knows what we're talking about. Austen means class, literature, virginity and family viewing. (...) We love Jane Austen because she's Heritage" (*The Guardian*, 12 April 1995, 2). Weldon means that this is perhaps the most influencing way in which Austen has been read and constructed. It is at least ironic that people view her like that because she *is* actually all that with a *mocking* look. The irony at the opening is also enhanced when we come to the end of the film, and see the same action happen again. But though repeated, the hen-stealing scene takes place at this time in a different context: it is contrasted both to the harvest and engagement celebration of first Mr. Knightley-Emma, and also of Frank-Jane and of Robert-Harriet. The irony now is not only expressively kept through editing procedures, but reinforced by Mr. Knightley's words. Visual irony is reinforced by verbal irony:

> Ladies and gentlemen – friends. We have been blessed this year again with a good harvest. I have been blessed in another way too.
>
> *He looks down fondly at Emma and she smiles up at him.*
>
> By next harvest, I shall be living at Hartfield, but I assure you all I shall be farming my estate, and looking after you all. There will be stability. There will be continuation – though my life is to change (...). (151)

Actually, scenes of social disruption, showing a frame beyond that of Austen's, constitute a remarkable feature of this film version. Immediately after the opening scene, there is a sequence of the Westons' wedding; on the carriage-ride to church, the camera takes advantage not only to register the dialogue between Miss Taylor, Emma and her father inside the carriage, but also to open the field of vision so as to show workers, common, poor people in the village. As the carriage moves, we listen to Mr. Woodhouse complaining, "Six good hens and now Miss Taylor," a

juxtaposition that sets the ironic tone as well, by equating Miss Taylor to a commodity. Davies' notes in the screenplay inform that the Woodhouses' carriage goes "past a couple of ramshackle cottages of extraordinary squalor. A couple of ragged barefoot children have come out to gawp at them" (79). There is a marked contrast between the Woodhouses' social-class superiority, their gentle manners, their nobleness, and the poor villagers' inferior social position, mainly expressed by their ragged clothes and general appearance. As the carriage passes, they raise their hats in a sign of deference and respect for the Woodhouses, thus attesting to their importance in the village. The visual rendition of a (perhaps) larger Highbury than that of Austen informs, in a wider spectrum, both on the quantity of servants upon whom the landed gentry depended, and on the inequalities and injustices of that kind of society, in which issues of class, money and manners – as Austen's novels, certainly with more subtlety, already reveal – play a crucial role. For instance, Lawrence's film also shows common workers in the village when Mr. Elton leaves for Bath in search of a wife, and servants and their work are shown during the picking of strawberries, during the Box-Hill picnic, and during the preparation of food for the harvest-dinner at the end of the film.

Yet, one may question whether the film actually renders a larger Highbury than the one already depicted in Austen's *Emma*, since this is considered to be a novel in which the matter of class distinctions and social ranks is very well delineated. Highbury, the village which functions as the setting for most of the actions in the narrative, includes people belonging to every social class, from the fake-aristocratic Churchills (that are merely referred to in other characters' accounts and actually live at Enscombe), to the representatives of the landed gentry, Mr. Knightley and the Woodhouses; from the vicar Mr. Elton (who marries the 10.000-worth Augusta

Hawkins) to the lawyer John Knightley, the apothecary Mr. Perry, and the tenant-farmer Robert Martin; those that have risen from trade to gentility, like the Westons and the Coles; the land workers, the servants, the gypsies, and the poor family, the Clarks, that Emma visits for charity at the beginning of the novel. And because its heroine, Emma, is, in Juliet McMaster's words, "one who specializes in social discrimination and makes prompt though often inaccurate judgments about the social station of the people around her" ("Class," 118), the novel provides many examples that contribute to the complexity of class distinctions. These examples (as already considered, for instance, in relation to Emma's rejection of Robert Martin as Harriet's partner, and in relation to Mr. Elton's despising Harriet) sometimes seem to reinforce, and at other times, deny, the strict boundaries of class distinctions. Or better, if they do not deny, they at least show the inevitable crossing of boundaries, so as to promote the assimilation of, for instance, those coming from trade into the so-called upper-gentry. I would argue that in Austen such distinctions are more subtly depicted, mainly with regard to the classes below the landed gentry; as it is known, it is the gentry who constitute her most privileged focus. In Lawrence's *Emma*, however, the dramatization of class distinctions – mainly because of the time-gap between Austen's time and ours – is more openly expressed. Whereas in Austen's novel(s) the reference to the less privileged classes almost always appears in the background, or through details, the film visually shows many scenes in which the presence of servants and other workers compete with those of the upper-gentry on the screen, a fact that illustrates their visibility in more evident ways.

Three examples from Lawrence's film serve to support this argument and to mark its difference from McGrath's version: the scenes dealing with the picking of strawberries, the Box-Hill picnic, and the harvest-engagement scene at the end. In

McGrath's film, the picking of strawberries and the Box-Hill picnic are condensed into one event. And though he chooses to end his film with the wedding scene, he only keeps part of the irony addressed at Mrs. Elton, thus being partially faithful to Austen's end in the novel. This partial faithfulness may be explained when one compares, in more detail, the filmic wedding scene with the way it is depicted in the novel. As usual with Austen, the wedding ceremony itself is undervalued, not dramatized, only mentioned in passing, almost parenthetically: "The wedding was very much like other weddings, where the parties have no taste for finery or parade (...)" (313). And the narrator continues:

> (...) and Mrs. Elton, from the particulars detailed by her husband, thought it all extremely shabby, and very inferior to her own. – "Very little white satin, very few lace veils; a most pitiful business! – Selina would stare when she heard of it." – But in spite of these deficiencies, the wishes, the hopes, the confidence, the predictions of the small band of true friends who witnessed the ceremony, were fully answered in the perfect happiness of the union. (313)

Austen – through the narrating voice – clearly ironizes the assumptions attached to weddings and to the conventions concerning their rituals, mainly in terms of the appropriate clothes and accessories people should wear. The irony in the last sentence, when the narrator unties her perspective from that of Mrs. Elton's, is mainly expressed through the cataloguing and enumeration of expectations for the newly-wedded couple: "the wishes, the hopes, the confidence, the predictions," culminating in the 'fairy-tale' expression "perfect happiness of the union." Following Culler, this irony may be classified as a self-conscious irony, in which the cliché-like style of the sentence immediately reminds the reader of the traditional way fairy-tales end. Thus, it strikes the reader as an aesthetic solution, as a way of speaking, of rhetorical bravado, rather than as a sensible account of the future reality of their married life.

However, because it is ironically constructed, the passage also ends up informing – by means of the unsaid – Emma and Knightley's future life together. Another irony is perceptible in the use of the adjective "true" to qualify the 'friends' who witnessed the ceremony. Mr. Elton is not only one of such a group, but he is the very person who has given his wife the detailed particulars – the "deficiencies" – of the ceremony. And Mrs. Elton, in turn, will make Selina familiar with the wedding's "deficiencies," a detail that also highlights the way gossips are passed on from member to member of the community, thus bridging the gap-distance between its members. The way Austen ends her *Emma* comes full circle to the way she begins it – having irony, and its cold and bitter stance, to provide the narrative framework with a look into the hypocrisies lying behind the apparently refined and civilized manners of that society. McGrath's film also parallels the end with the beginning, by making a transition from the 'real' characters, Emma and Knightley, to their miniature-portraits, as used in the film's opening sequence.

From the marginal and peripheral place it holds in Austen, the wedding-ceremony acquires, in McGrath's adaptation, a central importance: the wedding-scene (also with its "happy-end kiss") is visually rendered, showing the pomp, smiles and happiness of the couple. Mrs. Elton, differently from the novel, is present at the ceremony, and looks directly at the viewer to criticize the lack of satin and lace in the wedding. Though her presence and words still keep part of Austen's irony (mainly when one is familiar with the novel), I would say that most of its effect is diluted in the romantic treatment of the whole scene. In this case, once more, the visual richness of the wedding scene supersedes, by erasing, the ironic touch related to Mrs. Elton's comment.

The fact is that McGrath's film pattern aligns with a comic and romantic representation of Austen, in which the personal relationships are not intertwined with, or reflected in, social and public concerns; the few examples where irony is at stake end up as being lost, or simply unperceived. Lawrence's adaptation, on the other hand – also because of Davies' screenplay – has chosen to construct a film that brings to the foreground the issue of class distinctions and propriety; theirs certainly constitutes a more critical approach to pre-Victorian times and values. The film uses certain interesting resources to reveal, for instance, how the question of order and decorum plays a crucial role in that society. The scene immediately after the Westons' wedding, when Emma and her father are seen in the Hartfield dining-room, constitutes a good example. The positions that Emma and her father take at the table (a long-sized table), one at each other end, informs not only their disciplined and ordered pre-established places and behaviour; this aspect, together with the big size of the room, also serves to express Emma's loneliness and her need to invent stories, more interesting ones than what reality offers her.

In terms of larger social issues, Andrew Davies, commenting on the social context of the period, says: "(...) I think it's an interesting aspect of this book [*Emma*], the fears and evasions of the aristocracy and gentry, living in such close proximity to the great unwashed" (*The Making of Jane Austen's Emma*, 13). The visual rendering of these contrasts favours the creation of irony as well. Such is the case of the strawberry-picking scene, organized and hosted by Mr. Knightley in his Donwell Abbey. The first contrast the viewer notices is between the natural surroundings – specifically the strawberry beds – and what would be a rather natural undertaking (the picking of strawberries), and the way the ladies and gentlemen over-dress and behave (principally Mrs. Elton) – in a very ritualised way, as if in a form of

parade. The clash between nature and culture, and between the gentry and the servants is made more evident in the detail of the servant providing a knee cushion for the guests' comfort while they stoop to pick up the fruit. The irony is enhanced by Mrs. Elton's saying, "How delightful to gather for oneself – the only way to really enjoy them – don't you think, with one's basket over one's arm... so simple and natural, I fancy myself as a sort of shepherdess you know..." (131). The simplicity and naturalness of the task, referred to in Mrs. Elton's words, is every time denied, or undermined, by its ritualising and formal procedures. Again, irony is achieved first in visual terms, and elaborated further by verbal material.

The Box-Hill picnic – famous for Emma's crude and ironic remark addressed at Miss Bates – is another sequence of Lawrence's film that dramatizes the contrast between social classes, by emphasizing the role played by workers and servants in the provision of the pleasures and luxuries of the most privileged. The film shows a long take in which an army of servants are seen carrying the heavy paraphernalia for the picnic. The heaviness of the task, also set in contrast to the naturalness of the picnic, is corroborated by the steep feature of the hill they climb. The scene is also relevant to reveal how a social gathering, held in the open air, fails in its most elementary norms of social behaviour, conduct and gentility. The apparent freedom and beauty promised by the place do not find a correspondence in some characters' stifled inner life, the place somehow functioning as an outlet for them to express their secret emotions and oppressive thoughts, thus making them cross the boundaries of what would be considered a code of good manners. The description the narrator gives in the novel of the relationship between setting (Box-Hill) and characters already suggests, in the mode of a foreshadowing, a negative outcome for the picnic:

> (...) Seven miles were travelled in expectation of enjoyment, and every body had a burst of admiration on first arriving; but in the general amount of the day there was deficiency. There was a languor, a want of spirits, a want of union, which could not be got over. They separated too much into parties. (...) And Mr. Weston tried, in vain, to make them harmonize better. (...) during the two hours that were spent on the hill, there seemed a principle of separation, between the other parties, too strong for any prospects, or any cold collation, or any cheerful Mr. Weston, to remove. (236)

Andrew Davies' screenplay joins to the Box-Hill picnic an incident that takes place two chapters earlier in the novel, when Frank commits a blunder for commenting about Mr. Perry's plan of setting up his carriage (a piece of information he had known through one of his secret letters from Jane). In the novel, this incident leads to a "letter-game," in which Frank uses the words *blunder* and *Dixon*. As discussed in chapter III, this is a game (aligning with other games in the novel) that hides – but only to reveal retrospectively – relevant information about the characters: through the word *blunder*, for instance, Frank indirectly tells Jane of his silly mistake. The meaning of the word *Dixon* is shared by Frank and Emma on one level (Frank induces Emma to think there is a secret attachment between Jane and Mr. Dixon), and by Frank and Jane, on another (in fact, it is Frank and Jane who are already secretly engaged). The overlapping of these two level-meanings generates an ironic meaning, shared by narrator and reader/viewer (besides Frank and Jane) mainly at Emma's expense. In the film (as in the novel) the viewer is also guided by Knightley's detective and suspicious look, which reveals his intent to interpret what is going on. Interestingly, because these games are essentially linguistic, and have a considerable degree of indirectness, they would normally pose problems for the process of adaptation. A way of overcoming that, at least in Lawrence's version, is through the insertion of this letter-game in the Box-Hill picnic, an event that, in the novel, is already essentially tense (and dense) because of Emma's rude remark towards Miss

Bates. By accommodating the letter-game to the Box-Hill picnic, Davies' screenplay adds to the tensions of this social gathering and dramatizes, by deepening, the relationship between Frank and Jane. Jane, who, after seeing the letters corresponding to the name *Dixon*, leaves the group, looking clearly anguished and deeply affected by the "silly private joke," as Emma describes the game to Knightley afterwards. Thus, the letter-game not only introduces and prepares the way for Emma's climactic irony to Miss Bates, some time later, but in-between develops further (though still indirectly) the Frank-Jane relationship.

Chapter III above, which deals with irony in the novel, has already shown that the sub-plot concerning Frank-Jane's mysterious link is highly relevant for the creation of irony in *Emma*. In McGrath's version this sub-plot is superficially treated, being almost totally ignored; it is difficult for the viewer to make any sense of the Frank-Jane relationship judging only from the film's resources. Lawrence's version, conversely, is careful to scatter details throughout the film that dramatize their connection; in a retrospective viewing, one can perceive the subtlety of these details and their function to convey a type of *superior* meaning to the viewer, an aspect responsible for the creation of irony. Some of these "clues" are only visual, whereas others also rely on verbal material. Three of these *visual details* are the following: during a dinner at the Westons, when Jane is singing and playing the piano, Frank, though sitting beside Emma, looks completely lost in his thoughts, "staring abstractly in Jane Fairfax's direction" (114) thus denouncing that his mind is somewhere else. The superior knowledge expressed in this visual detail is developed further by a conflation of discourses – visual and aural. Some time later, while Frank joins in Jane's singing – we listen to their voices in the background saying, "And I will love you all the day" – Mrs. Weston comes to sit by Emma and tell her of her

"discoveries" in relation to Knightley and Jane. The two discourses compete on the screen: at the same time that we see Mrs. Weston talking to Emma about her conjectures, we also listen (in the background) to Jane's and Frank's moving voices as they sing.

The second example I would like to consider is the scene immediately after this at Randalls, when Emma and Harriet (after being met by Mrs. Weston and Miss Bates at Ford's) visit Jane at the Bateses. This is how the narrator, in the novel, narrates the passage:

> The appearance of the little sitting-room as they entered, was tranquillity itself; Mrs. Bates, deprived of her usual employment, slumbering on one side of the fire, Frank Churchill, at a table near her, most deedily occupied about her spectacles, and Jane Fairfax, standing with her back to them, intent on her pianoforte. (153)

The key-term in the passage is the word *appearance*, that already invites a reading that might differ from the picture given. Apparently, the reader 'sees' what the visitors also see when going into the room. Jane's reservation is once more reiterated through her "standing with her back to them." But what are Frank and Jane doing before they enter? This deliberate ellipsis on the narrator's part constitutes an interesting case of how much the unsaid *communicates*. It is significant that Mrs. Bates is sleeping, perhaps after being prevented from wearing her spectacles (the very object (?) of Frank's visit). That is, before sleeping she was also *blind* to what was going on around her. Actually, Jane and Frank have been alone all the time. Besides, Miss Bates's garrulous talk, when bringing the guests up to the dark and narrow staircase, gives the couple some time to *compose the scene* they want others to *see*. This moment is emblematic of the Frank-Jane *representation* when they are in front of others.

Lawrence's film version is somehow successful in putting these issues into play. The corresponding filmic scene shows the ambiguity between Frank's apparent act (repairing the spectacles) and what is really taking place (his being together with Jane), by dramatizing the abruptness with which both Frank and Jane receive the guests in the room (in the film, Mrs. Weston is not present). It becomes clear for the viewer that Jane and Frank have been taken by surprise by their arrival, and start to behave in a way that suggests more ceremony and formality than when they were by themselves. Besides, Jane's facial reactions – showing distress and anguish – after Frank's comments about her playing for Mr. Dixon in Weymouth, are seen just by the viewer, not by Emma (thus endowing the viewer with more knowledge than her).

The third *visual detail* relates to a scene during the strawberry-picking when Frank and Jane are seen at a distance. Jane has decided to go away, after being fed up with Mrs. Elton's lectures of "dos and don'ts," and also probably feeling oppressed by the pressure of *performing* all the time. While she is going away she meets Frank, who naturally tries to convince her to stay. This scene is shown at a distance, and only the viewer has access to it. We see that they are quarrelling, judging from their gestures, but we cannot hear what they say. This is another instance in which narration provides the viewer with a superior knowledge than that of the characters. The discrepancy between these two levels of knowledge generates irony for the viewer.

The Box-Hill picnic, in Lawrence's version, still provides another shot that adds to the dramatization of the Jane-Frank secret attachment. After Emma's ironic remark towards Miss Bates ("Yes, but there may be a difficulty for you Miss Bates. You will be limited as to number – only three at once!"), Mr. Elton and Augusta give

an awful look at Emma, to show their criticism of her attitude, and decide to go away for a walk. Looking at them from a certain distance, Frank says,

> Happy couple! How well they suit each other. Very lucky, marrying as they did on such a short acquaintance formed in a public place! How many a man has committed himself on a short acquaintance, and regretted it the rest of his life! (139)

Significantly, it is Jane (always so reserved) who gives Frank an answer:

> Such things do occur, undoubtedly. But only the weakest characters will allow such an unfortunate acquaintance to be an oppression for ever. Excuse me. (139)

Frank and Jane use the relationship between Mr. Elton and Augusta to talk about their own: it is them who have known and committed to each other at Weymouth. But differently from Mr. and Mrs. Elton, Frank and Jane have not been lucky, and do not seem to suit each other (Jane is an orphan, who needs to earn her living as a governess, whereas Frank is to inherit a fortune); money and the difference of social class prevent them from making their engagement public. At this moment, it is Jane who – indirectly referring to Frank as a "weak character" – liberates him (and herself) from the oppression into which their engagement has been transformed. Except for Knightley, who has had some suspicions about Frank and Jane, the other characters are completely ignorant of the actual meaning of their words above. Some time later, the film still provides another shot of Jane, walking in the fields, clearly without knowing where to go. She cries and looks thoroughly distressed. Only Robert Martin, besides the viewer, watches her pass completely unconscious of what is around her. The effect of the structural irony here and in the dialogue above (for those who are not familiar with the novel) will only be attained some time later, when Frank tells his father about his secret engagement to Jane. Whereas for the Westons (who hoped for

an attachment between Frank and Emma) and for Emma herself the secret's revelation has the effect of a bomb, for the viewer, it only comes as a way of answering to, thus confirming, his/her gradual suspicions.

The harvest-engagement celebration scene that (almost) closes the film – already discussed in relation to the hen-theft scene – still deserves some attention concerning the presence of tenants, workers and servants. As already mentioned, this is a scene that finds no equivalent in the novel, having been added by Davies' script. This is how he justifies the conception of his idea:

> (...) I wondered if it wouldn't be possible to think of some kind of event, other than a wedding, which would bring all the characters together and tie up all the loose ends. I then imagined a kind of harvest supper, like in Hardy's or Tolstoy's novels – all that lovely stuff of bringing the harvest home and the haymakers and the good gentleman farmer; a time when you need every man, woman and child in the community to work together. So I wrote in a scene where we see the harvesting in the fields and then a sequence of the harvest supper itself, where we show Knightley as an ideal old-fashioned landowner who wanted to share and celebrate with his tenants. I hoped this would form a nice contrast with the Eltons, who think it very eccentric of him to invite his tenants. (*The Making of Jane Austen's Emma*, 57-8)

Davies' words are important to illustrate the issue of traversing discourses in adaptations: the 'inspiration' for the scene was not found in Austen, but in Hardy or Tolstoy. The filmic scene is revealing not only of the presence of many servants who prepare the food, but it also suggests the *appearance* of a community bonding. Yet, actually, there are two different rooms to house the guests – one for the gentry, and another for the tenants; we also have glimpses of the kitchen, showing the servants cooking. The film emphasizes this separation, at the same time that it attempts to bridge the gap between both groups; this aspect is clear first in the scene when Emma has to cross a whole room in order to talk to Harriet and Robert Martin. The camera accompanies Emma's natural walking movement, as if in an attempt to highlight her

crossing of a boundary, both spatially and socially speaking. In this version (differently from McGrath's), Emma only speaks to Robert Martin and even shakes hand with him *at this time*. (In the previous situations they met, Emma never talked to him). Their meeting is now (ironically) even mediated by Harriet's formal introduction – as if they have never seen each other.

Another aspect that reflects the film's intent to show the assimilation of lower social classes into the gentry society is the way the dances are enacted. This is also a moment when the film takes the opportunity to emphasize that after all the mismatchings, things have finally come to a harmonic conclusion. So, first Knightley leads Emma into the dancing room, being followed by Frank and Jane, and also by Robert and Harriet. Afterwards, other couples join these pairs, a fact which makes the dancing group a social melting pot. The transition from the dancing room – with all these couples dancing and celebrating life (both in terms of the harvest success and in terms of their personal emotional life) – to the outside of Donwell Abbey to show the hen-stealing incident is revealing of the proximity of hunger and poverty to those that consider themselves as if living in an ivory tower. Undoubtedly, it is this scene that undermines the harmonic appearance and celebratory tone of the film's end.

The Visual Rendition of Emma's Fantasies

Besides the critical treatment that Lawrence's film gives to the question of setting, space, and the issue of class distinctions, a fact which endows the film with an ironical look and tone, it also generates irony through the visual rendition of Emma's imagination as to the love stories she invents; that is, the film succeeds in actually showing some of the events, conjectures and guesses as filtered through Emma's

mind, as results of her propensity to create stories (we already know from the novel that she constitutes a 'fallible filter'), stories which, as the film develops, do not align with what the narration at large is showing and telling. The visual rendition of Emma's imagination is relevant not only to provide the character with psychological depth, but also to create a link with the viewer through irony. In Sarah Lyall's "The Other Emma Confidently Makes Her Case," Kate Beckinsale, the actress who played Emma in the British version, says that "the main reason for her deep obsession with other people's relationships is that she's so stultified in her environment" (*New York Times*, 1997). The film, by subtly reproducing, on the one hand, the novel's sub-plot of mystery involving the secret engagement of Frank and Jane Fairfax, and on the other, by dramatizing Emma's fantasies, invites a close reading of its discourse, rather than of its story, since this device generates irony. Andrew Davies's comments on Emma's characterization illustrates the point:

> This idea of Emma having an artistic sensibility and wanting to manipulate life was something I treated as a playful thing, showing that the exuberant imagination she has makes her want to embellish every story she hears. She imagines things and then exaggerates them. I thought it would be good to see Emma's fantasies on the screen. (*The Making of Jane Austen's Emma*, 9)

In this way, the Lawrence-Davies film renders visually all the romantic possibilities that Emma imagines and invents first for Harriet (Harriet and Mr. Elton; Harriet and Frank Churchill) and then for Jane Fairfax and Mr. Dixon. The film also shows Emma's fantasy of Mr. Knightley's and Jane's wedding (after being induced by Mrs. Weston's conjectures). Among such fantasized scenes, the one when Emma invents a secret romance between Jane and Mr. Dixon is worthy of attention. Emma and Harriet are at the Bateses' sitting room (Mrs. And Miss Bates and Jane are also present), when they listen to Miss Bates' account of Mr. Dixon's saving Jane in a boat

accident at Weymouth. Miss Bates' voice-off is visually matched with Emma's romantic imagination of the scene. The viewer actually *sees* what Emma imagines, i.e., the camera registers not what has happened, but what Emma guesses to have happened. There is a sharp contrast between the actual account of the incident (what the voice says) and the way this account is represented through Emma's mind (what the image says). After Emma's fantasy, there is a cut back to Miss Bates, who continues the dialogue:

> Miss Bates: And ever since we had the history of that day, I have been so fond of Mr. Dixon!
>
> Harriet: Oh! What a shocking tale!
>
> Emma: But one with a happy ending. (103)

The way Emma looks at Jane when stating that implies that she means more than simply saying that everything went well in the end. Whereas the viewer shares with Emma the due weight of meaning she gives to her sentence, the other characters are completely unaware of the implication of Emma's words. But more interesting than that, the attentive viewer also laughs at Emma (just like in the Mr. Elton-Harriet plot) – thus sharing with the implied author the knowledge that she constitutes a fallible filter – if not by this time, some time later, when it will become clearer that Jane has a mysterious relationship with Frank. In this way, Emma's reading and interpretation of reality around her is all mis-threaded: her 'stories' are not reliable.

The film also succeeds in the presentation of Frank Churchill to some of the Highbury members, and to both Emma and the viewer. As in the novel, when even before having been to the village, the narrator ironically says that "Mr. Frank Churchill was one of the boasts of Highbury," (9) the film also provides a meaningful context, differently from the novel, to introduce Frank to the viewer, and to most

characters in the film, before he arrives there in person. Such an introduction is provided both by a portrait of Frank, hung on the wall in the Westons' room, and by Mr. Weston's playing the role of father-narrator, as he tells Mr. Elton – and the viewer – about his son's history-life. In the first case, when the information about Frank is mediated through his portrait, Emma looks at the picture and exclaims, "And he is very handsome." To which Mr. Elton answers, "Appearances may often deceive." This worn-out saying acquires a highly ironic overtone in the whole context of the film, in which matters of appearance and reality, and the incongruity between them, will be responsible for the general ironic pattern of the narrative. At the end of the Christmas dinner, when all the guests are returning to their homes, Emma (this time alone) looks once more at Frank's picture, and by now the picture materializes into the very person, Frank Churchill, who gallantly kisses Emma's hand and 'actually' speaks to her: "Miss Woodhouse, we meet at last." The first introduction of Frank to the viewer already creates, on one level, an expectation of a romantic attachment between him and Emma; but because the whole scene is mediated through Emma's imaginist tendencies – which the viewer soon learns to be 'fallible' – both Emma and the viewer will be deceived. Like the novel, but of course using peculiarly cinematic tools, the film thus succeeds in subverting pre-conceived notions about stereotypical romantic couples and relationships. Besides, the use of a portrait to introduce Frank is also consonant with Austen's emphasis, in the novel, on a world of signs (as for instance, Emma's drawing of Harriet's sketch, the charades, the conundrums, the letter-puzzles, and the word-games scattered throughout her narrative), and to their precariousness to actually convey stable meanings, thus always giving rise to misunderstandings and irony. In order to further develop the ironic nuance of Mr. Elton's statement "Appearances may often deceive," it is important to

highlight, for instance, that he is thoroughly unaware of Emma's blindness concerning his interest in her. Thus the reader/viewer, in their 'superior knowledge,' may attribute at least three different meanings to the above statement: 1. Frank may not be in reality what the portrait indicates; 2. Though Mr. Elton appears (from Emma's perspective) to be interested in Harriet, he is interested in Emma; 3. Though Emma appears (from Mr. Elton's perspective) to be interested in him, she is interested in his being interested in Harriet. On their carriage-ride back home – when Mr. Elton finally declares his love to Emma – the "appearances may often deceive" notion has its first revelation to Emma.

The discussion of both McGrath's and Lawrence's versions of *Emma* points to several distinctions between the two films. Whereas McGrath's adaptation illustrates a romantic and superficial portrayal of Austen's universe – superficial in terms of screenplay and in terms of its failure to express Austen's realism and criticism (mainly through her ironic discourse and stance) of pre-Victorian society and values – Lawrence's version seems to be more aware of the tensions inherent in the Austenian world, thus being more successful in the re-construction of Austen's ironies, even when creating and adding scenes different from those in Austen's novel. The visual rendition of Emma's fantasies are relevant to endow the character with psychological density and also to provide parallel 'stories' that give the viewer a superior knowledge to that of the characters, thus provoking irony. In general terms, McGrath's version is apparently more faithful to Austen, but the faithfulness is restricted to a transference of the narrative material (instead of the enunciating, which requires, rather than simply transference, adaptation), mainly as it relates to the romantic and comic misunderstandings of Emma's inventions. Lawrence's version, though apparently less faithful to Austen, manages to adapt certain incidents (such as the hen-theft scene) in

ways that answer to Austen's universe and to her uses of irony more productively and effectively than McGrath's.

3. Amy Heckerling's *Clueless* (1995): Ironical Relations with Austen

A first great distinction between Lawrence's *Emma*, as well as McGrath's, and *Clueless* is related to the acknowledgment of the 'original' source, Austen's novel, in the construction of the adapted text, and consequently the question of faithfulness to what they consider to be Austen's world and values. Whereas the period-piece adaptations make great efforts to reconstruct and recreate Austen's past village life in pre-industrial England in minute details – attention is given to historical locations, accurate period decor, authentic dances, period music, food, costumes, hats, wigs, make-up and hair design (see, for instance, the books *The Making of Pride and Prejudice* and *The Making of Jane Austen's Emma*, which attest, through research and consultation with specialists, the 'historical authenticity' of such films) – a contemporary loose adaptation like *Clueless* does not even mention Jane Austen in the credits. This lack of concern with origins and authorship (at least as it relates to Austen) is decisive for a consideration of *Clueless* and the relations it creates with both Austen's novel and the allegedly 'faithful' adaptations.

Although *Clueless* does not mention Jane Austen or the novel in the presentation of credits, any reader of *Emma* (or viewer of a more "faithful" translation of the novel) will immediately perceive certain "coincidences" between them, all located on story-level:

1. Like Emma, Cher (the main female character in *Clueless*) also plays the role of a matchmaker;

2. Similarly to Emma's family life, Cher's mother is dead (she died during a routine liposuction), and she lives with her father (a lawyer who earns five hundred dollars an hour), with whom she also has a sort of protective, patronizing relationship;

3. Cher's relationship with her stepbrother - Josh - reminds one of Emma's relationship with her brother-in-law, Mr. Knightley;

4. Cher's decision to "adopt" Tai, a classmate who belongs to a lower social class, so as to "improve" her, finds a parallel in Emma's relation with Harriet Smith;

5. Both Emma and Cher are members of high-class society; Emma belongs to early nineteenth-century English gentry society, and Cher to high-class twentieth-century American society;

6. Both Emma and Cher go through a process of self-discovery that includes their falling in love.

Several other parallelisms are created between *Clueless* and Austen's *Emma*: Emma's rude remark towards Miss Bates finds an equivalent in Cher's confusing her maid's origin country – El Salvador – with Mexico. Cher also tries to arrange a match between Tai and Elton, who is, instead, interested in Cher. At a party where Cher and Christian dance, Tai is left alone and Josh (though awkwardly) dances with her. This echoes the moment in the *Emma* ball when Mr. Elton refuses Harriet for a dance, and Mr. Knightley "saves" her from the embarrassment, by inviting her to dance. Christian also protects Tai from the Barnies at the mall, an echo of Frank Churchill's "saving" Harriet against the gypsies in *Emma*.

Despite such parallelisms, some of which are responsible for the creation of irony (as I will discuss below), what mostly calls one's attention in this film is its

deliberate intention to depart from Austen's *Emma* so as to create a completely different text. As such, the title already illustrates such a departure. And differently from the so-called period film adaptation, *Clueless* takes place in Beverly Hills, Los Angeles, in twentieth-century times. This aspect immediately makes the viewer wonder how Jane Austen can "fit" (or has the director's intention been to make her "dissonant with?") such a context.

Theorists who have elaborated on the question of adaptation usually refer to three possible types of relationship available to the filmmaker when transposing the novel to the screen. Brian McFarlane, in his *Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation*, quotes Geoffrey Wagner, for instance, who suggests the following categories: (a) **transposition** – "in which a novel is given directly on the screen with a minimum of apparent interference;" (b) **commentary**, "where an original is taken and either purposely or inadvertently altered in some respect ... when there has been a different intention on the part of the film-maker, rather than infidelity or outright violation;" (c) **analogy**, "which must represent a fairly considerable departure for the sake of making another work of art" (10-11). *Clueless* certainly exemplifies the third category. But though it departs considerably from *Emma*, the intersection with Austen's novel, even if unacknowledged, is still there. This implicit dialogue between some aspects of Austen's past and Heckerling's present also affects the expression of irony, mainly because irony in the twentieth century differs significantly from irony in late eighteenth-century. If we bring back Alan Wilde's classification, Austen's (mediate) irony, though bearing the function to satirize, to ridicule, to laugh at the world around her, is inserted in a context in which the ironist still believes in the moral, psychological, and interpersonal dream of wholeness. That is why an ordered pattern ("all is well that ends well") always characterizes Austen's endings. Conversely, as

we all know, the twentieth century puts an end to this dream of wholeness; in its place we only find disorder, uncertainty, absurdity, instability and contingency. Thus irony in our age contributes to shatter this conception of totality and closure, and replaces the belief in the possibility of recovery and harmony for a dream in (ironic) play. Awareness concerning such issues helps to determine both our reading and our evaluation of *Clueless* as to questions of 'quality' and more mass-culture adaptations.

Reviews and articles about the adaptations of *Emma* in the 1990s usually show the opposing opinions that Heckerling's film gave rise to. In commercial terms, "*Clueless* was a sleeper hit, grossing more than $55 million domestically," as Kim Masters, in "Austen Found: Hollywood Rediscovers the 19th-Century Writer," informs (*Washington Post*, 1995, G1). The following quotations from reviews and articles show the contradictory viewpoints about *Clueless*. In "So Genteel, So Scheming, So Austen," Janet Maslin refers to *Clueless* as "a deliriously pop version" of *Emma* (*New York Times*, 1996, C1); in "Remarks on Jane Austen and the Period Film," Gabrielle Finnane qualifies *Clueless* as "a bright contemporary translation of *Emma*" (*Metro*, 1996, 6); in "The Dumbing of Emma," Anthony Lane talks about "the daffy shape of 'Clueless,' a variation on the theme of 'Emma,'" and opposes it to what he refers to as "the real thing – 'Emma,' adapted and directed by Douglas McGrath" (*New Yorker*, 1996, 76); in "'Emma' Rings True To Jane Austen's Novel," David Sterrit considers *Clueless* as "the most original of them all [he is referring to other Austen adaptations]" (*Christian Science Monitor*, 1996, 11). In "The Austen Versions: Recent Films," Jocelyn Harris refers to *Clueless* as a "brilliant and funny movie" (429), whereas Donald Lyons complains that "[Austen's] masterpiece, *Emma*, was cutely shrunk to comic-book size this summer by Amy Heckerling in *Clueless* and is slated for proper adaptation soon" (*Film Comment*, 1996, 41). In "Verbal

Concepts, Moving Images," Brian McFarlane qualifies *Clueless* as "a sweet-tempered, if simple-minded, reworking of *Emma*;" though he later admits that Heckerling's film is "sharp and witty (...) and affectionate" he adds that "[it] will more than do until the real thing comes along shortly" (*Cinema Papers*, 1996, 31). Many other reviews would also be revealing of such different viewpoints concerning *Clueless*, but what is clearly at stake in the critics' negative evaluations of Heckerling's film is the question of (lack of) "truth" and "fidelity" to Austen's world – as the opposition between "masterpiece" (Austen's *Emma*) and "comic-book size" (Heckerling's *Clueless*), as well as the expression "proper adaptation" in Lyons' comment attest. Besides, the use of "real" to refer to period-piece adaptations, and to distinguish them from *Clueless*, masquerades the fact that all of these films are textual recreations; the notion of "real" does not apply to one more than to the other. Actually, what critics mean is that without a historical authentication that may link it to Austen, *Clueless* is merely a pop version, more mass-culture product than the other films. Such a consideration is also a consequence of the fact that *Clueless* is a film originally conceived to be addressed to teenagers, having its literary and filmic roots, as Esther Sonnet in her analysis "From *Emma* to *Clueless*" informs, "in the critically despised 'teenpic' genre that emerged in the mid-1950s as a result of the fragmentation of mass cinema audiences into age-specific consumer groups" (51).

These notions actually disguise the fact that the other supposedly "proper adaptations" are also remakes and aesthetic replays and are also inserted within a context of mass, popular culture. As Sonnet argues, "*Clueless* proposes a quite different relation to its textual 'origin.' It does not signal itself as 'past' and therefore does not cue in the 'gentrification effect I have argued typifies those 'literary' adaptations that make up 'highbrow' popular cinema. Instead, the resolutely

contemporary setting of *Clueless* plays as much against its source as it does with it" (60).

"Play" is actually a key concept in the discussion of *Clueless*, for what it does is to play with the possibility of making a film with different textual strata, not only semantically, but historically and culturally speaking – consisting of residues from different times and places, even if these are not always explicitly shown. Despite the parallels pointed out above on the level of story between both texts, Austen's *Emma*, in *Clueless*, consists of a quotation, an ironic quotation.

Because *Clueless* is not a period adaptation, it is crowded with references to themes and topics that have gained prominence in contemporary debates: drugs, adolescence, sexuality, virginity, ethnicity, divorce, violence, ecology, Greenpeace, Amnesty International, breast cancer, education, stereotypes, consumerism, fashion. But none of these are discussed; on the contrary, they are merely alluded to, or literally, but loosely, quoted, thus also constituting ironic quotations in the film's context. As the main setting for *Clueless* is a high-society secondary school (or should I say a shopping mall?) in Beverly Hills, contemporary Los Angeles and times, very often the school board shows words like "discrimination," "suffragette," "subjugation," "poverty," and "destitution." The irony is that these topics remain as distant as possible from the students; they exist merely as signs, words written on the board, or on characters' (such as Josh's) T-shirts.

As *Clueless* represents a considerable departure from Austen's *Emma* and from the period-piece versions of the novel, it illustrates in my view a kind of ironic vocabulary that aligns with Richard Rorty's conception of the ironist as discussed in *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*. He describes an ironist as a person who "has radical and continuing doubts about the final vocabulary she currently uses (...)" (73).

The ironist thus expresses herself through redescription, through "playing the new off against the old" (73). In opposing irony to common sense – "to be commonsensical is to take for granted that statements formulated in that final vocabulary suffice to describe and judge the beliefs, actions and lives of those who employ alternative vocabularies" (74) – Rorty characterizes the ironist as one whose vocabulary is contingent, fragile, doubtful, always subject to change. These notions in my opinion make the reading of irony in *Clueless* at least twice as complex because considering that to re-describe is to ironize, what *Clueless* does is to re-describe an already highly ironic text, a fact that makes it doubly ironic.

The playful and ironic tone of *Clueless* is pervasive from the beginning to the end of the film. The use of Cher as a first-person narrator is decisive for the play of incongruities between verbal material and the images shown. Cher's voice-over at the beginning of the film, introduces it thus: "So OK, you're probably thinking, 'Is this, like a Noxema commercial, or what?' But seriously, I actually have a way normal life for a teenage girl. I mean I get up, I brush my teeth, and I pick out my school clothes." The equality suggested by Cher between the film (*Clueless*) and a commercial is already symptomatic of the incorporation the film makes of other communication technologies through references to, and quotations from, other media, like: **1. Television** – Josh usually criticizes Cher for her lack of concern with what is happening around the world and for her preferences to watch cartoons; thus, cartoons are usually considered trivial, in opposition to the news, taken as serious television. The film also plays with advertisements, as in the case of the "freshmaker." **2. Video** – as when Cher and Christian (that would correspond to Frank Churchill in *Emma*) watch Stanley Kubrick's 1960 *Spartacus*. In *Clueless* Christian is a homosexual, a fact which tunes in with the theme of homosexuality in Kubrick's film, some of

whose scenes were censored in the original release because of their covert homosexual implications (Finnane, *Metro*, 6); **3. Cinema, literature, theatre, adaptation** – Two examples are revealing: the first relates to Cher's quoting of Shakespeare's verse "Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May but thy eternal summer shall not fade" to put it in Miss Giest's pigeon-hole (Cher is also a matchmaker in this version; she wants to make Miss Giest believe that a supposed lover has put the verse there). Dionne asks Cher whether she has written that and Cher says "it's a famous quote ... from Cliff's notes." Actually, Cher's/Cliff's 'verse' corresponds to two lines of Shakespeare's Sonnet 18, which starts as "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?:" line 3 – "Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May" and line 9 – "but thy eternal summer shall not fade." Interestingly, the new editing of Shakespeare's lines into one single verse also reflects a mass-market impulse to re-arrange, as if in a collage, so-called canonical texts/authors. The other example refers to Heather, Josh's girlfriend, when she mentions Hamlet saying "To thine own self be true." The dialogue goes like this:

> Cher: Ah, no, uh, Hamlet didn't say that.
>
> Heather: I think that I remember Hamlet accurately.
>
> Cher: Well, I remember Mel Gibson accurately, and he didn't say that. That Polonius guy did.[5]

These two instances reveal how the literary text – most of times considered superior both to the criticism written about it and its adaptations – is at present mediated by mass-culture experiences and diverse cultural discourses; Cher remembers Shakespeare's quote not from her reading of Shakespeare, but from Cliff's notes. Likewise, she remembers Hamlet not from her reading of Shakespeare's play, but from her memory of Mel Gibson playing his role. These examples also illustrate the

lack of concern with origins and authorship already commented above in relation to the film *Clueless* itself, in whose credits Jane Austen's novel does not appear.

To further analyze the matter of *Clueless* as constituting an ironic re-description of Austen's *Emma* I would like to concentrate now on what I consider to be a very substantial instance of ironic quotation from Austen's text. I refer to the moment when Cher takes a picture of Tai, and Elton asks her for a sample and sticks it in his locker.[6] The scene directly relates to the one in Austen's novel, when Emma draws a portrait of Harriet, and Mr. Elton praises Emma's ability as drawer and painter. Several implications arise from that change: for one thing, taking photographs as a substitute for drawing/painting is a way of signalling the move from a so-called high-artistic technique and expression (drawing/painting) to a mass-popular activity (photography), that lacks (at least in Cher's case as photographer) the standards of "great art." This scene might be enlightened and its discussion further elaborated by a reference to Walter Benjamin's much quoted text on "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," mainly the passage dealing with photography:

> (...) for the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual. To an ever greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility. From a photographic negative, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for the "authentic" print makes no sense (669-670).

That is why the reader of Austen's *Emma* cannot help laughing at the "photography scene" in *Clueless*, which, to a certain extent, allows the discussion concerning the matter of artistic reproduction, including Heckerling's film itself as an ultimate and concrete attempt at re-producing, in another place and time, Austen's *Emma*. In the novel's context, the reader may admit Mr. Elton's praise of Emma's painting – which still possesses what Benjamin calls "aura" – "that which withers in the age of

mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art" (668) – the element that attests to the authority, uniqueness, and singularity of the artistic piece. But in *Clueless*, when Elton says he has kept Tai's picture because it was taken by Cher, the viewer might suspect a parodic commentary on the misunderstandings in Austen's novel (which somehow begin with Emma's painting of Harriet). The film at this moment actually illustrates the historical and cultural gap between *Emma* and *Clueless*, whose title already alludes to a superficial world, where surfaces and style take precedence over content. The passage from Austen's novel is turned into a joke in Heckerling's film; after all, in an ordinary context (as the one in the film) a picture is much more important for what it contains (mainly when the theme is people/women) than by the fact of who has taken it (a fact that is made more evident when the viewer knows that Cher does not have any special ability for photography). Subverting this logic conclusion is a way the film finds to establish an inevitable difference in terms of Austen's world and ours – one in which, quoting Linda Hutcheon, in *The Politics of Postmodernism*, "the notion of the original as rare, single and valuable (in aesthetic or commercial terms) is called into question" (93).

The scene selected above from Heckerling's film also serves to illustrate the semantic features of ironic discourse proposed by Hutcheon: relational, inclusive and differential. Not only does *Clueless* reproduce the ironies present in Austen's text, but in adapting them to our contemporary time, i.e., in re-describing them, the film ends up enlarging such an ironic discourse so as to encompass other issues not present in Austen's time. In watching *Clueless*, the viewer notices that many of its ironic effects are actually derived from the parodic relations the film creates with Austen's textual universe. Such relations, however, are not always explicitly shown – they merely allude to Austen. The lack of acknowledgment to Jane Austen's *Emma*, for instance,

in the film credits, makes Austen be the *unsaid* in *Clueless*. In this sense, the relationship between said and unsaid meanings complement each other through this game of reference and allusion the adaptations create with Austen's source text, and also through the cultural gap between the literary and filmic texts.

Differently from the period pieces (McGrath's and Lawrence's *Emma*), which claim to be generally 'faithful' to Austen's source text, and which thus attempt to celebrate Austen's greatness and *reproduce* Austen's ironies, *Clueless* creates irony by intersecting past and present, by alluding to *Emma*, and at the same time by disguising, or denying, the allusion so as to concentrate on contemporary issues. Therefore, two readings of irony might result from *Clueless*: viewers who are not familiar with Austen's text will still enjoy the ironies in Heckerling's film; but the identification of *Emma* in *Clueless* (that is, the possibility of voicing out the unsaid) certainly adds to another level of irony in the film, one resulting from the dialogic rubbing of both texts. The scenes in *Clueless* which have a direct relation to Austen's *Emma* inevitably force the reader/viewer to re-dimension the question of irony in terms of new audiences, new targets and new interpreters.

The semantic categories of irony proposed by Hutcheon – relational, inclusive and differential – may also be enlarged, given another scope: not only do they work within the texts themselves, but in the texts' relations with one another. The irony with which Jane Austen depicted her world (in terms of appearance, manners and social ranks, for instance) is at once and the same time corroborated and further utilized as a pretext for launching an ironical look into our own time and culture. Therefore, some of the targets now are: the educational system, fashion, consumerism, and the superficiality characterizing young people's life in contemporary (American) world.

Discussion of other specific examples from the film are necessary for the elaboration of these points, mainly a consideration of the scenes that, though echoing passages in Austen's *Emma,* also enlarge their meaning by deviating from them, by making references to contemporary issues. Such is the case, for instance, of the ride home Elton offers Cher (this parallels the carriage-ride, in *Emma,* when Mr. Elton confesses his love for the heroine). The dialogue goes on like this:

> Cher: Oooh, you knew what?!
>
> Elton: That you were totally sprung on me.
>
> Cher: Hello?! Don't you mean Tai?
>
> Elton: Tai?!
>
> Cher: You have her picture in your locker.
>
> Elton: I have the picture you took in my locker.

I have already commented on the ironic effects resulting from the substitution of painting for photography, a fact that already enlarges the question of dramatic irony present both in the corresponding passage in *Emma,* and in the attempt to reproduce it in *Clueless.* Actually, the fact that Elton keeps Tai's picture in his locker because it was Cher who took it does not sound plausible, or convincing, neither for Cher nor for the viewer – whose superior knowledge about *Clueless* as a remake of *Emma* denies, or clashes with, Elton's gesture to endow Cher with the rank of an 'author,' and the picture with the status of originality and authenticity. Furthermore, the sequence highlights the opposition between signs and content, an opposition that underlies the film.

However, not only the scene itself is important; its outcome also deserves further attention. The revelation to both Elton and Cher that they had been wrong in

their conjectures – Elton is interested in Cher, not in Tai, as Cher herself supposed – makes both of them angry with each other to the extent that Cher asks Elton to stop the car for her to get out. The place where Cher is left is highly deserted, besides the fact that it is very late at night. When she is trying to get a taxi number she is alarmed by a robber who asks for her phone, her bag, and also for her to get down on the ground. Cher complains thus:

> Cher: Oh, no. You don't understand, this is an Alaia.
>
> Robber: An-awhat-a?
>
> Cher: It's like a totally important designer.
>
> Robber: And I will totally shoot you in the head. Get down!
> (Cher whimpers as she lies down on the pavement)
> Alright, um, count to a hundred. Thank you.
>
> Cher: One, two...

Besides underlining the difference between a more secure and stable past world (though Lawrence's version already denies this supposed security and stability) and ours, which is mainly characterized by vulnerability and danger, this moment aligns with a general pattern of *Clueless* to highlight superficiality and surface, represented in this case through fashion, whose metonym, "an Alaia," indicates.[7] This aspect should be understood within a broader context of consumerism that the film also emphasizes and ironizes; in the dialogue above, the robber's echoic repetition of Cher's "totally" in "I will totally shoot you in the head" displaces the previous meaning attributed to it in Cher's sentence and generates the ironic and mocking intent.

Fashion and consumerism in *Clueless* walk hand in hand. The second song used at the film's beginning is entitled "Fashion Girl," by David Bowie, a fact that

already introduces the relevance of the topic for the film's overall meaning. Consumerism is not only associated with fashion but with advertisements and technological development as well. Cher's voice-over, as the film opens, compares *Clueless* (or at least the scene that opens it, in which we are shown several shots of the girls having fun) to a "Noxema commercial." The film also plays with the conception of life in a highly technological and media-saturated society, in which, for instance, computers are used to provide for the combination of clothes, and polaroids replace mirrors when deciding for the right costume/clothes. The attention given to fashion and consumerism is such that the school where part of the action of *Clueless* takes place reminds the viewer, many times, of a fashion show walkway or parade. People are distinguished and identified also in terms of their dressing. For example, Cher and Dionne take Tai home for what they call a make-over; Cher decides to change not only Tai's accent and vocabulary but her clothes as well. Her make-over is accompanied by the song "Supermodel," and according to Josh, Cher is acting out on the poor girl as if she were her Barbie doll. The film actually dramatizes some of these moments that show the importance of fashion for these people, by highlighting their artificiality and by calling attention to them through verbal tirades, music and slow motion.

To provide another example, when Christian appears for the first time in the film – he comes to Cher's classroom – his appearance is marked by the use of a slow motion shot, and the song the "Summer of 42", by Michel Legrand. The slow motion, the very romantic song and the exchanging looks between Cher and Christian create an expectation of a romantic relation between them (an aspect that will not be fulfilled, as Christian is a homosexual); the scene is thus ironically loaded and plays with the representation of romantic clichés. But more than that, one soon notices that

Christian's sophisticated clothes find an echo in both Dionne's and Cher's way of dressing. Later on, when Murray tells Cher that Christian is gay, and Cher feels disappointed, she says she will at least continue the relationship with Christian as "one of her favourite shopping partners." But before she knows the real reason why Christian has rejected her, she concludes, "I suppose it wasn't meant to be, I mean, he does dress better than I do. What would I bring to the relationship?" Cher's conclusion undermines the possibility of creating friendship relations as based on wholeness and truth: relations are functional and contingent, and wholeness is replaced by merely material and pragmatic needs.

Another interesting scene relates to a group of school boys shown walking up the school path. Here, the boys are seen first from their backs, then a close-up shows their baggy pants, which seem to fall as they walk, their shoes, their caps, and then we see them from the front. The scene is punctuated by the song "All the Young Dudes" and by Cher's voice-over saying:

> So, OK, I don't want to be a traitor to my generation and all, but I don't get how guys dress today. I mean, c'mon, it looks like they just fell out of bed and put on some baggy pants, and take their greasy hair, Ew! And cover it up with a backwards cap and like, we're expected to swoon? I don't think so!

The irony provided by this example results from the dramatization of the boys' walking in juxtaposition to Cher's look and the camera's slow motion device, as if they were on a fashion show walkway. What Cher says through voice-over, however, denies the meaning attributed to the scene in visual terms; that is, the role of 'models' that the image confers to the boys is not legitimised by Cher's comment. But since the viewer has access to the film's metalanguage as a whole, the irony here is also enriched by the viewer's awareness that Cher is being ironized throughout the film, exactly because of her obsession with fashion and consumerism. In one of her many

voice-over examples, she says, "I felt impotent and out of control, which I really hate. I needed to find sanctuary in a place where I could gather my thoughts and regain my strength." In the next scene Cher is shown at the mall. In several other instances throughout the film, other characters corroborate Cher's obsession with shopping, and define her in terms of consumer parameters, by saying sentences like, "Just go back to the mall or something;" "go out and have fun, go shopping." In a scene almost at the end of the film, when Cher feels stifled, and highly disappointed with Tai, she decides to walk the streets – the scene will culminate in her self-discovery that she is in love with Josh; the scene is punctuated by the song "All by myself" and Cher's monologue through voice-over:

> Everything I think and everything I do is wrong. I was wrong about Elton, I was wrong about Christian, and now Josh hated me. It all boiled down to one inevitable conclusion, I was just totally clueless. Oh, and this Josh and Tai thing was wigging me more than anything. I mean, what was my problem? Tai is my pal, I don't begrudge her a boyfriend, I really...Ooh, I wonder if they have that in my size.

This is meant to be Cher's self-revelation moment, when she makes a kind of retrospect and balance of what her life has been like in recent times. But the seriousness of such an "epiphanic moment" is broken, or at least delayed and undermined by Cher's noticing a beautiful dress in a shop-window, and saying, "I wonder if they have that in my size." Visually, the "epiphany" is also mocked and ironized by a self-conscious exposing of its artificiality through the colourful fountain that 'suddenly' appears and lightens as Cher finally discovers she is in love with Josh.

The emphasis that *Clueless* gives to surface and style, to playfulness and ironic jokes is also perceptible in the scene when Tai, after being disappointed by Elton's interest not in herself but in Cher, decides to destroy the 'tokens' of their supposed love. Tai and Cher are in front of the fireplace, and Tai asks Cher, "Does this thing

[the fireplace] work?" Cher picks up the remote control and switches on the fire. Fireplace lit, Tai can already burn Elton's souvenirs. This scene is actually also inspired in Austen's *Emma*, when Harriet likewise makes Emma witness her destruction of Mr. Elton's souvenirs, which Harriet herself has named *Most precious treasures*. In Austen's novel, this is how Harriet refers to her act:

> (...) – No, let them be ever so happy together, it won't give me another moment's pang: and to convince you that I have been speaking the truth, I am now going to destroy – what I ought to have destroyed long ago – what I ought never to have kept – I know very well (blushing as she spoke). – However, now I will destroy it all – and it is my particular wish to do it in your presence, that you may see how rational I am grown. Cannot you guess what this parcel holds?" said she, with a conscious look. (216-7)

Several interesting ironies spring from the parallelism created between both scenes. First of all, the use of the remote control to switch the fireplace clearly voices out the difference and the gap between Austen's world and ours. The difference, I would argue, is not only technological, but moral and emotional as well. In Austen, the reader not only believes Harriet and her pang (though she denies it), but the misunderstanding provoked by Emma's wild imagination, i.e., her invention of a romantic attachment between Mr. Elton and Harriet, is once more brought under discussion so that both Emma and Harriet have the chance to learn, to grow rationally (echoing Harriet herself) with its disastrous outcome. In Austen, the incident at first is meant to be didactic, but of course, the moment also serves to ironize Emma, who apparently seems to have learned a lesson. But immediately after Harriet has put an end to the "Elton plot" (a plot that Emma has fantasized), by burning all the souvenirs, the reader comes across the following, "And when," thought Emma, "will there be a beginning of Mr. Churchill?" (219). The fact is that Emma has already begun to thread another love-story for Harriet – this time, with Frank Churchill. Clearly this

also suggests the crucial role of a husband in Austen's time, that is, the possibility of marrying, for women, means economic survival and social respect. Harriet does not have anything else to hope for. In *Clueless*, however, finding a partner for Tai does not have any of the weight that it does in *Emma*. It is Tai herself who, after burning all the *stuff* (the term that Tai herself uses; "stuff" also sets the gap in relation to Harriet's expression "most precious treasures"), asks Emma to help her get Josh. In this sense, Tai's apparent pain for Elton's "loss" sounds as artificial, or superficial, as the fireplace that needs the remote control to get started. Furthermore, we should remember that fireplaces have played a key role throughout the history of cinematic mise-en-scène to function as metonymic icons for love and passion. *Clueless* thus 'de-clicherizes' all that, since there is no passion or love for the fireplace to (metonymically) symbolize.

This emphasis on surfaces and styles at the expense of content is also characteristic of the way Cher introduces her house and her mother to the viewer:

> Isn't my house classic? The columns date all the way back to 1972. Wasn't my mom a betty? She died when I was just a baby. A fluke accident during a routine liposuction. I don't remember her, but I like to pretend she still watches over me.

The discussion of setting in McGrath's *Emma* has shown that period-piece adaptations generally attempt to recreate what they assume to be Austen's pre-Victorian England through minute details of costumes, landscapes, country houses, and what helps to construct the mise-en-scène in general, such as furniture, fabrics, paintings, china. Everything is carefully constructed so as to give the illusion of period authenticity. To recall once more Higson's argument in "The Heritage Film and British Cinema,"

> Such films display a museum aesthetic: the particular visual style of the films is designed to showcase these various heritage attractions, to display them in all their supposed authenticity. (233)

Our reading has revealed how, in dealing with adaptations of an author like Jane Austen, the visual richness and splendour end up competing with, and very often diluting, the ironic nuances at play in the source novels. That is why, for the viewer of *Clueless* who is also familiar with this context of "heritage cinema," the scene above when Cher refers to her house as "classic" and the columns as dating all the way back to 1972, enlarges itself in terms of ironic implications. The irony, again, is not only created through the gap resulting from the architectural differences characterizing early nineteenth-century England and twentieth-century seventies, but also through the fact that it is Cher who introduces her house to the viewer and exposes its "classic" features. Whereas in period-piece adaptations much care is taken to hide the recreation of authenticity, to disguise the process of simulation, *Clueless* exposes its artificiality, by self-mocking itself, a self-mockery that ends up affecting the relation it keeps with other Austen adaptations, by investing it with an ironic look.

This self-mockery intent can be illustrated with other moments in the film: for instance, when Cher is anxious because Christian does not call her, as he has promised, the telephone is shown in a close-up and the camera is positioned from below so as to exploit the object in its vertical features. Light on the phone is used in a way that creates a sense of upward tilt. This moment is punctuated by the main theme of "2001: A Space Odyssey" – Richard Strauss's "Thus Spoke Zarathustra" – another intertextual (though ironic) echo of Stanley Kubrick. The association of the musical theme with the close-up, that endows the phone with exaggerated proportions, ironically comment on the importance of a phone-call when a person is on the verge of starting an emotional relationship (ironically, though at this moment Cher refers to Christian as "brutally hot," she will eventually discover his homosexual preferences).

The irony in this sequence, of course, also depends on the viewer's recognition and identification of the scene accompanied by the theme in Kubrick's film, in "The Dawn of Man" sequence, in which an ape-man discovers a pile of bones and starts to manipulate them, thus awakening to their function as tools, or weapons. Eventually, one of the bones, shown in close-up, is thrown in the air, and both its slow motion movement as well as the use of Strauss's "Thus Spoke Zarathustra" endow the shot with a symbolic meaning of discovery and acquisition of knowledge, characteristic of an evolutionary moment; here, the piece of music, in its grandiosity, underscores the discovery, which sounds like an epiphany, a revelation, also considered from the viewer's perspective. The fact that the same piece of music is used in a different context in *Clueless*, at a time when we are so far away from (what seems now as) such 'rudimentary' discoveries, at a time when the world is so saturated with technological inventions (such as mobile phones, computers, and polaroids that substitute mirrors when one is dressing) provokes a displacement of meaning that culminates in irony.

Though it is the use of Strauss's piece of music that creates a parallel – an ironic parallel – between the bone and the telephone, the parallelism can be extended to the monolith. That is, the telephone has the same shape (rectangular) and the same colour (black) as that of the monolith in *2001*. As the monolith, which is at times shot from below, this is how we are rendered the phone – which underlines its rectangular shape and verticality. As we all know, the monolith in Kubrick's film symbolically stands for mystery, and cosmic, existential, perhaps transcendental, significance. In *Clueless*, the "phone-monolith" is certainly devoid of such mysterious and self-revelatory weight, being only an object with a very tangible function. The density of significance that the music possesses in "A Space Odyssey," mainly because of its

association with the existential overtones of the visual counterpart, is again undermined, undercut by the artificial and self-mocking tone of *Clueless*.

Obviously, *Clueless* is not a unique example of this kind of 'radical' adaptation and its significance. Some updatings of Shakespeare (as Lurhman's *Romeo and Juliet*) and the remake of *Dangerous Liaisons*, under the title *Cruel Intentions*, would also serve as illustrations. Considering Austen films, Whit Stillman's 1989 *Metropolitan* – based on *Mansfield Park* – also constitutes another example; this film's 'radical' adaptation of Austen, transposed to contemporary New York, having youthful playboys and playgirls, as well as its date of release (before the Austen revival in the 1990s), might have determined, or at least contributed to, its lack of visibility and critical reception.

These radical adaptations usually reveal a common trace of postmodern irony: its knowingness and self-referentiality. The discussion of *Clueless* above shows that Heckerling's film is constructed upon two movements: the simultaneous inscribing and undermining, through irony, of Austen's text. The examples selected for discussion – the intertextual relations with Shakespeare and with films by Stanley Kubrick (*Spartacus* and *2001*); the photography scene; the scenes dealing with consumerism and fashion; the scene in which Cher uses the remote control to light the fireplace; the scene when she exposes her house to the viewer; the scene showing her 'epiphanic' moment almost at the end – all these are characterized by this ironic knowingness and self-referentiality; that is, differently from realist narratives, whose power depends on reference, *Clueless* exposes its artificiality and points to its own construction.

Clueless might be defined as a parody of Austen's *Emma* and of its period-piece adaptations. Although postmodernism is widely associated with Fredric

Jameson's notion of pastiche, and my reading inserts *Clueless* in a post-modern context, I would not connect it to Jameson's concept, defined in the following terms:

> Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique style, the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language: but it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without parody's ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without laughter, without that still latent feeling that there exists something *normal* compared to which what is being imitated is rather comic. Pastiche is blank parody, parody that has lost its sense of humor: pastiche is to parody what that curious thing, the modern practice of a kind of blank irony, is to what Wayne Booth calls the stable and comic ironies of, say, the 18th century ("Postmodernism and Consumer Society," 114)

Clueless imitates Austen through 'the wearing of a stylistic mask' – the ironist's vocabulary of redescription. It does possess parody's sense of humour and ulterior motives – the satirical impulse, laughter, and 'the latent feeling that there exists something *normal* compared to which what is being imitated is rather comic.' *Clueless* illustrates Linda Hutcheon's definition of the parodic text as a form of ironic representation that is doubly coded in political terms:

> Parody is a perfect postmodern form, in some senses, for it paradoxically both incorporates and challenges that which it parodies. It also forces a reconsideration of the idea of origin or originality that is compatible with other postmodern interrogations of liberal humanist assumptions. ("Theorizing the Postmodern," 11)

Therefore, *Clueless* (though inserted in a postmodern context) would be less connected to Jameson's concept of pastiche than to Hutcheon's definition of parody. The double construction of *Clueless* as a film which simultaneously incorporates and criticizes elements from Austen's world, i.e., its redescription of *Emma*, is responsible for generating not only great humour and laughter (absent in the notion of pastiche) but also for endowing the film with an ironic intent. Such an ironic intent has a crucial role in the notion of 'discursive communities' – as related to *Clueless* – and

consequently the two different targets the film addresses: both the sophisticated reader of Jane Austen, and the fashion-bound superficial futile youth of today. Both targets become 'alazons,' thus victims of such a 'double irony,' though for different purposes: one for knowing Austen, the other for not knowing her, in a such a way that no one escapes irony.

These constitute a first aspect that would set Heckerling's film apart from the other adaptations of *Emma* – McGrath's and Lawrence's. As the analysis above has shown, these two period versions generally attempt to reproduce the world of Austen's novel, though in different ways and gradations. In this sense, redescription would apply to *Clueless* in a way that reproduction would apply to the other films (though to a lesser extent to Lawrence's). However, it is important to point out, once more, that McGrath's and Lawrence's attempts at reproduction get materialized differently. This difference has to do with a consideration of the verbal material that may be transferable to the screen, and with the inevitable changes that must be undertaken so as to adapt the so-called discursive elements. Based on this, the reading of both films has revealed that whereas McGrath reproduces a superficial view of *Emma*, in which emphasis is given to the romantic aspects of the story, Lawrence/Davies manage to articulate the narrative and discursive levels of the novel, crucial for endowing their film version with a more critical reading of Austen's ironic perspective.

Notes

1. The full references to these books are: Lane, Maggie. *Jane Austen's England.* London, Robert Hale, 1986; and Watkins, Susan. *Jane Austen's Town and Country Style*. London, Thames & Hudson, 1990. I have taken these references from Sales, 243.

2. This adaptation was initially included in my corpus, but I eventually decided to concentrate only on the 1990s adaptations of *Emma*. Besides, this is an adaptation that owes a lot to the relationship between television and theatre, a fact which would take me beyond the scope of my thesis.

3. I am quoting directly from McGrath's film; that is why there is no indication of page number.

4. The quotations of Lawrence's version of *Emma* are taken from the script provided in Birtwistle and Conklin's *The Making of Jane Austen's Emma.*

5. The quotations of Heckerling's *Clueless* are taken from the script provided at: http//www.geocities.com/Hollywood/Hills/5342/*Clueless*.htm. Copied from the above site on September 7th, 1999.

6. In *Clueless* "Elton" is a first name, and together with "Cher" and "Dionne" allude to names of artists; Cher says through voice-over that "Dionne and I were both named after great singers of the past who now do infomercials."

7. Other famous designers that Cher refers to in *Clueless* are Calvin Klein and Fred Segal.

Chapter VI

Conclusion

> "This is all that I can relate of the how, where, and when. Your friend Harriet will make a much longer history when you see her. – She will give you all the minute particulars, which only woman's language can make interesting. – In our communications we deal only in the great."
>
> (*Emma*, 305).

A basic hypothesis that generated the impulse for this research project, thus underlying its origins and its gradual formation and development, was that much of Jane Austen's irony seemed to get lost in the process of transposition from the novels to the screen. This general premise somehow clashed with the notion that irony – both as a discursive strategy and as a way of conceiving the world – is not restricted to verbal forms and expressions, being also available and possible to the audio-visual medium. If this were the case, I wondered what prevented screenwriters and directors from attempting at reproducing (or even what made them fail, if they did, in their attempt at reproducing) Austen's ironic strategies and perspective in their films. Several steps preceded this examination.

The theoretical material on irony, as discussed in Chapter II, enabled me to verify the different ways in which irony manifests itself as a linguistic and discursive device, as well as for what purposes and functions. The etymological origins of the term irony – as represented by the "eiron/alazon" relationship in Greek comedy – already point(ed) to the nuances of power relations that the practice of the term entails: to be ironic, in this sense, means to pretend ignorance, or to disguise one's real intentions so as to actually expose the ignorance of the other. The "eiron," i.e., the ironic person (or the ironist), always triumphs over the "alazon." This power-based relation, initially associated with Greek comedy, and also with the Socratic use of irony, is discussed and further elaborated by Douglas Muecke's "Images of Irony,"

which examines how irony, as a phenomenon, relates to the imagination. His analysis shows how the archetypal image of irony is associated with archetypal images of knowledge and power, having God as the archetypal ironist, and the human being as the archetypal victim, or "alazon." This initial archetypal pattern of verticality – what Muecke himself calls "the axis of power" (402) – is gradually replaced by other patterns; first by the horizontal image of irony (here, ironist and victim are (almost) on the same level), and then by "Protean" or "labyrinthine" irony, whose main feature is its resistance, or even refusal, to be pinned down, thus making the identification and eventual attribution of irony end up generating more ironies. In this sense, "Protean" irony makes it difficult for one to establish the contextual boundaries where irony takes place; it conceives of irony as limitless.

In general terms, I have related the patterns Muecke has devised in his "Images of Irony" to Alan Wilde's taxonomy as proposed in *Modernism, Post-Modernism and the Ironic Imagination*; the relation has resulted in the following:

Muecke		Wilde
vertical irony	-	mediate / pre-modernist irony
horizontal irony	-	disjunctive / modernist irony
"Protean" irony	-	suspensive / post-modernist irony

Clearly an investigation alone of these parallels, followed by analytical illustrations, would already constitute another research project. But for the purposes of this research – whose corpus included not only an examination of irony in Austen's novel *Emma*, a text belonging to early nineteenth-century English times, but also in three of its 1990s filmic adaptations, thus twentieth-century texts – Wilde's categories seemed to provide me with an initial point of departure to think about the distinctions between

irony in Austen and irony in the films. The differences concern not only the particularities of time and cultural contexts inherent to both novel and films – and, as a consequence, the ironic imagination that informs them – but also regard the distinct media, or modes of expression, constituting them. I have then decided to use Wilde's categorization of irony as *mediate* (with its function to satirize, mock and ridicule) to characterize Austen's ironic strategies, and have associated the power-pattern relation present in the "eiron-alazon" relationship with the roles of narrator/reader (or narrator/viewer) and characters, respectively, in literary/filmic texts. That is, Austen's narrator - and reader - usually know more than the characters, and this knowledge endows them with more power, and enables them to laugh at the characters' ignorance and blindness, principally through irony. In *Emma*, as the analysis has shown, this superior knowledge is very often created through dramatic irony, i.e., through narrative action, and also through structural irony (provoked by the use of Emma as a fallible filter). But the most interesting occurrences (and the most challenging in terms of adaptation) are those concerning verbal ironies – examples that show a contradiction of meanings, a dialogization of voices and ideas within the words themselves, usually mediated by the narrator, and a competition of meanings deriving from the discrepancy between apparent and actual meaning, which generates, in their turn, the eventual ironic significance. The identification and attribution of irony in these cases is more complex than in examples of dramatic and structural ironies, because verbal ironies depend on the complicity between narrator and reader as to the contextual surroundings of the texts, on their sharing certain presuppositions as to values, beliefs and cultural assumptions underlying these texts. In Hutcheon's terminology, narrator and reader must share the codes and values of the discursive communities being addressed.

In Chapter III, these points were illustrated in my analysis of irony in *Emma*, which focused on the diegetic details of the narrative, as combined to Emma's propensity for creating stories, that is, her tendency not only to (mis)interpret, but add creatively to, reality around her. Moreover, I have attempted to read these diegetic details in a way that they could further inform the characters' relationships, mainly as they are constructed in terms of conflicting relations, i.e., authority and power, on the one hand, and submission, or alleged inferiority, on the other. An emblematic instance of this pattern is the game that Frank and Emma play at Box-Hill picnic, which culminates in Emma's crude remark toward Miss Bates. The passages discussed in *Emma* have shown that Austen's use of irony is both varied in terms of style (she uses exaggeration, enumeration, catalogue, echoic mention, and punctuation, among others, to create irony) and in terms of its functions, which range from employing irony to be witty, to be aggressive in a seemingly un-aggressive way, to provide a context for power/authority relationships, to using irony for ridiculing, mocking and laughing at people and society. In more general terms, as passages from Austen's biographical material have shown, irony in Austen constitutes both a principle of discourse and a principle of aesthetics (and ethics); a principle that reveals her conception of social relations and life at large. Irony is a strategy that permeates her novels so as to shatter and question the world of appearance, good manners and propriety – the so-called civilized world apparently being portrayed.

When we move from Austen's novels to a consideration of their filmic adaptations, we have the impression that we are not talking about the same thing, about the same Austen, about the same *Emma*, and about the same Emma. And indeed we are not. Not only do (the) films constitute other texts, since they are mediated by our twentieth-century perceptions of life, but because of the difference of medium,

irony is expressed in distinct ways in the films. A first general conclusion is that the filmic versions tend to emphasize the romantic relations at the expense of Austen's realist and critical depiction of pre-Victorian society. This fact aligns both with a commercial demand for love-story narratives and with the evidence that the romantic material belongs to the narrative level of discourse (differently from her ironic criticism of society, which is often attached to the narrator's discourse), being thus more easily translatable to the screen. This premise was illustrated mainly by the reading of McGrath's *Emma*, and was also supported by a discussion of the reviews written about the film and by opinions given on Austen and the novel by McGrath himself. The reviews are relevant, for one thing, to give evidence of the role played by the star Gwyneth Paltrow in the construction of a discourse that is at variance with the function that Emma Woodhouse holds in the novel. In Austen's *Emma*, the reader has access to two movements: Emma as ironist and Emma as being ironized by the narrator and narration at large. In McGrath's *Emma*, Paltrow's beauty and goddess-like characterization overwhelms the ironic criticisms directed at Emma and annihilates any possible ironizing of the character.

Interestingly, however, McGrath's general failure to reproduce, or recreate, Austen's ironies provided me with the possibility of investigating what was left in their place, that is, what aspects had been highlighted at the expense of realism and irony. Ironically, I could perceive that the film's move away from Austen ended up creating other ironies. Such is the case with the importance that McGrath gives to outer space, landscapes and setting in general. The camera's frequent travellings in the countryside (and even indoors) are not only in consonance with the trend of heritage cinema, but are also emphatic of open-air scenes, thus denying the idea of confinement and restraint that Austen's female characters experienced at the time; in

this way, the film pattern clashes with Emma's psychological need to act as creative interpreter and inventor of stories.

Diarmuid Lawrence's/Andrew Davies's *Emma* is more attuned to the question of irony in Austen. Though at first their film sounds as less 'faithful' to the source text than McGrath's, the changes that they make – i.e., what they add (such as the harvest-engagement scene), or what they change from one place to another, the rearrangements they make in terms of plot – and also what they keep from the novel, serve not only to provide the narrative with more consistency and articulation than McGrath's, but also to create irony in more varied and substantial ways. Bearing this in mind, I consider the British version – with its attention given to the issue of class distinctions (by enacting the work of servants at several key moments), with the recognition of the relevance of the visual rendition of Emma's fantasies, with the articulation and dramatization of the Frank-Jane subplot – to constitute not only a more convincing appraisal of Austen's novel, but to have been felicitous in its reflection, and even reproduction, through some details, of the nuances and competing meanings of Austen's literary ironies.

The pilfering scenes that provide the film's framework are significant to show what happens when something which can be read as 'light' irony in the novel is *visualized* in the film. In other words, based on these scenes, it is possible to make a very important point about the effect of 'translation' in a language of a different order – from verbal to visual, from something which is read to something which is seen. In the novel, not only is the pilfering incident mentioned just at the end (thus only once, almost in passing), but its irony is 'light,' or mild, being mainly concerned with Mr. Woodhouse's fears and 'nervous system.' The robbery of his poultry-house, in the novel, functions as an appropriate, or convincing, pretext for him to accept Emma and

Knightley's wedding in a more smooth way. In the film, the pilfering scenes become, quite literally, darker; they acquire a menacing tone that transcends the limits of Hartfield to suggest a larger social implication.

Actually, I would conclude that Lawrence's version of *Emma* resembles the general pattern and tone of Roger Mitchell's *Persuasion* (1995), also produced by the BBC, mainly as it relates the expression of Austen's ironic perspective and the consideration of social class distinctions. Unlike other romantic versions of Austen's novels, such as McGrath's *Emma*, Ang Lee's *Sense and Sensibility* and the most recent (1995) BBC *Pride and Prejudice*, *Persuasion* and Lawrence's *Emma* (this to a certain extent) escape from a romantic tradition in both filmic and television portrayals of Austen, so as to offer a more critical representation of her universe. Just to offer an example of *Persuasion*, a scene at the beginning of Mitchell's film is very effective to show – with an ironic look – the reality of debts, material difficulty and economic decline of the Elliots. The mise-en-scène is used in a way so as to contrast a lavish world of tradition, social prestige and influence – denoted through the characters' clothes, the furniture, the paintings on the walls, the quantity of servants they are still keeping, and mainly Sir Elliot's vanity and superior airs (expressed by his gestures) – with what they talk about: the need to move to another place, so that they may let the mansion and pay part of their debts with the money. The Elliots' eventual decision to leave Kellynch-hall and move to Bath is mostly dramatized and visually shown – i.e., it is the images which "verbalize" their departure: the furniture covered, the separation of objects by Anne (including a Navy book and a paper-boat we presume she received from Captain Wentworth) and the row of servants in front of the mansion to say farewell to the Elliots. The close-up on the servants' faces, as Sir Elliot passes, seems to enact a parade of hypocrisy characteristic of their life.

The most recent Austen adaptation, the film by Canadian Patricia Rozema, *Mansfield Park* (1999), also provides an interesting dialogue with Austen. Not only does the film innovate in terms of incorporating some of Austen's biographical material to the narrative, but it is rather daring and provoking in its expression of female sensuality, and in its treatment of the question of slavery, drinking, and homosexuality. In terms of irony, the film makes use of frozen scenes at key moments in the film, with voice-over saying, "It all could have happened differently, but it didn't;" and the characters move, that is, they change from their statue-like positions as the voice says, "but it didn't." This is certainly a device that ironically comments, by exposing, on the conventions of filmic adaptation and costume drama, at the same time that it denies its traditional formula. These brief comments are an evidence that the question of irony in filmic adaptations of Austen still constitutes a vast field for analysis.

But going back to my specific corpus, in *Clueless* (as discussed in Chapter V) irony results from a process of *re-description* (in Rorty's sense of the term) of Austen's ironic vocabulary, as well as from the intersection created between two worlds: pre-Victorian England, which is basically alluded by Heckerling's use of certain characters and episodes from *Emma*, and contemporary high American society. Relations of power deriving from the narrator/viewer knowing more than the characters in the film also occur in *Clueless*, but the sense of superiority, authority and power (held by both narrator and viewer) is diluted because the viewer here also feels like a target/victim of that ironic discourse. Although the other two adaptations of *Emma*, the one by McGrath and the other by Lawrence, also create irony in different ways from Austen, it is in *Clueless* that this difference is most clearly perceptible. The examples chosen for discussion in *Clueless* – the photography scene, the moments

that ironize the obsession with consumerism (fashion, for instance), the scene of the fireplace that is lit with remote control, the 'Space Odyssey' theme, and the telephone/bone/monolith association – are all symptomatic of a world that is too much familiar to us, twentieth-century viewers of the film. The fact that Austen's readers, or even viewers of more faithful versions of *Emma,* are able to interpret such scenes in their intersection and dialogue with the world of Austen's novel, only favours the enlargement of these issues, by stretching irony's boundaries and contexts.

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