

UNIVERSIDADE DE LISBOA
FACULDADE DE LETRAS



Adapting Jane Austen's *Emma*
From Literary Text to Digital Afterlife

Ana Daniela Alcobia Coelho da Silva

Orientador(es): Prof.^a Doutora Alcinda Maria Pinheiro de Sousa
Prof.^a Doutora Deborah Jayne Cartmell

Tese especialmente elaborada para obtenção do grau de Doutor no ramo de
Estudos de Literatura e Cultura, na especialidade de Estudos Ingleses

2020

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Júri:

Presidente: Doutora Maria Cristina de Castro Maia de Sousa Pimentel, Professora Catedrática e
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Universidade de Lisboa

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- Doutora **Alcinda Maria Pinheiro de Sousa**, Professora Associada Aposentada
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- Doutora **Isabel Maria da Cunha Rosa Fernandes**, Professora Catedrática
Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa;
- Doutor **José Alberto Olivença Duarte**, Professor Auxiliar
Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa.

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Abstract

The present thesis aims at studying adaptation both as a process of reappropriation of the past and as a marker of contemporaneity, departing from Jane Austen's (1775-1817) *Emma* (1815), given the canonical status held by this novelist in literature and in adaptation studies. Acknowledging the present time as one of redefinition for adaptation studies, this thesis frames its discussion of adaptations of *Emma* not only in relation to key publications in the field (Hutcheon 2013 [2006]; Sanders 2016 [2006]; Cartmell and Whelehan 2010) but also taking into consideration more recent debates, particularly those broadening the scope and reach of adaptation, both inside and outside the academic environment (Newell 2017; Leitch 2017). Thus, recognising the broad scope of adaptation, which includes a variety of cultural products as well as the possibility of diverse intermedia exchanges, my analysis focuses on adaptations from diverse media, including the traditional cinematic and television products but with a particular emphasis on digital, online, and visual objects of the twenty-first century.

Aware of the contemporary significance of digital humanities, this thesis intends to contribute to rethinking the place of literature and its subsidiaries in the digital age as well as to the ongoing debates on the (re)definition of adaptation studies as an independent and interdisciplinary field of knowledge. Furthermore, it seeks to describe and understand the cultural and social significance of these adaptations, primary objects of consumer involvement in an intended participatory culture (Jenkins 2006), and to underscore their potential for critical engagement in an age of globalisation and social media.

Keywords: Adaptation, Jane Austen, *Emma*, literature and digital media

Resumo

A presente tese procura estudar o fenómeno da adaptação, simultaneamente enquanto processo de reapropriação do passado e como marcador da contemporaneidade, a partir do romance *Emma* (1815), de Jane Austen (1775-1817), cujo estatuto canónico é indisputável tanto a nível literário, como dos estudos de adaptação. Reconhecendo o tempo presente como um momento de redefinição para os estudos de adaptação, este estudo enquadra a discussão de adaptações de *Emma*, não apenas em relação a publicações essenciais no campo de estudos (Hutcheon 2013 [2006]; Sanders 2016 [2006]; Cartmell & Whelehan 2010) mas tomando também em consideração contribuições recentes para esse mesmo debate, em particular as que dilatam o escopo dos estudos de adaptação, tanto dentro como fora da academia (Newell 2017; Leitch 2017). Assim sendo, reconhecendo o alargado espectro próprio à adaptação, que compreende uma variedade de produtos culturais bem como a possibilidade de diversas permutas intermediais, a presente análise centra-se em adaptações para diversos *media*, incluindo os tradicionais produtos para cinema e televisão, dando particular ênfase a objectos digitais, visuais e em plataformas *online*, produzidos no século XXI. Consciente da actual importância das humanidades digitais, esta tese tenciona contribuir para um repensar do lugar da literatura e outras artes na era do digital, bem como para os debates em curso quanto à redefinição dos estudos de adaptação enquanto um campo de estudos independente e interdisciplinar. Concomitantemente, esta tese procura também descrever e compreender a importância cultural e social destas adaptações enquanto objectos promotores do envolvimento dos consumidores numa cultura que se quer participativa (Jenkins 2006), bem como sublinhar o seu potencial para avaliação crítica numa era de globalização e redes sociais.

O principal objectivo desta tese é questionar de que forma a adaptação contribui para a reinterpretação e mesmo reformulação de Austen, autora canónica mas também ícone da cultura popular, para a contemporaneidade. Nesse sentido, a adaptação é aqui considerada no âmbito de uma multitude de diferentes meios e formatos e não limitada ao habitual quadro conceptual da adaptação romance-filme, mas antes tomando em conta uma complexa rede de objectos que evidencia um profundo cruzamento de influências e referências. A questão fundamental à qual esta

tese procura responder é de que forma os novos tipos de produção e recepção de conteúdo, potenciados pelo recente paradigma digital, estão a alterar a maneira como pensamos a adaptação, mas também a literatura, a cultura, a sociedade e, em última análise, como nos entendemos. O presente trabalho tenciona em particular abordar a questão da precedência em adaptação, dado que diversas adaptações recentes de *Emma* partem não exclusivamente do romance, mas também (e por vezes até de forma mais significativa) de adaptações prévias e da percepção contemporânea de Austen enquanto constructo cultural complexo.

De forma a desenvolver estas questões, o presente estudo encontra-se dividido em duas partes distintas: a primeira, composta de dois capítulos, propõe uma reflexão alargada da concepção de Austen enquanto produto da construção cultural, por um lado, e um exemplo arquetípico nos estudos de adaptação, por outro. A segunda parte, composta por três capítulos, constitui a dimensão mais prática da tese, com foco na análise comparativa de diversas adaptações de *Emma*.

Tendo em conta esta divisão, a presente tese inicia, não com o habitual capítulo teórico dedicado a uma revisão da literatura mais relevante no campo de estudo, mas com uma reflexão sobre a relevância e preponderância actuais de Jane Austen, ícone cultural que ultrapassa em muito os limites da figura literária canónica. Essa reflexão parte da breve análise de três objectos publicados em 2017 como forma de celebrar o bicentenário da morte de Austen: *The Jane Austen Project* (Kathleen A. Flynn), *The Times Literary Supplement: Jane Austen* (Stig Abell, coord.) e *Jane Austen: Writer in the World* (Kathryn Sutherland, coord.). Constatada não apenas a omnipresença de Austen na contemporaneidade mas as diversas (e frequentemente contraditórias) interpretações da autora e da sua obra, o capítulo prossegue com um levantamento de estudos que procuraram a definição crítica deste fenómeno (Wiltshire 2001; Harman 2007; Ells 2011; Dow & Hanson 2012; Johnson 2012; Looser 2017). O primeiro capítulo encerra com uma breve incursão em áreas nas quais o fenómeno Austen enquanto constructo cultural complexo se afirma como potenciador de novas actividades, nomeadamente o turismo e a indústria *heritage*. Ainda que não directamente dependentes de ou classificáveis como adaptação de obras de Austen, a relação que muitas destas actividades estabelecem com essa mesma adaptação é inegável, sendo também óbvia a sua contribuição para um melhor entendimento do fenómeno de Austen enquanto activo (económico) global.

O segundo capítulo procura traçar a evolução dos estudos de adaptação, com particular ênfase nos desafios que o campo enfrenta na actualidade. Historicamente, a adaptação sofreu de uma atitude derisória, não apenas em termos generalistas – com variações do comentário “mas o livro é melhor” repetindo-se em múltiplos contextos – mas também em ambiente académico, dada a sua posição de subalternidade em relação às duas áreas com as quais frequentemente partilha tanto objectos de estudo como conceitos teóricos: a literatura e os estudos de cinema. Coincidentemente, o foco dos estudos de adaptação tem desde sempre sido em objectos que, partindo de textos literários, concretizam a sua remediação para o meio audiovisual, particularmente o cinema. Desse modo, essa relação de subalternidade tem encontrado reforço no interior do próprio campo de estudo, apesar de inúmeros apelos em contrário (Naremore 2000). Em contraste, contribuições recentes têm apontado novos caminhos, relevando os estudos da adaptação enquanto o espaço ideal para questionar assumpções teóricas, estéticas e culturais que ultrapassam a visão limitada e limitadora da avaliação de uma adaptação exclusivamente em função da sua relação com a obra original e lhe apontam mesmo um potencial de intervenção crítica e social (Elliott 2017).

Partindo dos primórdios da teorização em adaptação (Bluestone 1957; McFarlane 1996), a parte inicial deste capítulo foca-se nas novas perspectivas trazidas pelos múltiplos estudos publicados já no século XXI, como consequência da explosão de adaptações cinematográficas e televisivas produzidas na última década do século anterior (Stam 2005; Hutcheon 2013 [2006]; Leitch 2007; Geraghty 2008; Cartmell & Whelehan 2010). O segundo sub-capítulo foca-se na discussão promovida na segunda década do século XXI, à medida que nos estudos de adaptação se fazia sentir a necessidade de alterar, de forma mais drástica, a forma como se discutia e teorizava a adaptação, ainda prejudicada por premissas e conceitos que, negados em teoria, subsistiam na prática, nomeadamente o persistente argumento da fidelidade à obra adaptada (Leitch 2008). A revisão da literatura crítica foca-se nos estudos que procuraram responder a este desafio, com particular destaque para o aparecimento de diversos (e extensos) volumes de ensaios multi-autorais, também prova da maturidade e vitalidade do campo de estudos (Albrecht-Crane & Cutchins 2010; Cartmell 2012; Leitch 2017; Cutchins, Krebs & Voigts 2018). Como forma de síntese, o terceiro sub-capítulo propõe uma definição de adaptação, composta a partir dos diversos contributos teóricos apresentados e tomada como base do trabalho a desenvolver

subsequentemente. O quarto e último sub-capítulo foca-se nas relações entre adaptação, *heritage film* e Jane Austen, na medida em que estas contribuíram para a construção de uma imagem fixa de Jane Austen na cultura popular e para a teorização da própria adaptação, dada a prevalência de adaptações de obras da autora enquanto objectos de estudo e exemplos paradigmáticos.

A segunda parte desta tese concretiza então a análise das adaptações escolhidas, à luz das considerações teórico-críticas tecidas na parte inicial. O primeiro capítulo foca a sua atenção no romance *Emma*, seleccionando excertos relevantes para análise breve e tendo como princípio orientador a noção de camadas (“layering”), em que o texto literário e as construções críticas sobre o mesmo são tidas como exemplos, entre outros, dessas camadas de interpretação que tanto contribuem para a concepção actual de Austen, como influenciam novas adaptações/interpretações das suas obras. O segundo capítulo explora as adaptações para cinema e televisão, produzidas entre a década de 1970 e a prolífica década final do século XX, nomeadamente *Emma* (1972, BBC), *Emma* (1996, A&E/Meridian), *Emma* (1996, Miramax) e *Clueless* (1996). O terceiro capítulo centra-se na análise de adaptações produzidas no século XXI, do tradicional formato para televisão (*Emma*, 2009), a Bollywood (*Aisha*, 2010) e à adaptação para formato digital e interactivo (*Emma Approved*, 2013-2014). A estas juntam-se adaptações para formato livro, de actualizações para o tempo e espaço contemporâneos (*Emma*, 2014, The Austen Project), a *comics* (*Jane Austen’s Emma*, 2012, Marvel) e livros para crianças (*Jane Austen’s Emma*, 2013, Cozy Classics; *Emma*, 2015, Little Miss Austen).

Finalmente, a tese defende que, apesar da impossibilidade em prever a evolução destes fenómenos dada a ainda recente transição para o paradigma digital, o historial das adaptações de *Emma* revela um processo complexo, com intrincadas implicações socioculturais, mas também estéticas e políticas que contradizem a habitual exoneração destes objectos, em particular dos que mais abertamente se inscrevem nos parâmetros da cultura popular, enquanto objectos de estudo válidos. As adaptações de Austen em particular demonstram esta vertente e evidenciam a potencialidade, crítica, cultural e epistemológica dos estudos de adaptação.

Palavras-chave: Adaptação, Jane Austen, *Emma*, literatura e media digitais

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“A mind lively and at ease, can do with seeing nothing,
and can see nothing that does not answer.” (*E* 251)¹

Introduction

In the introduction to the inaugural issue of *Adaptation*, in 2008, Deborah Cartmell, Timothy Corrigan, and Imelda Whelehan referred to the phenomenon of Austen on screen as “a discipline in [its] own right” within Adaptation Studies, while arguing for the validity of its discussion “within the wider context” (3) of the field, which the new journal intended also to ratify. The following year, Pamela Church Gibson referred back to that same expression, when starting a survey for the same journal on Austen and adaptation. While renewing Cartmell, Corrigan, and Whelehan’s claim on Austen’s special status, Gibson called for a necessary change in the way adaptation scholars look at the adaptive process in general and at Austen and adaptation in particular. Stating that Austen scholarship had not been prepared to deal with the new (1990s) surge of Austenmania (the variety – and the sheer quantity – of objects daunting in itself), Gibson contended for greater “interdisciplinary scholarship” as a means to address “the difficulties created by a narrow, over-literary approach to Austen adaptations.” (180) The words still resonate as true and perhaps even more accurate when, about to enter the third decade of the twentieth century, new media and, in particular, new forms of sharing and experiencing media products are challenging the ways in which we think about adaptation. What Gibson called the need for greater interdisciplinarity is ever more imperative as new formats again put into question a limited understanding of both adaptation and Austen studies.

Jane Austen’s afterlife goes beyond the materiality of her reduced work and the scarce (and often biased) surviving biographical detail: it includes the many adaptations of both her work and her life, which have in turn contributed to the creation of an alternative (and not less interesting) image of Austen which ranges

¹ References to Austen’s *Emma* are taken from “The Cambridge Works of Jane Austen”, edited by Richard Cronin and Dorothy Macmillan (see the end of this introduction for further information on editions of this novel), and are abbreviated to *E*, followed by the page number. All other references follow the eighth edition of the *MLA Handbook*.

from the apparently fixed source of unproblematic, romantic stories taking place in an idealized past to the complex revaluation of Austen in postmodern terms. The continued interest in Austen has likewise led to an ever-growing number of adaptations, which simultaneously have themselves been the basis for other adaptations and have also challenged the way in which we define what we mean by adaptation.

Thus, the “near mania of adapting Austen’s fiction to the screen”, as claimed by Suzanne R. Pucci (134), was followed by or extended far beyond the boundaries set by a camera and has come to encompass a variety of objects in diverse media. Even so, adaptation studies of Jane Austen have, for the most part, remained faithfully attached to film (both in its cinematic and television formats), ignoring other media and formats. This thesis aims at bridging that gap by addressing the new challenges faced by adaptation studies today, while at the same time questioning how adaptations reflect us as both individuals and members of a given cultural moment. Therefore, adaptation must then be thought of as a vital part of contemporaneity, simultaneously a product and a producer of cultural meaning. And given that Jane Austen has become a paradigmatic case in the field of adaptation studies (so much so that it continues to be difficult to find a book on the subject that does not include at least one chapter on an adaptation of her works), this fact alone makes her the best case study when thinking of adaptation as an evolving discipline and as a reflection of our own contemporary society.

The choice of *Emma* (1815) as a centripetal force in this study is justified not only by the need to reduce an overwhelmingly large group of objects when discussing Austen adaptations, but also because of the particular position it occupies within the Austen canon. Often identified as Austen’s most accomplished novel, *Emma* has also developed an interesting track-record in terms of adaptation history, at times ignored due to its difficult marketability and at others the subject of consecutive or even simultaneous reinterpretations. In an era when Austen has been appropriated by popular culture in ways perhaps unrivalled by any other writer other than Shakespeare, *Emma*’s distinctiveness is all the more significant as it makes its contemporary adaptations even more challenging and their subsequent analysis more meaningful.

As the first attempt to provide a comprehensive overview of adaptations of Austen’s *Emma* beyond the novel-to-film format, this work aims at both offering a

more encompassing view of Austen adaptation and contributing to a more open conception of adaptations studies. While seeking to innovate in its choice of objects under scrutiny, their present analysis follows nonetheless the established methods in the field, recognizing both their intrinsic validity and potential for establishing connections with other studies. Thus, I agree with and follow the example of Julie Sanders when she claims that:

[...] while close reading and case studies can never be the only methodology of adaptation studies, they remain valid means for effecting comparative readings alert to the functions of analogue and to the potential of the new multimodal literacies or readers and audiences in the modern era that critics such as Thomas Leitch have alerted us to (2007: 3). (161)

The intention to establish connections and promote dialogue within the field of adaptation studies is also one of the main guiding lines in this thesis, recalling again the possibilities provided by an Austen-based study and subscribing to more recent tendencies in the field which rethink adaptations not as a unidirectional process but in terms of a complex and ever enriching network, as Marina Cano notes:

This is perhaps what distinguishes Austen from other eighteenth- and nineteenth-century authors: her work has accumulated a two-hundred-year history of citational force that is probably unequalled by any other English writer apart from Shakespeare. Each citation recalls earlier ones; each revamp encompasses and rearticulates a history of earlier iterations. (5)

The main purpose of this study is then to question how adaptation (considered in a multitude of media and formats, and not just in the usual novel-to-film conceptual framework, but within a complex network of works) has reshaped Austen's image in contemporaneity. The main question I seek to answer is how new forms of production and reception, made possible by the new media paradigm, are altering the way we think about adaptation and, ultimately, the way we think about literature, culture, society, and as such ourselves. Taking Austen as an archetypal example in adaptation, and *Emma* as a challenging point of departure, I wish to address the issue of precedence in adaptation, given that the more recent adaptations of *Emma* (for television, cinema, online platforms, comics, or children's books) depart, not only from the novel, but also (or more significantly) from previous adaptations and from a contemporary perception of Jane Austen as a cultural construct. Finally, the English studies anchorage of the present work is justified not only by the leading position of

the area within the more specific field of adaptation, but also by the already mentioned position of Austen in both the literary and adaptation canons.

In order to better develop the proposed discussion, this thesis has been divided into two main parts. The first, composed of two chapters, proposes an overall reflection on the evolving nature of Austen, both as a particular cultural construct and as an archetypal example within the field of adaptation studies. The second part is composed of three distinct chapters, constituting the more practical dimension of the thesis, thus focusing on the comparative analysis of several adaptations of *Emma*.

The first chapter begins with a close look into three very different objects from what can be identified as Austen's "spreadability",² i.e., her presence in various media. Departing from the celebration of the 200th anniversary of Austen's death in 2017, I intend to explore some of the most important critical definitions of the Austen phenomenon suggested over the last two centuries, while also briefly considering its overflow, as a primarily literary phenomenon, into the realms of film, tourism, and fandom. The second chapter delineates the theoretical background of the present work by conducting an indispensable survey on the evolution of adaptation studies and questioning the most important theories put forward during the last decades, in relation to the analysis to be developed in the subsequent part. Although this chapter's main focus is adaptation studies, namely adaptation theory, a focus on heritage at the end was considered to be essential. The attention given to the heritage debate (in more global terms at the end of the first chapter, and more specifically on heritage film at the end of the second) finds its justification in the importance it has in Austen adaptations, particularly in screen adaptations. Therefore, one cannot approach a study of Jane Austen period adaptations (a category which extends to one of the objects under analysis and to multiple previous influencing objects), and not consider the label under which many of such adaptations are catalogued, at least in broad terms. Nonetheless, I agree with Church Gibson when she admits to the present "unspoken consensus – we are, it seems to be agreed, within a 'post-heritage' phase." (182).

The first chapter of the second part begins by having a closer look at Austen's *Emma*, particularly the excerpts which constitute the basis for analysing the multiple adaptations chosen as case studies. The second chapter, which properly inaugurates

² See Jenkins, Ford, and Green.

the case-study approach on adaptation in this work, traces the backstory of adapting *Emma* on-screen by re-acknowledging the importance of the novel-to-screen adaptations, allowing for a better understanding of how this very unique Austen heroine has been adapted for new audiences. The third and final chapter focuses its attention on the new-millennium adaptations of *Emma* produced for television, cinema, online platforms, comics, and book-format publications.

This study's main departing hypothesis is that *Emma*, in its verbal nature, is not necessarily superior in terms of aesthetic, and even entertainment, value when compared to its adaptations, which include cinema, television, visual, and digital products. Likewise, neither does it occupy a primordial position in terms of engagement at a social, economic, cultural and/or political level. This implies that any stance placing one above the other (adapted text and adaptation, or vice-versa) depends, in principle and exclusively, on the perspective adopted in each particular comparative analysis, rather than being a feature inherent to the nature of the object (and the media) itself. Only then can the value of objects such as the ones here proposed for academic study be recognised, a move not only justifiable but necessary as the new digital paradigm that dominates every aspect of our daily lives forces us to rethink the way academia may fruitfully contribute to tackle the challenges posed by contemporaneity.

As far as editions of the novel are concerned, the present work bases itself on "The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen", which has republished Austen's complete works for the twenty-first century and has now come to be recognised as the standard edition of the novelist's *operae*. In that status, it replaced the long-preferred edition of Austen's novels and *Minor Works* by R. W. Chapman (published in the 1920s and 1930s for Oxford University Press), and the first critical edition of a novelist in the English Language, a distinction only granted to classical authors up until that moment.³ Although that reason alone inscribes Chapman's edition in the annals of both Austen studies and textual criticism – "it set the gold standard for editing novels" (Ray 210) –, the text had long been found to be in need of actualization (the last one having been made in the 1960s), even when, as is the (unique) case with *Emma*, only one edition of the novel was published in Austen's

³ Although Chapman is usually credited with both putting together the massive enterprise of editing Austen's works and establishing her as a canonical writer, both those tasks are now seen by scholars to be the result of a close (and unacknowledged) collaboration with his wife, Katherine Metcalfe (see Sutherland, *Textual Lives* 36-44).

lifetime. This new twenty-first century edition of *Emma*, by Richard Cronin and Dorothy McMillan,⁴ includes an extensive introduction as well as explanatory notes which build on the accumulated knowledge of editing Austen.

The sheer amount of other editions, even if one focuses on *Emma* alone, invalidates any exhaustive listing in a work such as this one, which does not imply that a serious study in that area is not lacking.⁵ As shown, albeit at a different level, by Margaret Sullivan's *Jane Austen Cover to Cover* (a catalogue of numerous covers for editions of Austen's novels around the world, including but not exclusive to *Emma*), there is still much to be gained from such endeavours. The absence of an exhaustive bibliographical study on Austen, or even *Emma* alone, may also bear testimony to the unorthodox evolution of Austen studies. The process of Austen's inclusion in the English literary canon was simultaneous with the addition of English Literature curricula in Anglophone universities.⁶ That did not prevent, however, the less-than-objective attention she received within academia and which would culminate in D. W. Harding's provocative address (later, article) "Regulated Hatred: An Aspect of the Work of Jane Austen", in 1940.

Although Austen criticism has never suffered from abandonment or neglect, given the almost constant flow of titles, which shows no sign of abating,⁷ that criticism has often been informed by varying agendas, originating contradictory evaluations of Austen and of her significance in contemporaneity. Given the scope of the present work, however, it would be impossible to conduct a thorough reflection on the subject of Austen criticism and for that reason I will return to it in the course of this thesis only when it serves the objectives here proposed. The same is true for the publication of biographies about Austen and editions of her letters.⁸

As a final word on the ever-enduring significance of Austen, I refer to Harold Bloom's claim, which, in my opinion, is true not only for the written works, which are

⁴ The Editorial Board of the series, whose general editor is Janet Todd, includes Marilyn Butler, Claudia Johnson, and Deirdre Le Faye.

⁵ Here I would like to signal the work promoted by JASNA (the Jane Austen Society of North America), which publishes, on an annual basis, a bibliography list on its website. See, for instance, the list for 2017: <http://jasna.org/publications/persuasions-online/volume-39-no-1/jane-austen-bibliography-2017/>. Accessed 22 November 2019.

⁶ See ahead, chapter 1 (Part I), pp. 40-43.

⁷ See for instance the recent publication of *After Austen* (Hopkins 2018), or the special issue of *Women's Writing*, "Bicentennial Essays on Jane Austen's Afterlives" (Bautz and Wootton 2018).

⁸ A note here must be made concerning the thorough and informative *A Chronology of Jane Austen and her Family*, by Deirdre Le Faye, which contains the accumulated knowledge of the Le Faye's long-term dedication to Austen Studies and whom, like Chapman before her, has benefited from a close contact with Austen's descendants, still in possession of valuable documentation.

her direct legacy to us, but also for the myriad of reinstallments and reinterpretations they have in turn originated:

Like Shakespeare, Austen invented us. Because we are Austen's children, we behold and confront our own anguish and her own fantasies in her novels. She seems to explain us for the simple reason that she contributed to our invention. [...] The art and passion of reading well and deeply is waning, but Austen still inspires people to become fanatical readers. We read Austen because she seems to know us so intimately for the simple reason that she helped determine who we are both as readers and as human beings. (v-vi)

PART I

**JANE AUSTEN AND ADAPTATION:
THE NEVER-ENDING STORY**

It is possible to say of Jane Austen, as perhaps we can say of no other writer, that the opinions which are held of her work are almost as interesting, and almost as important to think about, as the work itself.

Lionel Trilling, *Beyond Culture: Essays on Literature and Learning* (31)

She was not born, but rather became, Jane Austen.

Devoney Looser, *The Making of Jane Austen* (1)

Of course other artists have ardent admirers; other fan clubs run wild on the Internet; other subcultures have clubby conventions where grownups play dress-up. But still, there's something about Jane. [...] nearly two centuries after her death, Jane Austen has a secure home in two very different worlds: the solemn pantheon of English literature and the exuberantly commercial realm of popular culture. She is the ultimate crossover artist, equally welcome at Yale and on YouTube.'

Deborah Yaffe, *Among the Janeites* (xvii)

The movement is both familiar and new each time it is made.

Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (50)

Frequently the most narrow and provincial area of film theory, discourse about adaptation is potentially as far-reaching as you like.

Dudley Andrew, *Concepts in Film Theory* (96)

Chapter 1.
Jane Austen:
Global Asset

“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. [...]”

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.” (*E* 403)

Celebrating Austen 2.00

Looking at the list of Austen related titles published per year might be a very daunting experience. Ranging from academic to fan fiction, the offer in terms of genre is almost as diverse and, not rarely, surprising. As Emma so unkindly reminds Miss Bates in the well-known Box-Hill picnic chapter, the difficulty resides in choosing which ones to read. The 200th anniversary of Austen’s death made the year of 2017 particularly productive in Austen titles. Of the many published in this celebratory tone, I limit my attention now to three.

In the 2017 sci-fi/semi-dystopian novel *The Jane Austen Project*, by Kathleen A. Flynn, British actor Liam Finucane, and American Janeite/trained doctor Rachel Katzman, travel back in time to 1815 London.⁹ Their mission is to save a finished manuscript of *The Watsons* from destruction by its own author, Jane Austen, as well as the lost letters to her sister, Cassandra. Although initially instructed not to make changes to the past, risking unpredictable consequences, Liam and especially Rachel, the novel’s protagonist, inevitably alter the course of events and entangle themselves in the lives of Austen family members and their predicted destinies. Previous novels, from the ever-growing library of Austen-related fiction, had already explored the idea of time travelling, such as Sally Smith O’Rourke’s *The Man Who Loved Jane Austen* (2006) or Laurie Viera Rigler’s *Confessions of a Jane Austen Addict* (2007).¹⁰ This type of plot is not exclusive to written fiction and the latter novel’s departing point is

⁹ The part of the action of *The Jane Austen Project* taking place in the present happens after some kind of cataclysmic event named “the Die-off” (25), but never thoroughly explained.

¹⁰ *The Man Who Loved Jane Austen* (2006) had a male protagonist going back in time and, as the title reveals, not only falling in love with Jane Austen but also creating the ultimate fictional hero, Mr Darcy, whereas *Confessions of a Jane Austen Addict* (2007) had a twenty-first century Austen fan mysteriously finding herself in the Regency world and struggling with the expected everyday difficulties.

reminiscent of another slightly defiant Austen-inspired object: ITV's 2008 mini-series *Lost in Austen* (2008) in which Austen fan Amanda Price changes places with Elizabeth Bennet and lives her own *Pride and Prejudice*, a story she knows by heart but cannot help but change. What is interesting about this ITV production, an original screenplay written by Guy Andrews, is how much space it allows for the main character, and even more the audience, to question their relationship with a fantasy creation of Austen, her works and her time, while still evidently catering for the audience's expectations.¹¹ Almost a decade after, *The Jane Austen Project*, as befits post-modern objects, simultaneously inscribes itself in the world of Austen-inspired objects and questions such phenomenon, with the protagonist both rejoicing in and struggling with living her own Austen fantasy. Just before meeting Henry Austen, a necessary move in order to secure the mission's objective, Rachel questions her own persona, caught in a world of illusion motivated by an obsession with Austen:

[...] [T]he weirdness of this sometimes gave me the urgent need to salt my discourse with medical jargon, an obscenity, an Americanism, or a choice word in Yiddish, the lingua franca of New York — anything to avoid vanishing into the part of a Jane Austen heroine. (58-59)

The immersion of an assumed Jane Austen fan literally into the world of Austen herself brings to the fore the less agreeable aspects of such an experience and, although being aimed at the established niche market of die-hard fans, the novel is not naïve in its representation of the early nineteenth century, specially as it is filtered from a feminine point-of-view. Rachel thus both consciously and unconsciously transmits to the reader the constraining situation for women in the early 1800s, on a variety of aspects, from idleness (99), to complete submission to nearer male relative (103), and general less social importance (224) and, perhaps more significantly, the importance of marriage, presented as a necessity leading to further submission to a patriarchal system (87). Subtly, *The Jane Austen Project* both celebrates Austen's genius and exploits her contemporary marketability, allying a clear commercial strategy to a self-awareness of its own position in the directory of Austen-inspired works, even if its tactics may not be perceivable by all its readers. As such, *The Jane Austen Project* with its independent, intelligent and sexually proactive heroine

¹¹ I will return to this adaptation in the chapter three of the second part and discuss its place in the sub-genre of Austen adaptation.

negotiates the sometime treacherous pact of post-feminism, as proposed by Diane Negra (2009) for some time-travel films.¹²

Also in 2017, and the second publication I wish to focus on, *The Times Literary Supplement (TLS)* issued *Jane Austen*, a selection of texts published by the weekly literary review on Jane Austen, since its foundation, in 1902. Edited by *TLS* editor Stig Abell, the collection is the second of its type, after the publication, the year before, of the *TLS: Shakespeare*. In both cases the publication marks anniversaries of two English Literature giants: the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death, in 2016, and the 200th anniversary of Austen's death, in 2017. The fact that only Austen and Shakespeare seem to have the status to make such publications possible is meaningful already: they share, according to Virginia Woolf and countless other before and after her, an indisputable place at the head of English Literary canon. In fact, the association of Austen with Shakespeare constitutes in itself an established tradition, with several critics comparing the novelist to the poet/playwright as a way of recognizing the former's genius.¹³ More recently the association gained an additional accuracy given the double status both share in contemporaneity, as pointed out by Rachel Wifall: "In today's multimedia, global, capitalist environment, Shakespeare and Austen have reached a level of literary "rock star" status occupied by no-one else, accompanied by all of the commodification which the corporate world has to offer." (404) Nonetheless, the covers chosen for Shakespeare's and Austen's special *TLS* editions seem to denounce a different approach to each of the authors. In fact, although both are highly conceptual, whereas the Bard's – a human head – appeals to rationality, the Novelist's – a human heart – seems to suggest sentimentality (Fig.1).

Comprising an editorial, two infographics, eighteen articles and six full-page illustrations/quotations from each of Jane Austen's novels, *TLS: Jane Austen* is, in the words of its editor, a "collection of the *TLS*'s best writing about this wonderful writer,

¹² See also Shelley Cobb's discussion of this in "What Would Jane Do? Postfeminist Media Uses of Austen and the Austen Reader".

¹³ Although many others, before and after, have compared Austen to Shakespeare, Virginia Woolf is famous for her claim in *A Room of One's Own*: "Here was a woman about the year 1800 writing without hate, without bitterness, without fear, without protest, without preaching. That was how Shakespeare wrote, I thought, looking at Antony and Cleopatra; and when people compare Shakespeare and Jane Austen, they may mean that the minds of both had consumed all impediments; and for that reason we do not know Jane Austen and we do not know Shakespeare, and for that reason Jane Austen pervades every word that she wrote, and so does Shakespeare." (1929, 63) Claire Harman offers several of such other examples (202) and John Wiltshire also looks into this question (58-76), but the more recent contribution is Marina Cano and Rosa García-Periago's edited volume, *Jane Austen and William Shakespeare: A Love Affair in Literature, Film and Performance*, which explores the relationship between Austen and Shakespeare in terms of influence, reception, and adaptation.

taken from the past hundred years.” (3) In addition, the back cover displays that “[h]ere, for the first time, is a selection of classic and newly commissioned writings from the *TLS* about one of the greatest English writers of all time.” There is no indication, however, of which texts were previously published in the *TLS* and which were specially commissioned for this collection; contributors range from writers and journalists to scholars, with a few being well-known collaborators of the *TLS*, whose “classic” pieces are now republished after their deaths: E. M. Forster, Mick Imlah (former poetry editor for *TLS*), Arthur McDowall, David Nokes, Brian Southam, and Virginia Woolf.

Arranged in six sections – one might assume as a kind of tribute to the number of Austen’s *opera magna* –,¹⁴ the articles offer an overview of the novelist’s biography and historical and social context, but also of her literary outputs and their reinterpretations and reuses in the 200 years now separating us from her death. Diversity is an understatement however, as the titles surely suggest, ranging from Virginia Woolf’s “A Jane of one’s own”¹⁵ (a praise of Austen’s genius, thus featured as the “introductory essay”) to “The Silence of the Bertrams”¹⁶ (Brian Southam’s work on *Mansfield Park* and discussion of slavery) or “Keeping it in the family”¹⁷ (Kathryn Sutherland on the difficulty of writing a biography of Austen given the control her family held over documents and reports for over a century after her death). While some aim at context and thus stray from Austen as a subject (such as “Sex and the Georgian city”),¹⁸ others seem to take the author herself, or whatever she has come to signify in contemporaneity, as a vortex. It is in part the case of “We’re all Janeites now”,¹⁹ by writer and *TLS* reviewer Ian Sansom, who claims:

We’re all Janeites now: and if you’re not look out. In a world – to use a phrase that might serve as the introductory voice-over to the trailer for any recent Austen adaptation/biopic/retelling – in which the mute are always inglorious and fame is the only guarantee of value or quality, posterity has proved her worth. (22)

¹⁴ Introduction, The novels, Beyond the novels, The Life, The Times, and The Afterlife.

¹⁵ Pp. 8-13. Presented as the Introductory Essay, it is the only one of which the original publishing date is given (May 8 1913), no doubt capitalizing on the fame of its author, both as a woman writer and a well-known admirer of Jane Austen (Woolf is also the only author to be allowed a picture, and a full-page one).

¹⁶ Pp. 34-38.

¹⁷ Pp. 56-60.

¹⁸ Stella Tillyard, pp. 68-71.

¹⁹ Pp. 22-28. Actually a re-publication of “Jane Austen, on the money”, published online in 18 July, 2017, the anniversary of her death, as well as in *TLS* nr. 5964, of 21 July, 2017.

Nevertheless Sansom's article does not pursue the issue of Austen's significance in contemporaneity. In fact, his article is more of a short review of all six Austen complete novels, no doubt thinking of those uninitiated who may be unable to distinguish an Elizabeth Bennet from an Emma Woodhouse, thus coming right after Virginia Woolf's introductory essay. More than questioning the Austen literary and cultural phenomenon, the collection itself seems to answer to (or take advantage of) Austen's vogue in contemporaneity, making it an appetizing object even for those readers, mostly fans or Janeites, to whom the *TLS* might not be a first reading choice.

Finally, also in 2017, the Bodleian Library, in Oxford, hosted an exhibition dedicated to Austen and titled "Which Jane Austen?"²⁰ This particular celebration included a relatively small but eclectic exhibit, a series of lunchtime talks by specialists, and a book, *Jane Austen: Writer in the World* (2017), edited by Austen scholar Kathryn Sutherland. This book, although not a catalogue in the strict sense of the word, follows the exhibit closely, expanding in its chapters the areas in which the former was organized. The book also takes into consideration another bicentenary exhibition, titled "The Mysterious Miss Austen", held in Winchester, where Jane Austen died and is buried.²¹ As Sutherland puts it in the introduction, "[t]his book is a tale drawn from two exhibitions and considers yet again Jane Austen's life and writings through a world of things." (12) These "things," objects showing Austen "as a writer in the world – in her world and in our world" (12), ranged from her manuscripts and music books, to her silk pelisse-coat and portable writing desk, among many others, directly or indirectly linked to Austen:

These 'things' map Austen's immediate space of writing, the threads that connect her (from India to Bath and from North America to Chawton) to those on the world stage during the wars with France – wars that measured her own lifetime; finally they chart her reputation over the 200 years since her death. (12)

The materiality of Austen is thus showcased as a way to invoke the presence of a fleeting, hard-to-pin-down, yet now ever-present, author. As Claudia Johnson put it, "[...] Austen's admirers have always felt her presence in a way that is more than a little out of this world. [...] she never properly died." (*Jane Austen's Cults and Cultures* 7) Such ghostly presence was thus summoned for visitors of both

²⁰ Weston Library - Bodleian Libraries, Oxford, 23 June – 29 October, 2017.

²¹ Winchester Discovery Centre, Winchester, 13 May – 24 July, 2017.

exhibitions, faced with an impressive array of objects connected to Austen, her family, her times, and her legacy. *Jane Austen: Writer in the World* tries to fix that same presence in another, more enduring way, setting to print words and images summarizing the life and afterlife of both the author and her works. As acknowledged in the introduction, such intention is in line with Butler's revolutionary take on Austen, back in 1975: one who is more palpable and less divinized, more in touch with the world, both her own and ours (9).

The book includes nine chapters, divided into three parts: "Georgian Life", "Novelist in the World", and "Jane Austen Imagined", thus suggesting the usual path from biographical and contextual elements, to literary achievement and, finally, an afterlife for both author and works. Departing from "[t]hings of this world" (to use Marilyn Butler's expression quoted by Sutherland in the introduction), some of the articles included in these sections (namely the first and the second) focus on the few manuscripts we still have of Austen²² and on clues on her writing process, as suggested by some of these documents.²³ Others adopt a contextualizing purpose and offer a more generalized view of Austen as set in her particular time and place.²⁴ Others still take on objects once owned by Jane Austen and now raised to the status of relics, such as Austen's silk pelisse in "Jane Austen's Pelisse-Coat"²⁵ and her portable writing desk, one of the British Library's treasures,²⁶ in "The Art of the Letter".²⁷ The chapter on the pelisse coat is a particularly interesting piece, for, as dress historian Hilary Davidson acknowledges, the object on display here reflects Austen's own rise to stardom, from cherished and well-defended family heirloom to the source of a powerful and heterogeneous cult:

The barely worn material, reminder of a beloved aunt, stayed in the family [...] until it came to Hampshire County Museums and Archive Service in 1993. By that point, no one could quite remember if it had really been Jane Austen's; but her fame had grown so extraordinarily in the intervening years that even the possibility it had belonged to her was enough to make the pelisse an important object. Today, most of the known Austen 'relics' are jewellery and accessories:

²² It is the case of "Teenage Writings: Amusement, Effusion, Nonsense" (Thomas Keymer, pp. 16-35), analysing her three Juvenilia notebooks, and "Making Music" (Jeanice Brooks, pp. 36-55), on her musical sheets.

²³ Such as "Making Books: How Jane Austen Wrote" (Kathryn Sutherland, pp. 118-143).

²⁴ As in "Women Writing in Time of War" (Kathryn Sutherland, pp. 96-117), and "The Novel in 1817" (Freya Johnston, pp. 144-161).

²⁵ Hilary Davidson, pp. 56-75.

²⁶ See <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/jane-austens-writing-desk>.

²⁷ Deidre Lynch, pp. 76-93.

a turquoise ring, a bracelet, a topaz cross, a muslin scarf. Clothing is different. It envelops and reflects the body, especially the body it was made for in the early nineteenth century before mass-manufacture and the sewing machine. (57)

And as Sutherland adds in a Making Of video promoting the Winchester exhibition, “[b]ringing the [Austen] portraits together with the pelisse creates an even bigger question mark.”²⁸ As might have been expected, the number of objects on display, physically in both exhibitions and remotely in *Jane Austen: Writer in the World*, do not bring us closer to a more authentic Jane Austen. They do, however, work as vehicles for our own interrogation, one of the objectives defined in this endeavour. According to the voiceover of the Winchester exhibition’s Making Of video, “The visitor is taken on a journey inevitably leading to the question, *Who is Jane Austen to you?*” The question was reworked in the Oxford’s exhibition to “Which Jane Austen?” where it was adopted as title. These three items – both exhibitions and their book rendering – suggest an attempt to come to terms with our contemporary obsession with Jane Austen. Or as Sutherland admits, it is a “process” in which “we’re constructing and deconstructing our image of Jane Austen”,²⁹ with the “we” here including both the curators and the visitors, in a shared experience of constructing what Austen means today, from the various objects which work to (re)invoke her in a multitude of ways. It is her unabated presence in contemporaneity that makes her such an interesting case study. As Claudia Johnson claimed,

Jane Austen is not and has never been any old great author, whom we might discuss more or less rationally, but a fabulous figure and the paragon of popular and elite audiences alike. Certainly no other author — perhaps nor even Shakespeare himself, who, despite his preeminence, is no longer popularly accessible — has inspired such widespread and intense devotion that is itself worthy of study. (*Jane Austen’s Cults and Cultures* 11-12)

Such material presence in our contemporaneity has made of Austen a unique case in literature and can be found across a variety of forms, of which the three objects (*The Jane Austen Project*, *TLS: Jane Austen*, and *Jane Austen: Writer in the*

²⁸ The Winchester exhibition had on display, for the first time, six alleged portraits of Jane Austen: the sketch and the watercolour made by Cassandra Austen to which were added the Byrne, the Rice, and the Clarke portraits (the later three disputed as authentic), as well as the James Andrews’ watercolour, commissioned by the family and based on Cassandra Austen’s sketch. For more information on the portraits, see section “A Life in Portraits” (164-185) of this catalogue and also Johnson’s thorough analysis in the first chapter of her book, “Jane Austen’s Body” (*Jane Austen’s Cults and Cultures* 16-67).

²⁹ Sutherland, *The Making Of The Mysterious Miss Austen Exhibition*.

World) with which I have started are just examples. All three items described above have been published in 2017, in order to celebrate (or at least profit from the buzz around) the 200th anniversary of Jane Austen's death. Whether or not they should be taken seriously when debating Jane Austen in an academic dissertation such as this one is in fact an important and unavoidable question I wish to raise from the start. They are not, obviously, equally comparable, as they are essentially three different objects, with distinct purposes and rules of their own. They also address primarily different reading publics, although, as most things Austen, they look to benefit from an extended target audience interested in everything related to the author. However different, they also share an inherent questioning on Austen's meaning today, more than 200 years after her death. Although none of them theorizes on such phenomenon, they lay it bare, more or less evidently, for us, scholars or critical readers, to follow the lead.

Critical definitions of the Jane Austen phenomenon

Despite the many titles published every year on her, the critical definition of Jane Austen as a very specific, and, I believe, unique phenomenon is far from an easy task. Even mapping previous attempts at such definitions has proved a challenge. The well-known, and amply used, terms like Aunt Jane, dear Jane and even St Jane, pointing to an early reception of Austen that divinized the novelist in ways denounced by Butler and alluded to above, has been explored by several authors.³⁰ Those considerations are not, however, immediately pertinent for the present study and, although referred to on occasions, they do not constitute my immediate concern. My aim is to focus on more recent takes on the subject, namely those departing from what is sometimes considered the second wave of Jane-o-mania, following the overflow of television and film adaptations in the late twentieth century, particularly during its last decade.

In considering the definition of Austen as a particular phenomenon in both literary and popular culture spheres, the first reference must go to John Wiltshire's *Recreating Jane Austen* (2001). Although hardly a book on adaptations of Jane

³⁰ See Looser (5-12).

Austen, Wiltshire's now seminal work defines as its focal point "the nature and status of 'Jane Austen' within our culture", "the role Jane Austen plays in the contemporary cultural imagination" (ix). Wiltshire is particularly quoted for having addressed this issue by distinguishing between 'Jane Austen' and Jane Austen: "'Jane Austen' then, the cultural image, can be distinguished from Jane Austen, the texts." (10) In Wiltshire's distinction, 'Jane Austen' has connotations to the heritage industry, an "anachronistic fascination" with past manners, and even English imperialism, usually via traditional adaptation or any other forms of popular culture dissemination. The most interesting aspect, nonetheless, is that Wiltshire does not find this 'Jane Austen' exclusive of adaptations: she is a "composite" pervading and informing almost everything related to Austen:

[S]omething that seems to be characteristic of work on Jane Austen – the construction of a composite 'Jane', compounded of biographical information, interpretation of the letters, readings of the novels, the whole enhanced – and apparently validated – by the still surviving geographical lineaments of the world she inhabited. This composite Jane (or 'Jane Austen's world') crosses generic and textual borders, so that Jane Austen's biography seeps into the most formal criticism, enters into a film based on a novel, and sequels are written in which the Reverend Edmund and Mrs Price bump into the Reverend and Mrs Elton at a ball. (15-16)

Writing in the beginning of the new millennium, just as Austen's star was rising in unprecedented ways following the success of the 1990's TV and cinematic adaptations, Wiltshire works in his theory on adaptation by mediating between "two incompatible camps – the radical or subversive, and the conservative or nostalgic." (134) Working mainly on 'Jane Austen', he looks for the value added by transcoding Austen's texts to contemporary settings. He thus acknowledges Austen as a composite, a complex unit made of multiple, multi-layered additions, which in turn generate meanings and create dialogues between different Austen-related objects.

A few years later, Claire Harman could already claim in the preface to her *Jane's Fame: How Jane Austen Conquered the World* (2007), that "[a]s the title of one Austen blog has it, 'Jane Austen — She's Everywhere!', endlessly referenced and name-dropper and part of today's multinational, multilingual, multicultural single currency." (2) Harman sets to establish the origins and history of Austen's rise to fame, from early fan(atic)s (such as Miss Shirreff and Annabella Milbanke, later Lady

Byron) to the rise of Janeites,³¹ which she sees as a conservative male response to the New Woman movement of the late 1890s. Departing from the idea that “Austen’s success as an infinitely exploitable global brand, or conceptual product, is everything to do with recognition and little to do with reading” (3), Harmon’s pervasive study goes through the inclusion of Austen in the literary canon – at the same time as English Literature rises as a subject in universities – and then as she is taken as source for the new media of film.

In her last chapter she introduces an expression summing up her theory on Austen, just like Wiltshire. However, and since Harman is more focused on Austen as “global brand”, the commercial aspect is more enhanced in her “Jane AustenTM” than in Wiltshire’s ‘Jane Austen’. Accepting that Austen “has come to exist, more obviously than any other English writer, in several mutually exclusive spheres at once” (243), she proposes the idea of Austen as a marketable item, progressively distant from the “real” Jane Austen, both writer and person:

Austen’s current success as a brand, or product, the name of which accrues interest from circulation alone, is a measure of ‘that ideological surplus value known as “legitimacy” or “authority”’ that Linda Charnes has found in all ‘notorious’ names. A strong myth or ‘product legend’ like hers depends upon separation from its origin; to quote Charnes again, it requires ‘the naturalizing or “forgetting” of its own history’ (a process which began for Austen even before her history was written). An opinion formed by a small group can in this way spread out and be held by a much larger group; its ‘half-real, half-fictitious’ quality becomes not just the way it decimates effectively, but the reason it does. (244)

As such, both Wiltshire’s and Harmon’s expressions recognize the existence of an Austen avatar, one who surpasses the novelist, who died in 1817 without reaching considerable recognition. That other Jane Austen, who is and at the same time is not Jane Austen, women novelist of the early nineteenth century, is however a complex thing, difficult to define beyond a clever moniker, such as ‘Jane Austen’ or Jane “AustenTM”.

Although Wiltshire and Harman are unavoidable references, other critics have dwelt, exclusively or partially, on Jane Austen as a popular culture concept incorporating a multitude of objects, reflective of just as many diverse approaches and reinterpretations. As such Harman is not alone in insisting on a universal Austen. In

³¹ See note 33.

their edited collection *Global Jane Austen: Pleasure, Passion, and Possessiveness in the Jane Austen Community* (2013), Lawrence Raw and Robert C. Dryden also advocated Austen's global nature, referring not only to the spread of her work and name worldwide, but also to the overall reach of the themes in her novels, still demeaned in some circles as confined and of limited scope. Most important to our discussion though is Raw and Dryden's claim that Austen's apparent limitedness contrasts with her global presence in contemporaneity:

Austen's reach from that sitting room in Stevenson, Bath, Southampton, or Chawton is extensive. She is able to transcend those confining walls, rooms, and social attitudes to touch the wider world of her day and most impressively the wider world of our present day [...]. (3)

Another study influenced by both Harman and Wiltshire is Gillian Dow and Clare Hanson's *Uses of Austen* (2012), a collection of essays departing from an idea of Austen as "cultural signifier with global recognition" (1), as the editors claim in the introduction. Dow and Hanson see this cultural signifier as a result of several factors which, combined, define our own complex contemporaneity. Jane Austen's value in today's world is thus turned into a mirror of particular trends and cultural movements, which may even be contradictory between them or in relation to the historical Jane Austen:

The last two decades have seen an exponential rise in 'Jane's Fame': Austen now stands with Shakespeare as a signifier with a global currency that is invested with multiple and contradictory cultural values. The transformation of 'Jane Austen' to international celebrity status can be ascribed to a number of interlocking factors, including the appearance in the 1990s of film and television adaptations of her novels with high production values; the rise of 'girlie culture', third-wave feminism and postfeminism; the emergence of book clubs, including celebrity book clubs; and widespread access to the internet. (10)

It is important to notice that, in between these studies, other authors have addressed the issue which seems to be given more and more attention, as evidence of Austen's singularity in this aspect has become more and more apparent. One of such studies is Emily Auerbach's *Searching for Jane Austen* (2006), a pervasive study on how two centuries of criticism and limited readership have shaped our contemporary image of Austen. According to her, even at the start of the new millennium, Austen is, more than ever, seen as a girly thing and as such of no great importance, an idea

Auerbach believes to be very much created by film adaptations that have simplified her texts:

This attitude must end. In some ways, we have moved backwards from the time when W. H. Auden could write with utter confidence of Austen's readership: '[...] She wrote them [novels] for posterity, she said; / 'Twas rash, but by posterity she's read.' Auden wrote these lines in 1937, three years before the wave of Austen films began to link her to frilly costumes. Jane Austen is no more a writer for women than Shakespeare is a writer for men. [...] She has turned into heritage. She has become something that's associated with cream teas and vicarage lawns and a kind of England that barely existed... (283)

The many readings posterity has made of Austen are again the object of study in Juliette Wells' *Everybody's Jane: Austen in the Popular Imagination* (2011). In a pervasive (though geographically bound to the United States) study, Wells departed from yet another common expression, "everybody's Jane". The phrasing itself is a direct allusion to Henry James' famous complaint on the commercial overexploitation of Jane Austen,³² but it has come to signify more than just that. Taking on the immensity of objects James had criticized in the first place – and whose number has only grown exponentially to Austen's popularity during the twentieth and now twenty-first centuries – Wells conducts a survey on multiple forms of engaging with Jane Austen via popular culture. *Everybody's Jane* constitutes a broad take on the reception of Jane Austen in contemporaneity, offering examples ranging from enthusiasts and amateur collectors to various forms of reading Austen (for pleasure, as self-improvement, as a form of mental escape, etc.). Wells also takes into consideration reworkings of Austen and her works, from the more consensual adaptations, portraits, biographies, to the more polemic appropriations, or "hybrids", which include explicit sexual, horror/paranormal or religious over-texts. Her aim is to acknowledge the importance of the non-academic material, taken on its own terms and for its own value:

Rather than pointing out "misreadings" or denigrating personally applied (as opposed to analytical) responses, it is essential that we take each reader's account on its own terms, asking what she or he seeks through contact with Austen, and what she or he finds. If we evaluate non-academic approaches

³² "Responsible [for the high tide in the appreciation of Austen], rather, is the body of publishers, editors, illustrators, producers of the pleasant twaddle of magazines; who have found their 'dear', our dear, everybody's dear, Jane so infinitely to their material purpose, so amenable to pretty reproduction in every variety of what is called tasteful, and in what seemingly proves to be saleable, form." (James, "Lesson of Balzac" 63)

according to scholars standards, or if we dismiss those whose literary knowledge is less than or different from our own, we will not appreciate fully what Austen means to readers today. For literary scholars like myself, adopting this non-judgmental vantage point requires a conscious, and sometimes considerable, effort. Austen as she variously appears in the popular imagination may resemble not at all the Austen whose writings we know. (7)

Wells' book brings to the forefront objects only named or alluded to in other texts, normally as examples of how far the exaggerated, out-of-control today's exploitation of Austen has gone. Wells' view is less judgmental and inward looking, underlining the fact that all of these popular manifestations constitute an important part of what Jane Austen is today. Her study is thus of invaluable usefulness, despite having, like the overwhelming Austen-related universe she addresses, some of the scrapbook quality of Alberta H. Burke's collection, the Austen memorabilia collector she dedicates a chapter to.

Wells' word of warning is also reminiscent of the controversy surrounding the early scholarly attention given to Jane Austen by those self-assumed first Janeites (like George Saintsbury, the first to use the term),³³ highly criticized by other scholars, such as F. R. Leavis or, in the extreme, H. W. Garrod.³⁴ It seems that even today, the gulf between the serious, academic Austen and the other Austen, the object of unconditional love and alleged misreading, is still a reality. As Wells states, "[...] the history of Austen's reputation casts light not only on her status today, both among academics and amateur readers, but on the history of the division between those two groups." (13)

The issue of Janeites, both in its earlier and contemporary definitions, is therefore of great importance when discussing the significance of Austen in contemporary culture. On the importance of Janeites to the rising cult of Austen, Claudia L. Johnson's fruitful work on the topic is the necessary reference. Starting as early as 1996 – coincidentally (or not) at the same time Austen hits popularity charts

³³ George Saintsbury first uses the word in a preface to his 1894 edition of *Pride and Prejudice* to describe his own admiration for Jane Austen, making himself part of "the sect—fairly large and yet unusually choice—of Austenians or Janites" (Southam 1987, 215). Claudia L. Johnson's defines Janeitism as "the self-consciously idolatrous enthusiasm for 'Jane' and every detail relative to her" (1997, 232). One of the most interesting aspects about the word is that it has been used both as a derogatory term by critics of Austen enthusiasts, but also by those same enthusiasts as a proud statement of identity.

³⁴ Garrod, a classical scholar, is particularly remembered for his caustic address to the Royal Society for Literature in May 1928, "A Depreciation of Jane Austen".

with the broadcasting of BBC's *Pride and Prejudice* (Langton, 1995) – Johnson first approaches the subject in “The Divine Miss Jane: Jane Austen, Janeites, and the Discipline of Novel Studies”. Retracing the history of Austen's early reception, she coincides it with “the institution of novel studies” (147). By focusing on the “perceived queerness of many of her readers”, Johnson mirrors responses to suggestions of Austen's homosexuality³⁵ to an overly closed way of looking at Austen and her work. Retaking Butler's cue, Johnson brings into the discussion the need to bring “non-normalizing Austenian readings back into view” (163). Johnson returned to the subject in 1997, in a chapter for *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, coining the term “Austen cults and cultures”, which also titles the said chapter. Exploring the importance of scholars such as D. W. Harding, R. W. Chapman, F. R. Leavis, Lord David Cecil, many of whom assumed Janeites, Johnson traces Austen's reception in academia, an unusual progress which in a way accounts for her double status as canonical writer and source of unrequited adoration:

What makes Harding's and Leavis' attacks on the unmanfulness of Janeites different from Garrod's and others' is that they like Austen, and seek to clear themselves from the charge of gender deviance by wresting Austen from gentlemen scholars and literati and making Austen safe for real men engaged in real study. [...] Academic literary criticism of the 1940s and early 1950s saves Austen from her admirers and for a middle-class professorate by celebrating her acerbity and seriousness, championing her fiction as a legitimate object of study in the as yet young field of novel studies over and against the ostensibly frivolous appreciation of Janeites. (“Austen cults” 241)

Finally, a couple of years later in her encompassing *Jane Austen's Cults and Cultures* (2012), Johnson draws a comprehensive study of the evolution of Austen's myth, from the various visual representations of her indefinable physical presence to her changing reception in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as filtered by Victorianism and the two World Wars, with their profound effects in modern living. Putting the stress on Janeism, Johnson's objective is not to theorize but to map and

³⁵ The reference is to Terry Castle's review essay in *The London Review of Books*, titled by an editor “Was Jane Austen Gay?” (1995). The ensuing controversy is doubtless the reason why the review is now titled online as “Sister-Sister”. John Wiltshire also refers to this question: “In the vein of Castle's transgressive suggestion, Johnson sketched the history of Austen's reception as a struggle between what she called ‘the elegiac tradition’ – ‘pressing fantasies about the wholesome serenity of Regency England into the service of nostalgic yearnings after intelligibility’ – and an ‘anti-normative tradition’ which has always suspected that if, in Charlotte Bronte's words, ‘the passions were entirely unknown’ to Jane Austen that was, as Johnson puts it, ‘not because she was such a good girl but because in some secret, perhaps not fully definable way, she was so bad’.” (36)

compare the nature of the development of Jane Austen's popularity, or the evolution of what she so well termed, her "cults and cultures".

In between the multiple outputs of Johnson's long and evolving work, others have contributed to the growing awareness of taking into consideration, instead of outright dismissing, Janeites when debating Austen in academic circles. On the threshold of this new era, Deidre Lynch's edited collection, *Janeites: Austen's Disciples and Devotees* (2000) called the attention to the importance of the neglected popular Austen of contemporaneity. Particularly, Lynch pointed out the validity of taking into consideration popular culture appropriations of Austen as a means to understand her:

If it is possible to read Austen in ways that transgress the boundaries of properly literary reading, it must follow that the location of those limits is far from being apparent or fixed. In this way, the worry that Austen has been afflicted by the wrong sort of popularity seems a backhanded acknowledgment of the tenuousness of the boundaries between elite and popular culture, and between the canonical and the noncanonical. (8)

Some years after Lynch's collection, Emily Auerbach, referred to above, also defended Austen meetings – the ultimate manifestations of Janeism combining an academic conference with more popular expressions such as a Regency ball – as proof of "Austen's ability to appeal simultaneously to a popular and academic audience", which only shows "the clarity, universality, and profundity of her works." (283) Now, whereas Johnson had taken the early academic Janeism as a starting point,³⁶ Lynch's collection proposes making it the unifying research element, suggesting a broader definition, one which undeniably includes popular culture. The essays go from accounts on early readership to the influence of Austen on several later novelists, from the unrelenting love of fans to the critical postmodern readings. The diversity of the contributions, though interesting, must however lead us to question how unifying the issue of Janeites really is. More important, it makes clear the necessity to further study Janeism as a particular form of cultural and sociological phenomenon, with deep connections to both historical change and literary convention.

More recently, Rachel Brownstein's *Why Jane Austen?* (2011) took as its research question the title of one of the last unfinished pieces by Lionel Trilling,

³⁶ Johnson's article "The Divine Miss Jane: Jane Austen, Janeites, and the Discipline of Novel Studies" is reprinted in Lynch's collection (*Janeites*), as its first essay.

“Why We Read Jane Austen” (1974). Unlike other critics however she is more critical of “the Austen craze” (6) of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century and confesses that “the increasingly giddy competing interpretations of the novels (and the life) have lowered the level of the conversation around her, but I have been amused by much that has emerged from that vogue.” (13) The book, as Brownstein acknowledged, “combines literary and cultural criticism with recollections of teaching and travel”,³⁷ with the author navigating between the roles of Austen scholar and Austen enthusiast. In her final chapter, which again reworks Trilling’s title to “Why We Reread Jane Austen”, one of Brownstein’s final remarks is: “Why so much interest in a dead author? Or is the interest in fact not in an author but rather in Jane Austen as what Roland Barthes might have called a text, that is, the authors “written” by the ongoing anonymous cultural discourse?” (242-243)

Although Brownstein’s questions are raised concerning the public interest on the Morgan Library’s exhibition, “A Woman’s Wit: Jane Austen’s Life and Legacy”,³⁸ they also apply more broadly to the contemporary response to Austen. Why does in fact Austen exercise such fascination over a contemporaneity whose social values are apparently so different? How is such construct, or text to use Brownstein’s comparison, built or written, and by whom? More importantly, how does it inform every new product, which, in turn, may come to enrich the said construct/text? Unfortunately, Brownstein does not go beyond her immediate example, the Morgan Library’s exhibition and its items on display. In fact, as is now clear, although several authors take this issue and treat it in different and interesting ways, few problematize it, the most interesting questions being sometimes left for afterwords and open conclusions. Now, as in 1811 when Austen published her first novel anonymously, she remains something hard to define and deal with.

One title that tries to address this question is the more recent *The Making of Jane Austen* (2017), where Devoney Looser approached the subject by looking at Jane Austen as a specific construct. Although her book focuses more on the diverse, and often concurrent, processes leading to such creation, Looser proposes workable notions of Jane Austen as more than a great, or the greatest, English novelist. Instead of Brownstein’s “Why Jane Austen?” Looser prefers to ask “Whose Jane Austen?”

³⁷ See “Why Jane Austen” in *The Montréal Review*, August. <http://www.themontrealreview.com/2009/Why-Jane-Austen.php>.

³⁸ Held from 6 November, 2009, through 14 March, 2010 - <https://www.themorgan.org/exhibitions/a-womans-wit>.

(2), mapping out the long making of Jane Austen, from her first illustrators to early dramatizations, from politicized uses of her name to first academic approaches. Going back to one of the opening epigraphs of this chapter, “She was not born, but rather became, Jane Austen.” (1) – Looser’s inaugural line is a statement towards the admission of Austen as a concept, one particularly complex given the long historical development, instead of any unrealistic search for the authentic Jane Austen. This long historical background is, in Looser’s perspective, crucial to the understanding of Austen in today’s world. She states,

The invention of Jane Austen has been, and continues to be, a fraught public process — in her case, a bizarre, unprecedented, social, literary, and historical extravaganza. Austen’s celebrity has a fantastically shambolic past, its depths only partly and very misleadingly plumbed. (1)

Despite focusing on the history of Austen’s rise to stardom, from the early eighteenth century to our own early twenty-first century, Looser brings to light neglected aspects of this process, avoiding instead the apparently never-ending repetition of the same few known facts or stories of Jane Austen’s life:

[...] Austen’s posthumous journey to becoming an icon looks very different when we take the back roads. It looks different when it’s not narrated by protective collateral descendants or prevailing cultural gatekeepers, by relatives or literati. We get a different history of Austen — author, woman, and works — from perspectives of literary populism, moments of commercial opportunism, or political and cultural clashes. [...] Too often these kinds of things have been dismissed as cultural detritus. The most snobbish and closed minded of our learned experts have a bad habit of telling us that Austen herself would have been disgusted by such lightweight trash put forward in her name. / That’s their Austen. It’s not my Austen. But it’s also not the point. Whoever we say Austen is, or whatever we suspect she would or wouldn’t have liked, we’re writing inferior literary and cultural histories if we leave out the incredible range of people, practices, texts, and images that contributed to her complicated and unlikely trek to becoming an icon. (11)

Her focus on frequently ignored areas of Austeniana and especially the fact that she tells Austen’s as a “popular culture story” instead of the usual “literary-critical” (218), making clearer the reasons why Jane Austen became the globally recognizable popular icon, or “household name” (4) she is today. Her work is thus invaluable to any other trying to work on contemporary reworking of Austen. Despite the many studies however, a more conclusive option of ‘Jane Austen’ or “Jane

Austen TM” remains to be reached. Perhaps one way to such goal is to analyse specific objects adapting Jane Austen for contemporaneity in light of these theoretical notions. It also implies taking into consideration other manifestations of the contemporary obsession for Jane Austen.

Looking for Jane: readers, viewers, tourists and other fans

Today’s obsession with Jane Austen assumes many forms, with most taking as a starting point a somewhat definite image of Austen herself as a plump, middle-aged woman in cap and Regency-styled dress, source of romantic stories and representations of a safe, circumscribed past. The omnipresence of the image is all the more surprising given that no likeness is known of the author, who never sat for a portrait and died well before the first experiments in photography. Most of the contemporary depictions of Austen are still based on the watercolour (c.1869), by James Andrews, ordered by the family as mere illustration and with no claim to authenticity, for the upcoming publication of James Edward Austen Leigh’s biography.³⁹ Considering the process leading to the establishment of Austen’s “official” image, J. P. C. Brown states the following:

This is the picture, often in a form reworked and ‘feminized’ according to Victorian taste, which generally stands for Austen to this day—even though Harman speaks aptly of the first nineteenth-century reworking of it (by a Mr Andrews of Maidenhead) making her look ‘bovine’, and explains that the family accepted this reworked version of Austen not for its likeness, but because it created an acceptable public face for a woman whose growing, posthumous fame was threatening to slip beyond the family’s control. The publication of James Austen-Leigh’s *Memoir of his aunt* in 1870 put an engraving of this revised image into general circulation. Caroline Austen consoled herself that, though not much like her, it did at least represent a ‘pleasant countenance’ (Harman 146–7). Reviewers were delighted to find a version of Austen that answered their expectations. This assimilation of Austen in the era of exactly reproducible images continues. (211-212)

³⁹ This picture, less well-known than the engraving by the Lizars firm based upon it, was sold at an auction in 2013 to a private collector for £164,500, raising considerable interest in the media. See <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/04/29/pictures-day-29-april-2017/portrait-novelist-jane-austen-james-andrews-will-appear-new/> and <https://austenonly.com/tag/james-andrews/>.

As the debate around Austen's likeness and the authenticity of other possible portraits rages on, particularly around the Byrne and Rice portraits, the perception of the world concerning the above mentioned standardized image of Austen remains unaltered. As if pursuing a life of its own, the standardized, popular culture image of Austen, what it stands for and what it can effectively sell seem rather fixed in the minds of the public and content producers alike. From journalists to touristic agents, Jane Austen's name and image are unquestionable marketing assets.

One of the areas still understudied from a purely academic perspective is tourism and how it particularly influences and fuels the continued interest in everything Austen-related. Despite several ground-breaking contributions to this field of studies, on the one hand, and the importance it has acquired in several national economies, on the other, the particular area of literary tourism still suffers from the same kind of academic depreciation Nicola Watson denounced a decade ago:

The embarrassment of literary tourism is encapsulated in the very phrase, which yokes 'literature' – with its long-standing claims to high, national culture, and its current aura of highbrow difficulty and professionalism – with 'tourism', trailing its pejorative connotations of mass popular culture, mass travel, unthinking and unrefined consumption of debased consumables, amateurishness, and inauthenticity. As a practice that tries to make the emotional and virtual realities of reading accountable to the literal, material realities of destination, it is bound to make literary specialists uneasy. (5)

Literary tourism is still regarded as a lesser domain of interest, particularly suspicious in literary academic study, except for some biographical insights. However, tourist sites are particularly relevant in the study of Austen as they both display examples and contribute to her contemporary remake as a popular culture icon. As Rachel Wifall argues, just like in the case of Shakespeare, contemporary obsession with Austen is inseparable from a geographical connection enhanced by tourism (404). Thus invoking Jane Austen's practically un-materializable presence is a constant feature in a number of touristic sites connected, in one way or another, to a relatively short number of biographical facts. Among these, Chawton and Bath stand out as the more relevant. Chawton lays claim not only to "Jane Austen's House Museum" – her last residence and where all her books were prepared for publication – but also Chawton House – her brother Edward Austen Knight's estate and at present home to a library specialized in women's writing. Both hold multiple events related to Austen

and the author's presence extends to other locations in the small village, such as St. Nicholas Church where Austen's mother and sister are buried, or a bed and breakfast and tea room named "Cassandra's Cup". Bath, on the other hand, is home to the Jane Austen's Centre, although the building where it is located is in no way associated to Austen and the author only resided there for a short period of time. Nonetheless, the city is well-known among Austen fans for holding the annual Jane Austen Festival (<https://www.janeaustenfestivalbath.co.uk>), "an immersive experience" including talks, tours, theatricals, a Regency Costumed Promenade, and a Summer Ball.⁴⁰

Together, Chawton and Bath constitute the two geographical foci of Austen tourism but they are not the only ones. To these two destinations, others can be added, from the more obvious Austen's grave, in Westminster Abbey, to the Cobb, in Lyme Regis, where Louisa Musgrove fell in *Persuasion*.⁴¹ Regardless of the degree of factual or fictional closeness each of these sites can claim to Austen, they share in an established industry, experienced by a growing number of fans of Austen.⁴²

Tourism related to Jane Austen is not limited to sites bearing some kind of connection to her life or works. More appealing to a general public not set on picking up every possible vestige of Austen, real or fictional, are the numerous grand houses and estates used as location for the many Jane Austen adaptations. Hence Austen tourism becomes the perfect example of how tourism can develop as an activity often subsidiary of, but not exclusively dependent on, the adaptation industry. In fact, it is in these terms that a real and important economic activity has grown, turning English heritage into a marketable (and profitable) brand. Empowered by the 1990s row of successful adaptations of Austen's novels, the industry grew with the support of public or state agencies such as the National Trust or the English Heritage Trust. Even today, a quick search on these entities' websites still proves this to be a working strategy. The National Trust's website, for instance, includes a page titled "Bringing Jane Austen to life" (Fig. 2) which lists several of its attractions with links to TV and cinema productions of adaptations of her novels.⁴³ Austen is thus repackaged as touristic merchandise not because of her literary fame but mainly because of

⁴⁰ See for instance the official page for Austen tourism in Bath at <https://visitbath.co.uk/things-to-do/jane-austens-bath/>.

⁴¹ Although of a very different nature, both places are regular stops in Austen-themed excursions. See for instance Yaffe (*Among the Janeites* 36-37).

⁴² On that subject see "Getting Closer to Austen: Literary Tourism" (Wells, *Everybody's Jane* 103-140).

⁴³ <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/lists/jane-austen-film-and-tv>.

adaptations of her work. Enticing possible visitors with the possibility of “bringing Jane Austen to life”, the National Trust’s website explores the connection between adaptations and the real historical buildings or natural places under its protection, even if they bear no direct link to Austen or her novels:

If you’re a Jane Austen fan, the names of the settings in her stories are as readily recognisable as those of her characters. Ever wished to take a peek inside Netherfield, or admire Pemberley from across the lake? It’s easier to follow in the footsteps of Lizzie and Darcy or Elinor and Marianne than you might think. Here’s our pick of the places we care for that have starred in adaptations of Austen’s novels.⁴⁴

Not surprisingly, a reference to Mr Darcy leads a list of potential historical places to visit even if the connection in that particular case is tenuous at least: the suggestion is to “Find Mr Darcy at Basildon Park”, the eighteenth century mansion used as Mr Bingley’s Netherfield in the 2005 *Pride and Prejudice* (dir. Joe Wright).⁴⁵

These historical buildings, or places of natural relevance, thus gain an added appeal when marketed as film or television locations. In such move they also gain a collective identity, representative of a specifically English trait or Englishness, meant to appeal to the national as well as the international markets. What is often termed as heritage film finds its origin in this collective identity. To many critics its international marketability is heritage cinema’s most obvious connection to the more general heritage industry and one of the reasons for their shared nomenclature. John Hill remarked that “just as heritage culture permits Britain to carve out a niche for itself within the global tourist economy so heritage films may be seen to provide the British cinema with a distinctive product in the international media market-place.” (79)

The heritage element is undoubtedly of great importance in every object recasting Jane Austen, herself as an author or her novels and fictional characters, for the consumption of contemporary publics, being it in a fictional or non-fictional environment. Her place in post-modernity is paradigmatic to the point of making it possible to read the comment below by Belén Vidal on heritage tourism and its connection to film as having Austen (and Austen related locales) in mind: “These forms of retro-tourism reinforce the links between the past as an object belonging to

⁴⁴ Idem.

⁴⁵ Due to the success of BBC’s 1995 adaptation, Mr Darcy and his estate became powerful marketing tools – see Ellington.

visual consumer culture, and popular film and television fictions that derive their prestige from the same literary and historical connections.” (15)

However, although the connection between adaptations of Austen and the tourism heritage industry, particularly in terms of *mise-en-scène*, is obvious and an element to take into consideration, it cannot overpower the consideration of such adaptations. Claire Monk made a similar point when she accused the traditional critique of heritage film of the 1980s and 1990s of applying to film the arguments against the heritage industry as a whole, namely in its efforts to accommodate a “conservation lobby” keen on preserving built private property by highlighting its national interest:

[...] this strategy neglected to consider differences between the display of the built or landscaped environment for public consumption and the operation of films, in which the ‘heritage’ *mise-en-scène* is only one and potential site of pleasure among many, including the pleasures of narrative, character, performance, humour, sexuality, and so on. (“British heritage-film debate revisited” 188)

In the next chapter I will return to this discussion, framing the issue of heritage film in the broader discussion of adaptation, particularly in the ways relevant to Austen’s reinterpretation, and sometimes even repackaging, for contemporary publics.

Taking a more encompassing view, what is described as heritage can be seen as part of a larger tendency visible in a variety of audiovisual products that do not correspond to the cinematic, fictional model.⁴⁶ For example, the popularity of certain television shows that capitalize on a specific kind of heritage prove that the trend, far from remaining confined to certain media or even genre within one particular media, has expanded into a variety of products. From *The Great British Bake Off* (2010-) to *Escape to the Country* (2002-), a number of popular television shows have explored an established view of England/Britain, marketable both within the UK borders and with international audiences. The former is a baking competition exploiting not only a supposedly traditional and culturally significant British activity but also a strong visual identity in which a heritage inspired production is visible from the opening

⁴⁶ Writing in 1999, at the end of the boom decade for the heritage industry, John Hill traces an interesting history of how it developed, particularly in terms of tourism, and how British film in particular is located within it – see Hill (74-98).

title⁴⁷ to the selected filming locations.⁴⁸ The latter is a reality property-buying programme that helps potential buyers find a new house in rural UK. As expected, it frequently showcases the idyllic scenery of rural England, from traditional villages to National Park regions and the exploitation of such images is an unabashed central element of the series. Although none of these series are connected to Austen, they explore the same commodity: “‘Heritage’ here is not that which is handed down from the past to the present but that which is appropriated from it or superimposed by a modern generation.” (Childs 89) It is a visual construct, a selection emphasizing the prettiest part of the past, in particular of the (early) nineteenth-century rural England, set to be experienced in multiple formats and media.

What the connection between Austen and heritage also reveals is how, despite the plethora of manifestations of the contemporary Austenmania, quite often these manifestations return to the visual adaptations of her work, in particular television and film, as either a direct source or an unavoidable reference with pre-eminence over the literary text itself. For that reason, Austen and adaptation remains a fruitful area of exploration, both in commercial and in scientific terms.

Austen’s widespread popularity in contemporaneity, materializing in all sorts of objects from online videogames and spin-off novels to teacups and romantic self-help guides, turn her into a global commodity which seems to have lost almost all identity only to become a visual representation of an idealised bygone era. This prolific output of Jane Austen also implies that she has come to signify something equivalent to somewhat safe and unsurprising pieces of entertainment, as this rather casual but meaningful *fait divers* reported by Andrew Higson makes clear:

It is noteworthy that a screening of *Emma* was slotted into the television schedule sensitively reorganized on the day of the funeral of Princess Diana, Princess of Wales, in September 1997. This tasteful though not always reverential period drama, about a charismatic but insecure and less than perfect young upper-class heroine moving uncertainly towards a fairy-tale romantic closure, provided the happy ending that Diana's fairy tale did not have. That it did so with the cultural authority of Jane Austen meant that it could be deemed

⁴⁷ Apart from the Victorian-styled lettering, the entire title sequence bears remarkable similarity to the title sequence of *Downton Abbey* (2010-2015), another hugely popular (fictional) series in which the heritage motif is undeniable.

⁴⁸ Although the show itself takes place inside a tent, the production is set on the grounds of a grand house, normally one for each season. Besides frequent aerial shots from these houses and their fabulous grounds, both the presenters and the amateur bakers are frequently set against idyllic sceneries, ranging from fabulous gardens to sheep grazing in green meadows.

safe in the context of what many saw as a day of national mourning - but it was also both modern and traditional, like Diana herself. (*English Heritage* 21)

In the second part, I will move the discussion of this phenomenon to the analysis of particular objects, all of which late twentieth century and twenty-first century adaptations of Austen's *Emma* (1815) that confirm and/or redefine such recreation of Jane Austen in contemporaneity. In order to so it is necessary to first establish sound bases, in theoretical terms, concerning adaptation, the focus of the chapter to follow.

Chapter 2.
Adaptation Studies:
Challenges in a New Millennium

“One half of the world cannot understand
the pleasures of the other.” (E 87)

Beginning to theorise adaptation

In 1996, Brian McFarlane’s *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* is considered by many to be the first attempt at a full-length theoretical study in the academic field of adaptation studies. Despite a title pointing to the more limited conception of novel-to-film adaptation and a focus on adaptations made from nineteenth century novels, McFarlane stresses the need to change traditional views of adaptation, already criticizing what has come to be known in the field as the fidelity discourse and instead supporting an approach based on intertextuality. Citing Christopher Orr, he stands by the claim that “the issue is not whether the adapted film is faithful to its source, but rather how the choice of a specific source and how the approach to that source serve the film’s ideology”. (10)

McFarlane’s text has to be discussed in relation to the previous, and almost homonymous, *Novels into Film* (1957), by George Bluestone.⁴⁹ Bluestone’s pioneering study focuses on adaptation as transformation of novels into film and is important for establishing the touchstone for adaptation studies (even if the discipline was not established as such at the time): recognizing the generic difference between cinema and literature.⁵⁰ However, Bluestone still avows literature the prime place and, as James Naremore (2000) noted, he assumes and establishes, for years to come, “the intellectual priority and formal superiority of canonical novels, which provide the films he discusses with their sources and with a standard of cultural value against which their success or failure is measured.” (6) McFarlane, on the contrary, seems to be aware of the failings of such framework, as he begins his own book, forty years

⁴⁹ Between both texts others exist, the limited space allotted here not allowing to detail every one of them. See Andrew (1984) and Boyum (1985).

⁵⁰ Bluestone’s text is frequently considered the founding study of the discipline of adaptation studies. Thomas Leitch, for instance, considers everything before the publication of that book as belonging to “a prehistoric period” that “does not deal directly with specific adaptations at all, but rather focuses on generalizations about literature and film as such.” (*Handbook 2*)

after, with an attack on “fidelity criticism”.⁵¹ Despite some problematic issues, such as deliberately avoiding the issue of authorship in film and not including in that designation adaptations made for television (all of which acknowledged in the preface), McFarlane nonetheless sets the tone for a rising cry against the use of fidelity as the primary value against which adaptations must be judged. In a later text, McFarlane is clear in stressing the importance of intertextuality, a process he sees as going beyond the obvious connections to the adapted text:

The way we respond to any film will be in part the result of those other texts and influences we inescapably bring to bear on our viewing. [...] When we turn to a film adapted from literature, or in some way connected to a literary text or texts, we need to realize and allow for the fact that the anterior novel or play is only one element of the film’s intertextuality, an element of varying importance to viewers depending on how well or little they know or care about the precursor text. (*Reading Film* 26-27)

This first period of critical debate is thus marked by a concern in defining adaptation, no doubt a result of the need to affirm the field’s independence from the more established areas of literary and film studies, from which the majority of adaptation scholars came. The discourse however is still close to that of literary studies – for instance, both Dudley Andrew (1984) and McFarlane put a strong emphasis on narrative as the defining element of both novel, film, and by extension, adaptation –⁵² and the focus on the novel-to-film model did not advance more innovative forms of thinking about adaptation. The field of adaptation studies lacked, however, theorization, as Thomas Leitch complained in “Twelve Fallacies in Contemporary Adaptation Theory”, published in 2003.

With the beginning of the twenty-first century and following a boom of adaptations in the 1990s, in both volume of productions and audience awareness, other critics contributed to the discussion on adaptation as an academic discipline. Robert Stam’s work on dialogism was of seminal importance, as it made possible an

⁵¹ He states on the “pervasive” use of “fidelity to the original novel as a major criterion for judging adaptation”: “No critical line is in greater need of re-examination - and devaluation.” (*Novel to Film* 8)

⁵² See for instance Andrew’s following statement: “Narrative codes, then, always function at the level of implication or connotation. Hence they are potentially comparable in a novel and a film. The story can be the same if the narrative units (characters, events, motivations, consequences, context, viewpoint, imagery, and so on) are produced equally in two works. Now this production is, by definition, a process of connotation and implication. The analysis of adaptation then must point to the achievement of equivalent narrative units in the absolutely different semiotic systems of film and language.” (103)

alternative for the vilified, but still very much present, fidelity discourse.⁵³ Stam proposed instead to look upon adaptation from the point of view of intertextual dialogism (*Literature through Film* 3-5), which presupposes equity in status between adapted object and adaptation by reapplying, like McFarlane, Gérard Genette's forms of transtextuality – itself a reworking of Bakhtinian dialogism and Kristevian intertextuality –, particularly hypertextuality and the concepts of hypertext (film) and hypotext (the text and even its previous adaptations) (*Literature and Film* 31). His refusal of “fidelity as a methodological principle” in favour of an “intertextual dialogism” attempts to release film adaptations from hierarchized or moralistic judgements, in favour of a broader view that also locates adaptation in its historical, social, and cultural environment: “Filmic adaptations get caught up in the ongoing whirl of intertextual reference and transformation, of texts generating other texts in an endless process of recycling, transformation, and transmutation, with no clear point of origin.” (*Literature through Film* 5) As inclusive as Stam's notion of intertextual dialogism might be, the titles of his prolific output around 2005⁵⁴ make clear that the literary model is still prevalent and constitutes a hindrance to a real advance in the field of adaptation studies, both in theoretical and analytical terms.⁵⁵ As for intertextuality, it became a stepping-stone for the field at this time, with several other critics having contributed to that discussion.⁵⁶

The following years saw the publication of a quick succession of titles, some of which – namely the work by Linda Hutcheon, Julie Sanders or Thomas Leith –

⁵³ Stam is the author of one of the most quoted attacks on the fidelity discourse, originally made in *Literature and Film* (2005): “The conventional language of adaptation criticism has often been profoundly moralistic, rich in terms that imply that cinema has somehow done a disservice to literature. Terms like ‘infidelity,’ ‘betrayal,’ ‘deformation,’ ‘violation,’ ‘bastardization,’ ‘vulgarization,’ and ‘desecration’ proliferate in adaptation discourse, each word carrying its specific charge of opprobrium. ‘Infidelity’ carries overtones of Victorian prudishness; ‘betrayal’ evokes ethical perfidy; ‘bastardization’ connotes illegitimacy; ‘deformation’ implies aesthetic disgust and monstrosity; ‘violation’ calls to mind sexual violence; ‘vulgarization’ conjures up class degradation; and ‘desecration’ intimates religious sacrilege and blasphemy.” (3)

⁵⁴ *Literature through Film: Realism, Magic and the Art of Adaptation* (Stam, 2005), *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation* (Stam & Raengo, 2005) and *A Companion to Literature and Film* (Stam & Raengo, 2004).

⁵⁵ On this see Geraghty (193-194).

⁵⁶ Such as Linda Hutcheon (*Theory* xiv), Mireia Aragay or Thomas Leitch (“Twelve Fallacies”, “Genre”). See for instance Leitch's remark here: “[I]t is the work of all reading or viewing, since reading any book, attending any play, looking at any painting, or watching any film allows an audience to test assumptions formed by earlier experiences of books or plays or paintings or films against a new set of norms and values. The distinctiveness of adaptation as a genre is that it foregrounds this possibility and makes it more active, more exigent, more indispensable. Comparisons that are discretionary in all texts, because they are all intertexts, become foundational to the extent that any audience experiences an adaptation as an adaptation.” (“Genre” 117)

would become staple references in the field. Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* (2013 [2006]) was first published a decade after McFarlane's study and became the unavoidable reference when working with adaptation. Assuming to be what McFarlane's book had only admitted to attempt (and moving away from the case-study model), the theory of adaptation proposed by Hutcheon consolidated some of the principles various scholars in the field had been putting forward in the meantime, such as the intrinsic nature of adaptation to western culture, the "pleasure of repetition" and "repetition without replication" (xviii) as explanations for the omnipresence of adaptation, or the failure in the "rhetoric of fidelity".

Hutcheon's own contribution to the theorization of adaptation was the proposition of the "mode of engagement" with a story as the defining element in an adaptation, i.e., where other critics had suggested tripartite forms adaptations could take, she proposes three modes of making that adaptation come into being: telling, showing, and interacting. By focusing on the mode of adapting, Hutcheon tries to shift the attention from a derivative object bound to fail its reproduction of another in a different medium, to the ways making each adaptation a new (and innovative) form of repetition, a word she uses in a non-deprecatory way:

A doubled definition of adaptation as a product (as extensive, particular transcoding) and as a process (as creative reinterpretation and palimpsestic intertextuality) is one way to address the various dimensions of the broader phenomenon of adaptation. An emphasis on process allows us to expand the traditional focus of adaptation studies on medium-specificity and individual comparative case studies in order to consider as well relations among the major modes of engagement: that is, it permits us to think about how adaptations allow people to tell, show, or interact with stories. (22)

Partaking in the reuse of the concept of intertextuality like other critics before her, Hutcheon's method also seems to move away from the traditional novel-to-film approach.⁵⁷ Particularly the third mode, or "interacting", moves to include in the discussion on adaptation objects usually left out, such as videogames or theme park rides. One other trademark of this study is the use of Darwin's theory of evolution as a metaphor for adaptation (31-32), a line of argument Hutcheon would return to in later texts, reaffirming it as a working homology that may contribute to discard "the

⁵⁷ Hutcheon signals this right from the start, the opening sentence to the preface to the first edition being: "If you think adaptation can be understood by using novels and films alone, you're wrong." (*Theory* xiii)

continuing dominance of what is usually referred to as ‘fidelity discourse.’” (Bortoletti and Hutcheon 444) As she had affirmed in the final lines of her *Theory*, this “biological parallel” also provides a valorization of adaptation: if a text adapts to survive, then the biologically improved form can never be secondary or inferior (176-177). Although at times prescriptive, Hutcheon’s *A Theory of Adaptation* remains a valuable tool when setting the bases for any work on adaptation, such as this one and I will return to it later on.

The same year saw the publication of another influential study in adaptation, Julie Sanders’ *Adaptation and Appropriation* (2016 [2006]). As it is clear from the title, Sanders focuses on the binary adaptation and appropriation, which she sees as two distinct processes equally part of what adaptation studies deals with. Despite criticism that such a dual approach might be restrictive,⁵⁸ as two clear “creative activities” which “intersect and interrelate”, Sanders reaffirms that “adaptation most often signals a relationship with an informing source text either through its title or through more embedded references”, whereas appropriation “effects a more decisive journey away from the informing text into a wholly new cultural product and domain, often through the actions of interpolation and critique as much as through the movement from one genre to others” (35-36). Though indebted to other authors whom she often cites, such as Linda Hutcheon and Deborah Cartmell, Sanders’ argument is one more clearly on the defence of adaptation’s creative and critical value as it pushes further away from the “source text”.⁵⁹

Adaptation can be a *transpositional* practice, casting a specific genre into another generic mode, an *act of re-vision* in itself. It can parallel editorial practice in some respects, indulging in the exercise of trimming and pruning; yet it can also be an *amplificatory procedure* engaged in addition, expansion, accretion, and interpolation [...]. Adaptation is nevertheless frequently involved in offering *commentary* on a source text. This is achieved most often by offering a revised point of view from the ‘original’, adding hypothetical motivation, or voicing what the text silences or marginalizes. Yet adaptation can also continue a simpler attempt to make texts ‘relevant’ or easily comprehensible to new audiences and readerships via the processes of *proximation* and *updating*. (22-23, my emphases)

⁵⁸ See the introduction to Pascal Nicklas and Oliver Lindner’s edited volume *Adaptation and Cultural Appropriation: Literature, Film, and the Arts* (2012). On the contrary, other critics, like Thomas Leitch (“Adaptation and Intertextuality”) do not see this as problematic.

⁵⁹ Sanders’ book includes considerations on other important issues in adaptation studies but because these underwent a significant revision for the second edition, I will address them in the subsequent part of this chapter.

Together with Hutcheon and Sanders, Thomas Leitch's *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents: from Gone with the Wind to The Passion of Christ* (2007) constitutes the basis for contemporary theoretical discussion in adaptation studies. Leitch begins by denouncing the perpetuation of crippling notions despite the pervasive debate on the need to change perspectives:

In the twenty years since Dudley Andrew complained that 'the most frequent and most tiresome discussion of adaptation concerns fidelity and transformation,' why has the field continued to organize itself so largely around a single one of these positions, the proposition that novels are texts, movie are intertexts, and in any competition between the two, the book is better? (6)

His contribution to the necessary change implies debasing such ideas by means of an historical overview of how film adaptation was made and received from the short films of early twentieth century to early twenty-first century blockbusters. Rich with cinematic references that cover a chronologic span even wider than the one suggested by its title, Leitch's book attempts to counter the fixed ideas of "fidelity and transformation [of an original narrative]" he had mentioned earlier by supplying proof of adaptation's long track-record in autonomous and creative practice. Instead of following a clear-cut analytical process, Leitch opts for what seems to be a more dispersive approach – from biblical films to the many (and varied) afterlives of Sherlock Holmes, from discussing authorship in the works of Hitchcock, Kubrick and Disney to "postliterary"⁶⁰ or "based on a true story" adaptations –, only to make clear how pervasive adaptation issues really are. As he wraps up his analysis of the latter kind, he also proposes a broader path ahead of adaptation studies scholars, one that could fulfil the field's real potential:

Given these films' challenge to the distinction between films that are adaptations and films that are not, the slippery slope away from adaptation studies to intertextual studies seems dangerous indeed. / Yet the future of adaptation studies, and of textual studies generally, depends on our ability to negotiate this slope. [...] Adaptation studies will rest on a firmer foundation when its practitioners direct their attention away from films that present themselves as based on a single identifiable literary source—preferably a

⁶⁰ Leitch both defines and defends the study of "postliterary adaptations" thus: "movies based on originals that have neither the cachet of literature nor the armature of a single narrative plot that might seem to make them natural Hollywood material. Even if many more of them were not gathering on the horizon, they would warrant a closer look because they throw a new light on the subject of adaptation and suggest a possible alternative to the chimerical quest for fidelity." (258)

canonical work of fiction like *Pride and Prejudice* or *A Christmas Carol*—and toward the process of adaptation. Instead of distinguishing sharply between original texts and intertexts, future students of adaptation will need to focus less on texts and more on textualizing (the processes by which some intertexts become sanctified as texts while others do not) and textuality (the institutional characteristics that mark some texts, but not others, as texts). The study of adaptations offers a matchless opportunity to treat every text, whether or not it is canonical, true, or even physically extant, as the work-in-progress of institutional practices of rewriting. (302)

During the last decade, Leitch's continuous work on the field has been towards challenging assumptions and promoting the metacritical questioning from inside the field. Names like Hutcheon, Sanders or Leitch however were not the only ones to challenge fixed perceptions in the field. To these others like Deborah Cartmell, Imelda Whelehan, Kamilla Elliot and Christine Geraghty, for their prolific production, must be added and we shall return to their work during the course of this thesis.

In 2007 Cartmell and Whelehan edited the first companion in the discipline of adaptation studies, *The Cambridge Companion to Literature on Screen*, proof of the field's growing maturity and inclusion as a separate discipline in curricula for the undergraduate level. The following year, Christine Geraghty's *Now a Major Motion Picture: Film Adaptations of Literature and Drama* (2008) defended a non-prescriptive approach by proposing a broader take, even to the intertextuality model (as opposed to that of fidelity), which she sees as "the beginning not the end of the matter" (193). Although still restricted to filmic adaptation, Geraghty refuses to analyse the source text, focusing instead on:

[...] the established conventions of popular cinema — the interplay of genres, the organization of space and time through editing and camera work, the presentation of performers as stars, the handling of landscape and setting, and the practices of reviewing and publicity that surround many films — [...] understood at the beginning of the analysis, not wheeled in as explanations for failure. (194)

Her equation between the adaptation and a process of "layering" (195-197) – which may reveal changes in social attitudes and their representation (as more progressive or conservative, for instance), performance (including the layering of previous roles by the same actor or the different performers of one character), setting, and issues of

authorship – is particularly useful, except for the fact it categorically excludes the first of these layers: the literary text.

Cartmell and Whelehan's *Screen Adaptation: Impure Cinema* (2010) closes the first decade of criticism in the new millennium and offers, from its very start, a reflection on the name of the discipline, still not completely fixed by then: "[...] with two eminent critics, Linda Hutcheon and Thomas Leitch, using the term 'adaptation' [...] perhaps the area is beginning to settle under a banner which can contain multitudes, and denies either 'literature' or 'film' unwelcome primacy." (1) Aligning themselves with the most forward-looking works in adaptation, Cartmell and Whelehan, both staple names in the field, call attention to the fact that the need for innovation must not imply that all past practices or methodologies should be abandoned. In the conclusion to their monograph, they warned against unfruitful exaggeration in theoretical innovation:

The severance of Film Studies from Literary Studies has meant that adaptations have been pushed to the margins of both subjects to the degree that it is no longer fashionable to use the word 'literature'. While certain adaptation scholars have excluded the literary text from their analysis of adaptations, the slow and painful death of literature in the field needs to be either better defended or refuted. [...] The literary 'source' as intertext is an approach aired by most contemporary scholars, but it may be worth pausing and reflecting upon how far we can or should diminish the 'literary'. (128-129)

Despite the prolific output during the first decade of the twenty-first century, several authors still claimed for a more profound change in the ways of theorizing and analysing adaptation. Like Leitch's quote above showed, one of the most debilitating aspects preventing adaptation studies from becoming a cutting-edge discipline able to foment dialogue between very distinct scientific areas has been its practical inability to move beyond constraining concepts, despite the many theoretical cries against exactly that. On the threshold of the new millennium, Naremore asked for "a broader definition of adaptation and a sociology that takes into account the commercial apparatus, the audience, and the academic culture industry" (10). His claim still made sense in the beginning of the second decade of the new millennium, even if his suggestion that adaptation was a "moribund field" (11) proved to be unfounded, and a "broader definition of adaptation" must go beyond the inclusion of adaptations' contextual conditions. More than anything else, it meant going beyond the literature-film model, an approach the second decade of the twenty-first century would prove a

necessity. As the new millennium progressed, revolutions in both technological conditions and forms of reception /interaction would call for a change in perspective for adaptation studies.

Adaptation theory: Changing perspectives

In 2013, Linda Hutcheon questioned whether adaptation studies were facing a change of paradigm, a mere six years after the publication of her influential book on adaptation theory (see ahead, page 107). Even earlier, in 2010, Cartmell and Whelehan had talked of a “near-paradigm shift in the last decade” (8-9). The phenomenon seems to have accentuated and during the last few years we have witnessed the publication of a significant number of titles on the definition of Adaptation Studies, no doubt a sign of the field’s growing independence.

From the very beginning, adaptation studies have negotiated a place within a competitive and intertextually-rich area of scientific knowledge, and that fact has not significantly changed, even if the field is now undoubtedly recognized as a specialized area of expertise, as the existence of several journals⁶¹ and the recent wave of publications attest to. In 2008, precisely in the inaugural number for the *Adaptation* journal, Thomas Leitch’s complained, in a review article entitled “Adaptation Studies at a Crossroads” that many of the problematic issues raised by critics concerning adaptation remained and that “[e]ver since its inception half a century ago, adaptation studies has been haunted by concepts and premises it has repudiated in principle but continued to rely on in practice” (“Crossroads” 63). The second decade of the millennium thus started with theoretical questioning for the field, for as Yvonne Griggs (2016) more recently put it: “[A]daptation studies is a field of academic theorizing that forever finds itself in defence of its own existence [...] constantly preoccupied with theoretical ‘models’ generated to validate its position as a contender for scholarly debate.” (1)

The need for such defence may rest on the still too preponderant position of both literature and film when we talk of adaptation studies, the most visible of

⁶¹ *Adaptation in Film and Performance*, issued by Intellect in 2007, and *Adaptation*, published by Oxford Journals since 2008, are the two most obvious examples, to which the long-standing *Literature/Film Quarterly*, founded in 1973, must be added.

Leitch's haunting presences, above cited. Linked to such traditional view on adaptation is the old issue of fidelity, still reclaimed by some scholars after several leading figures in the area called for its abandonment in the discourse on adaptation.⁶² And of course the same fidelity criterion is still prevalent in non-academic spheres, namely reviews on the press or everyday commentaries. Take for instance Yvonne Griggs account of the phenomenon:

The question 'Yes, but is it as good as the book?' continues to haunt matters relating to screen adaptations: even if it is merely a ghostly presence, shadowing but not dominating debate in academic circles, it remains a concrete manifestation for reviewers in the twenty-first century, especially when we are dealing with screen adaptation of works revered as part of the canon. Can the adaptation of a text be as good or better than the canonical text that it is supposedly adapting? Who determines that? How and why is it an issue? (5)

In an academic context, however useful the fidelity criterion may be when applied in a particular, instead of a general, manner to any consideration of adaptation, it seems to be without methodological applicability or significant advantage in sight, given the trail of prejudice it leaves. Leitch addresses this issue in an article entitled "The Ethics of Infidelity", in which he explores the ethical implications in any fidelity discourse when talking about adaptation:

However nice it may be to be creative, adaptations never have an ethical imperative to do anything new with their source texts. Their ethical responsibilities are all toward the original texts, or to the authors or fans of those texts, with whom they are presumably joined until death or a more faithful remake do them part. The main reason for this asymmetry is that the discourse of mimetic art that descends from Plato and Aristotle comes with a heavy charge of ethics built in. The discourse of art as a creative or imaginative endeavour, by contrast, stems from a Romantic aesthetic not notable for any ethical emphasis [...] / It may well be impossible to recast adaptation studies in a way that severs its ties to ethically charged language. (66)

Leitch goes on to analyse two examples – illustrations for Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* and Gus Van Sant's remake of Hitchcock's *Psycho* – in order "to encourage a more judicious balance between negative and positive assessments of

⁶² See for example the collection *True to the Spirit: Film Adaptation and the Question of Fidelity* (McCabe et al., 2011).

infidelity” (66).⁶³ In a 2007 article, Hutcheon had called into question “an entire negative rhetoric of ‘infidelity’”, in a statement all the more valid as we approach the end of the 2010s:

[D]oes [literature] actually have priority? What about even earlier performative forms like ritual and song? Or to look forward, instead of back, as Tim Barker urges us to do in his article here, what about the new media’s additions to our repertoire with the advent of electronic technology? How can we retain this hierarchy of artistic forms—with literature inevitably on top—in a world like ours today? How can both the Romantic ideology of original genius and the capitalist notion of individual authorship hold up in the face of the complex reality of the production of literature today (as well as in the past)? (“In Defence of Literary Adaptation” par. 11)

As adaptation veered steadily away, even if on occasion slowly, from the fidelity principle – more recently Kamilla Elliot has claimed it to be a myth with few real presence (“Adaptation Theory” 690–692) –, it has searched for new ways in which to make sense of a relationship with previous texts. A relationship which is, inevitably and by definition, complex and multi-layered. This has given origin to numerous new works, which both map and probe into the field, opening up new lines of analysis and thinking.

In the new decade, a number of such titles have been collections of essays, edited by some recurrent names in the field, namely Christa Albrecht-Crane and Dennis Cutchins’s *Adaptation Studies: New Approaches* (2010), Deborah Cartmell’s *A Companion to Literature, Film, and Adaptation* (2012), Thomas Leitch’s *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies* (2017), and Dennis Cutchins, Katja Krebs and Eckart Voigts’s *The Routledge Companion to Adaptation* (2018). Aiming at opening up perspectives in adaptation studies, such publications are composed of studies reaching different areas of knowledge and varied objects and media. As such, and despite always taking into consideration the historical and theoretical foundations of the field,⁶⁴ all these publications aim at a diversified approach, including studies on objects like radio, music, or video games, and reaching out to areas such as biology, intermedial studies, or classical rhetoric.

⁶³ On a different note and included in the same volume as Leitch’s essay, Kate Newell looks at the various forms fidelity discourse may take in “‘We’re off to See the Wizard’ (Again): *Oz* Adaptations and the Matter of Fidelity”.

⁶⁴ Part I of Cartmell’s companion is titled “History and Contexts: From Image to Sound”, Leitch’s is “Foundations of Adaptation Studies”, and Cutchins et al. is “Mapping the field”.

These publications' introductions also share another interesting feature: the need to call for a change in the field of adaptation studies, rising against the tendency to "fighting yesterday's battles and beating dead horses" (Leitch, *Handbook* 18). For instance, Albrecht-Crane and Cutchins lament the field's resistance to adopt new critical perspectives, namely those proposed by poststructural theories, with dominance still being given to "the issue of 'fidelity' to a precursor text as a means to understand an adaptation's scope and worth." (11-12) For them "the term 'adaptation' [needs] to broaden and expand", i.e., to include moves besides that of novel to film, and "more carefully and rigorously examine 'intertextual' relationships in general" (12-13), through the lens of poststructural theory and thus answer James Naremore's appeal, a decade earlier. Adopting a different strategy, Leitch's introduction to his massive edited volume makes a brief but incisive survey of the field's past, present and future and flaunts "its resistance to the dream of settling the fundamental questions in adaptation studies" (18), in favour of a more open and debate-raising contribution. Apart from each collection's general approach on adaptation, we can find important contributions to the theoretical/methodological debate among the numerous individual articles that constitute them. Take for instance Sara Cardwell's "Pause, rewind, replay: adaptation, intertextuality and (re)defining adaptation studies" (in Cutchins et. al.).

However dominant they may seem at present, output in adaptation studies has not been limited to collections of essays, themselves a consequence of the demands in global dissemination of academic knowledge, no doubt. One interesting recent addition to the field is Yvonne Griggs' *The Bloomsbury Introduction to Adaptation Studies: Adapting the Canon in Film, TV, Novels and Popular Culture* (2016). Despite its title and the historical survey Griggs conducts in the first chapter, *The Bloomsbury Introduction to Adaptation Studies* is more of an introduction to methods in analysing adaptations, rather than an overall introduction to the field of adaptation studies. Apart from its usefulness to anyone starting out in the field, the most relevant aspect of this study is Griggs' insistence on "a creative, process-driven approach to the exploration of adaptation studies" focusing "on the mechanics of adaptation via a series of creative exercises." (11) The methodology seems interesting, specially for proposing something unusual in adaptation monographs, even if Griggs has been accused of both criticising and siding with a tripartite taxonomy and failing to engage with more recent phenomena, namely in new media (Kramer 380-381).

Apart from original titles, some relevant titles in the field of adaptation studies have also been updated via second editions adding to their original theoretical framework new considerations motivated by new media, internet-based platforms and consumer-made products. This was the case of Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006/2013), whose second edition was added an epilogue by Siobhan O'Flynn on how the "hybrid media landscape" (181) impacted on Hutcheon's original theory, even if the latter chooses "not to rewrite *A Theory of Adaptation* in the light of these recent changes" as they are to her "a continuation of the kind of thinking begun in the existing book" (xx). The fact that Hutcheon nevertheless admits new technological advances and consumer habits have challenged some of her theoretical principles but does not explore such new possibilities beyond a new preface has left room for other critics to challenge them.⁶⁵ O'Flynn's epilogue, rather than revise Hutcheon's theoretical positions, repositions them instead in view of the changes brought by global social media and the technological tools making them possible. Focusing on transmedia, she makes clear how multi-platform objects, fan-produced/oriented content, and other forms of participatory culture further complicate the adaptation scene:

A survey of the variant interdynamics of adaptation and transmedia as design strategies extending narrative projects/brands across media strongly supports Hutcheon's argument that adaptation can be thought of as a "system of relations among works" and "a system of diffusion" (2006: 171). Hutcheon's final questions [What is *Not* an Adaptation? What Is the Appeal of Adaptations?] provide a prescient framework for considering how adaptation as product and process continues to evolve due to the pressure to innovate that is now demanded of global entertainment industries. This pressure is amplified because in the world of convergent media, the proven templates of traditional media are no longer adequate (screenplay, production, marketing, distribution). (187)

Although some of the issues looked at by O'Flynn have also become out-of-date in this rapidly moving world of digital media,⁶⁶ her take on the new forms of viewing

⁶⁵ The definition of adaptations as "repetition with variation" is one of the elements of Hutcheon's theory Kate Newell's *Expanding Adaptation Networks* (2017) discusses, an issue I shall return to later, and which Hutcheon herself admits to: "Thematic and narrative persistence is not the name of the new adaptation game; world building is. This also means that theorizing adaptation only in terms of repetition with variation becomes too limiting; what must be added is a way to deal with the range of extensions and expansions of a story world that not only transmedia producers but, as we shall see, fans too have wrought." (Hutcheon, *Theory* xxiv)

⁶⁶ As her discussion of the world of possibilities in interactive children's books, opened-up by the iBook app for the newly launched iPad. For an idea on the instability of the market see, for instance,

adaptation is insightful and the balance she manages to establish between adaptation theories and the challenges brought by the new transmedia industry was only more thoroughly developed by Christy Dena, to whom I will return shortly.

The new ways in which we experience with adaptations has also led Julie Sanders to review her arguments, which nevertheless, seem even stronger with the progression of the millennium. She begins the introduction to the second edition of her *Adaptation and Appropriation* (2006 [2016]) by acknowledging how processes of adaptation and appropriation, although part of our cultural evolution, have been made more visible by twenty-first century technology and the use we make of it:

In the new Web 2.0 era we have been exposed to new modes of intertextuality not least through the collective creativity and personalized customizations of the user-maker generation of platforms and sites such as YouTube and YouKu. In this context terms like remix and remediation, along with mash-up, have entered our everyday vocabulary and have in turn posed their own challenges to ideas of authorship and intellectual property versus creativity and open access (Bolter and Grusin 2000). The ‘newness’ of all this can of course be overestimated as the historical depth of adaptation across art forms referred to in his study confirms; what might be more accurate to state, however, is that technology has made us much more aware of this availability of art in its broadest terms for customization, hyper-conscious perhaps of these digital and indeed textual affordances and the social and cultural values they perform. As novelist Tom McCarthy has put it: ‘Technology reveals us to ourselves as we always in fact were: networked, distributed, laced with code’ (McCarthy 2011). (3)

In this new media world order, Sanders’ previous claim on the creative dimension of adaptation/appropriation becomes more visible and she sees both processes as “celebratory of the cooperative and collaborative model of creativity.” (6) This model, now too preponderant to ignore, calls for a revision in the way we, as audiences, look at adaptations and, even more relevant for this study, in the way we, as scholars, think about adaptation:

As connections and interconnections of this kind proliferate in our argument and in the new digital environment, we need to think less in terms of lines of influence in the older Bloomian model than in terms of webs and networks of allusion; these models are distinctly less hierarchical in structure and allow for great mutuality in terms of impact and creativity. (199)

this 2015 top ten list by *The Guardian*: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/sep/14/ten-best-interactive-book-apps-ios-android> .

Casting aside fidelity as a valid criterion, Sanders shows how her model adapted to the changing situation in terms of both media technology and its use in contemporaneity. She also shows how the future for adaptation studies must rest on a necessary change in perspective, one more profound than the inclusion of digital-based forms of adaptation in the literature-to-film most prevalent model.

Both Julie Sanders' and Siobhan O'Flynn's revisions must be read taking into consideration developments in new media studies, as the new millennium brought significant changes in the way adaptations could be received by audiences. Among such studies, the work of Henry Jenkins on convergence culture (as a paradigm replacing the digital revolution model)⁶⁷ is of capital importance. Although not specifically on adaptation, Jenkins' work has had a direct impact on the field and both Sanders and O'Flynn directly acknowledge such influence. Central to his theory on media convergence⁶⁸ and of particular importance to my work here is the concept of transmedia storytelling:

Transmedia storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story. So, for example, in *The Matrix* franchise, key bits of information are conveyed through three live action films, a series of animated shorts, two collections of comic book stories, and several video games. There is no one single source or ur-text where one can turn to gain all of the information needed to comprehend the *Matrix* universe.⁶⁹

Jenkins' definition of transmedia storytelling, part of his convergence media theory, is intimately connected to the concepts of participatory culture and collective intelligence, all of which presume wide circulation of content across media, supported

⁶⁷ "If the digital revolution paradigm claimed that new media would displace old media, the emerging convergence paradigm assumes that old and new media will interact in ever more complex ways. [...] Convergence is, in that sense, an old concept taking on new meanings." (Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* 6)

⁶⁸ "By convergence, I mean the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want. [...] / In the world of media convergence, every important story gets told, every brand gets sold, and every consumer gets courted across multiple media platforms. [...] I will argue here against the idea that convergence can be understood primarily as a technological process bringing together multiple media functions within the same devices. Instead, convergence represents a cultural shift as consumers are encouraged to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content." (Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* 2-3)

⁶⁹ In "Transmedia Storytelling 101" (accessed 17 October 2019), http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2007/03/transmedia_storytelling_101.html?rq=transmedia%20storytelling.

by consumers' active participation (*Convergence Culture* 2-4). By showing the amplitude of the network of both informing texts and media strategies, Jenkins has made clear how open and diverse storytelling as a process can be in contemporaneity. His assumptions are equally applicable to adaptation, not least because many of today's adaptations are themselves part of transmedia strategies: see for instance the Harry Potter adaptations which include individual objects such as films, plays, videogames, and merchandise, but also complex entities such as the content platform *Pottermore* or the media franchise *Wizarding World*. As many new media concepts and theories, that of transmedia storytelling has been subject to change over the last few years, surely a consequence of the fast-evolving world we live in today. Although transmedia storytelling, as Jenkins conceives it, may include adaptation, the concepts are not equivalent, and Jenkins sees the absence of "add[ing] something to the existing story as it moves from one medium to another" as the difference between adaptation (nothing new added) and extension.⁷⁰

Christy Dena (2009) has challenged this view on her PhD thesis on adaptation and transmediality (95), forcing Jenkins to revise his somewhat Manichean opposition and acknowledging that "[i]t might be better to think of adaptation and extension as part of a continuum in which both poles are only theoretical possibilities and most of the action takes place somewhere in the middle." Siobhan O'Flynn also calls attention to the fact that the Transmedia Producers Credit seems to rule out traditional adaptation, when deliberating: "These narrative extensions are NOT the same as repurposing material from one platform to be cut or repurposed to different platforms." (181)

However, even if the transmedia framework poses difficulties when considered under the adaptation axis, the question "Is transmedia a new form of adaptation?" is beyond the point. The most important fact about transmedia storytelling is that it acknowledges a change at the macrostructure of telling, receiving and retelling stories and for that reason research into the field must inform the way we look into adaptations. For my own work I would also follow Dena's lead, as I intend to consider each adaptation not as a stand-alone object in a one-way relationship to a single source, but as one element in an adaptive network. That adaptive network, although already present before, was made more visible by twenty-first-century uses

⁷⁰ In "Transmedia 202: Further Reflections", http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2011/08/defining_transmedia_further_re.html. Accessed 17 October 2019.

of technology, as adaptation becomes “one of a number of skills to be employed in the development of transmedia content across platforms.” (O’Flynn 194)

Debate in the (trans)media arena, involving scholars but more frequently practitioners as well, revolves around “distinctions between adaptive practices and transmedia production” and “how to separate existing brand-building practices from transmedia campaigns” (O’Flynn 194). In some ways, this debate retorts to the usual binary oppositions that have haunted adaptation discourse for decades. It is just that the element standing opposite to adaptation got updated, with the latter frequently retaining a secondary, market-oriented (and thus lesser) position. As before, however, such binaries are of small practical (and theoretical) use. A wider and more encompassing view of adaptation would be preferable. Instead of serving as a denominator for practices older and more restrictive than transmedia, adaptation, as an area in which considerable and often interdisciplinary expertise has been displayed, could contribute to a more fruitful debate on these new creative practices. Although not all adaptations will necessarily partake in these new forms of experience, many will be either defined or at least influenced by them. As such, and although I am not interested in pursuing an extended discussion on how transmedia storytelling and adaptation differ, I do believe the concept of transmedia storytelling to be central in any new discussion on adaptation for, as Hutcheon admitted, it has become “the new entertainment norm, not the exception” (xxiii).⁷¹

Another important contribution by Jenkins is the distinction he makes between media and technologies. In fact, although we rightly see technological advances as facilitators in the changing ways of making and receiving adaptations, technology is not the origin nor endpoint of everything:

Delivery technologies become obsolete and get replaced; media, on the other hand, evolve. Recorded sound is the medium. CDs, MP3 files, and 8-track cassettes are delivery technologies. / To define media, let’s turn to historian Lisa Gitelman, who offers a model of media that works on two levels: on the first, a medium is a technology that enables communication; on the second, a medium is a set of associated “protocols” or social and cultural practices that have grown up around that technology. Delivery systems are simply and only technologies; media are also cultural systems. Delivery technologies come and go all the time,

⁷¹ Also, if the *Adaptation Prize* is by any means an indicator of a particular theme’s relevance in the field of adaptation studies, then the 2011 winner, Clare Parody’s “Franchising/Adaptation”, proves that there was at least recognition of the importance of debating these issues.

but media persist as layers within an ever more complicated information and entertainment stratum. (*Convergence Culture* 13-14)

For Jenkins that implies that convergence, as a paradigm shift, also does not depend on any technological specificity, being

[...] a move from medium-specific content toward content that flows across multiple media channels, toward the increased interdependence of communications systems, toward multiple ways of accessing media content, and toward ever more complex relations between top-down corporate media and bottom-up participatory culture. (*Convergence Culture* 243)

Such processes are still far from defined, for although *Convergence Culture* (2006) is more than a decade old, debates on the subject still rage on, as both the industry and political institutions strive to control consumers' newfound liberties under copyright issues.⁷² For Jenkins this means "a critical moment of transition" for the relationship between the industry and consumers, but it can also be so for adaptation. As such, the particularities of our present world seem to provide the ideal conditions for adaptation to release itself from age-old discussions, limiting both its academic scope and societal impact.

Recent queries into the field which were inspired by such ideas include work on the notion of adaptation network, discussed for instance by Kyle Meikle in "Towards an Adaptation Network", incidentally the winner of the *Adaptation* Essay Prize in 2013. Early on, Meikle claims his essay "encourages adaptation scholars to rethink the adaptation industry as an adaptation network more accommodating to textual effects." (260) Meikle is responding directly to Simone Murray's *The Adaptation Industry: The Cultural Economy of Contemporary Literary Adaptation*, which, despite its claim on "bring[ing] balance into contemporary adaptation studies by holding together both the specificities of adapted texts and their common adaptation context" (186) he accuses of having "[its] scales [...] weighted far more in favour of the latter than the former." (262-263)⁷³ Murray's over-emphasis on the production context of adaptations however does not put into question the importance

⁷² See for instance the Warner Bros.'s attempt to limit so far tolerated fan activities (K. De Groot) or the debate around the recent EU's copyright legislation (Flint).

⁷³ Although original, Murray's work does not stand alone and Christine Geraghty's (2008) take on adaptation via "established conventions of popular cinema" (194) had already thread some of the paths Murray was to take.

of taking into consideration industrial aspects of the adaptation process. In fact, as elements external or unusual in the traditional, solitary analysis of the move from text to film are called onto stage, such a move also contributes to a renewal in perspectives in adaptation studies. It inevitably adds and makes possible Meikle's own call for a model "[e]xpanding the adaptation industry into an adaptation network" (262).

That seems to be precisely Kate Newell's aim in *Expanding Adaptation Networks* (2017), whose title seems in fact to answer Meikle's call. In order for it to work however this notion of adaptation network has to mean more than just extending the focus to include the "industrial and social relations which underlie the creation of adaptations" (Zeller-Jacques 9), or what Murray calls "a sociology of adaptation" (4). Thus, Newell challenges our established definitions of adaptations – she takes on Hutcheon's seminal definition of adaptation –, particularly what she calls "product-base views of adaptation" (3-4) that tend to limit adaptation to a particular source text or original, extensively transformed into another singular text. Newell's example is *The Wizard of Oz*, whose multiple adaptations and readaptations/reuses across media defy the A-to-B notion of adaptation and turn it into

a "culture-text," which Brian Rose explains as a text that "through the processes of consistent readaptation in popular media, and through the reuse and augmentation of motifs first appearing in earlier adaptations, [creates] a body of popular-cultural memories and associations" (1996,15). (*Expanding Adaptation* 2)

Newell thus offers her own conceptualization of adaptation as going beyond the usual "process- or product-oriented approaches":

My own conceptualization of adaptation is weighed heavily by reading strategies and the manner in which adaptation reflects and contributes to the development of what I think of as a particular work's network: the broad inventory of narrative moments, reference points, and iconography that comes to be associated with a particular work through successive acts of adaptation. (*Expanding Adaptation* 8)

Even if Newell's notion of network as applied to adaptation is particular – she sees it as "experimental and dependent on the audience" of no necessary "sustained engagement with a pre-existing text or texts" (*Expanding Adaptation* 8) – the use of the concept itself is gaining adepts among scholars. The concept of network is thus of fundamental importance, not only in the way that it illustrates the mechanics of

adaptation as process, but also because of how it defines contemporary cultural exchanges. In the revised introduction to her *Adaptation and Appropriation*, Sanders also argued that, in the context of new forms of creative use of existing works made possible by contemporary technology, “the notion of an ‘original’ or source begins to be rescaled in a discussion of networked distribution and collective interpretation.” (4)

When working with this notion of network, one obvious connection is how adaptation as a discipline can work with and benefit from connections to other areas of knowledge that either share similar theoretical challenges or face the same scientific problems. Due to its naturally transdisciplinary nature, the link between adaptation studies and other areas of knowledge is undeniable and several authors have drawn attention to this fact. Julie Sanders, for instance, recognizes both intertextuality and translation studies as “cognate areas and practices” (21). Thus looking beyond the theoretical framework of adaptation might be useful, as long as issues raised in different or close scientific areas might provide insight into problematic issues within adaptation studies.⁷⁴

In her very recent *Reception* (2018), Ika Willis names adaptation as one of many forms of work included in reception.⁷⁵ On the one hand, looking towards reception as she broadly defines it might prove useful. On the other, and just like translation (or intertextuality), also frequently used as a metaphor or linguistic substitute for adaptation,⁷⁶ it could risk bringing the problematic issues of that field into that of adaptation. Furthermore, as Naremore argued, “[t]he problem with most writing about adaptation as translation that it tends to valorize the literary canon and essentialize the nature of cinema” (8). Or as Leitch added, “[a]daptations engage in a wider variety of cultural tasks than the metaphor of translation can explain.” (*Discontents* 71).

The case of reception might be useful however if interdisciplinary discussion, instead of juxtaposition of one field over another, is the intention. For Willis, adaptations seem to fall under the category of “text-to-text approaches to reception”,

⁷⁴ That is Kamilla Elliott’s suggestion in “Adaptation: a Dialogue between the Arts and Sciences”.

⁷⁵ “textual analysis, tracing the ways in which a text seeks to generate particular meanings and effects through references to earlier texts, or tracking the afterlife of a text through its later interpretations, adaptations and appropriations.” (3)

⁷⁶ Having listed several metaphors and synonyms for adaptation, Robert Stam argued that “(e)ach term, however problematic as a definitive account of adaptation, sheds light on a different facet of adaptation.” (*Literature and Film* 25)

i.e., “theories and methods of reception which take as their object of analysis not readers or audiences directly, but instead the texts which readers/authors generate on response to other texts.” (35) Focused on reception, Willis seems to imply that adaptation is mainly concerned with the objects/texts, overlooking reception by readers/audiences, a position she seems to reinforce as she later states: “Text-to-text approaches to reception proceed, as I have indicated, on the basis that texts, rather than audiences, are the place where reception happens.” (38)

Although I am not concerned with the fact that such affirmation is, at least to some extent, incorrect,⁷⁷ I am interested in how on target it might be in terms of how adaptation is generally perceived, outside the “charmed circle” of academia and professional readers to use translation theorist Andre Lefevere’s metaphor (6). Apart from that, one of Willis’s earliest claims seemed to me to open an interesting path. When defending her wide and almost all-encompassing view of reception, Willis claims: “Thinking about reception entails thinking about the system itself: about the people, processes and institutions involved in the production, transmission, distribution and circulations of messages and texts.” (5) It is a claim not far from Murray’s provocative and thought-provoking *The Adaptation Industry*, still one feels repetition of, or rather insistence on, such invectives a necessary element of the field. Besides, it is Willis’s focus on the centrality of interpretation, an interpretation that includes consumption and is itself a form of adaptation, that might be interesting:

Models of text-to-text reception regard writing and reading, creation and interpretation, as intertwined. As André Carrington (2016: 9) puts it, ‘Every interpretative act is an act of authorship, and every act of authorship is an act of interpretation’. The consumption of a text is also an act of production: the production of an interpretation. (44)

The link between consumption and interpretation makes even more sense if we consider it under Jenkins’ (revised) definition of transmedia storytelling and participating culture. It is my conviction that it is in the combination of different theoretical approaches and methodologies that the field of adaptation studies might find a movement forward. As might by now be clear, although theorizations and methodological propositions abound in adaptation studies, the field is characterized by not settling on, even if temporarily, one particular theoretical/methodological

⁷⁷ See for instance Claire Monk’s *Heritage Film Audiences: Period Films and Contemporary Audiences in the UK* (2011).

approach. Kamilla Elliott's recent work on this issue is particularly thought-provoking.⁷⁸ She argued such pattern has less to do with the need to create new theories than with the reshaping of adaptation scholarship:

The theoretical diagnoses and prescriptions – get rid of those theories, adapt adaptation studies to these theories – have persisted for over a century now, regardless of what the theories are, across diametrically opposed as well as compatible theories. [...] It is not new theory that we need, or more theories, or a more rigorous application of the theories we already have, but rather a fundamental rethinking of the relationship between adaptation and theorization. (“Adaptation Theory” 680-681)

In her invective she is joined by Thomas Leitch, who in the article which both follows Elliott's and closes his 2017 collection of essays states, almost *ipsis verbis*: “[...] that what adaptation scholars most need is not new theories, but new attitudes towards theories” (702).⁷⁹ Elliott further contends that adaptations' resistance to all attempts to theorize them lays in the fact “they cross every border and line seeking to define and categorize them”, as naturally unstable objects that “continue to assume new identities in new contexts of consumption and re-adaptation” (682). Such resistance to theory has led to a cycling (re)questioning of what it means to do adaptation studies.⁸⁰ She acknowledges the option taken by many scholars of adaptation of embracing theoretical plurality and even characterizes Hutcheon's theory, the unavoidable reference in the field, as “far from being a single theory, combining many without reconciling their ideological differences in a postmodern theoretical pastiche” (“*Badaptation*” 22).

Elliott has thus distinguished two main trends among adaptation scholars: that of “theoretical progressivism”, i.e. “a continued championing of newer theories”, and that of “theoretical nostalgia”, or the “return to older theories in order to ponder what theoretical viable babies may have been thrown out with the bathwater dumped by the theoretical turn” (“Adaptation Theory” 684). Both of these she sees as “discourses of theoretical failure” (686) and proposes instead the use of an “adaptive theorization”, i.e., “[to] study adaptations to discover ways in which theorization is lacking,

⁷⁸ See both “Adaptation Theory and Adaptation Scholarship” and “The theory of *badaptation*”.

⁷⁹ In the article, titled “Against Conclusions: Petit Theories and Adaptation Studies”, Leitch focuses on dismissing the duality between theory and the case-studies model and on advocating for a “petit theory”, as opposed to Grand Theory and in the sense of “working hypotheses” (*Handbook* 703-704).

⁸⁰ See for instance the example of Thomas Leitch: once a defender of the intertextual model, he has recently remarked that there is “an increasingly pervasive suspicion of the limits of intertextuality as a methodological framework” and its “uncritical adoption” (*Handbook* 5).

allowing adaptations to challenge and adapt even our most cherished theoretical beliefs” (“*Badaptation*” 25). Even if we must wait for further clarification on the concept by Elliott,⁸¹ her advances so far show that such a lack of theoretical fixation need not be a weakness, though it may seem daunting to anyone now starting on the field. As long as productive debate is issued – and the publication of several collections of essays in the last few years attests to it – such uncertainty may prove to lay ground to innovative research, both in and outside the more restricting definition of adaptation.

Which adaptation? Coming to terms with definitions

Having discussed several theoretical takes on adaptation, with no ambition of being exhaustive, it could now feel necessary to come to establish what I mean when using the term adaptation throughout this dissertation. I would follow Kamilla Elliott when she designates the *Oxford English Dictionary* as a good place to start: “‘The action or process of adapting one thing to fit another, or suit specified conditions, esp. a new or changed environment’ and also as the product of such process (*OED* 1989)”. (“*Badaptation*” 20). To this simple and all-encompassing definition we can add Linda Hutcheon’s definition, which I find to remain usable and useful, both in its simplicity and influence, even if this means updating and adapting a more than a decade-old utterance:

Adaptation is repetition, but repetition without replication. [...] First, seen as a formal entity or product, an adaptation is an announced and extensive transposition of a particular work or works. [...] Second, as a process of creation, the act of adaptation always involves both (re-)interpretation and then (re-)creation; [...] Third, seen from the perspective of its process of reception, adaptation is a form of intertextuality: we experience adaptations (as adaptations) as palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation. (*Theory* 7-8)

To this I would add Sanders’ view of adaptations themselves as part of the intertextual network that informs new adaptations and, as such, as creating new meanings and expanding interpretations:

⁸¹ Elliott’s forthcoming monograph is meant to develop this concept.

Adaptation has, perhaps, suffered from an over-emphasis in post-Romantic Western culture on a highly singular notion of creativity and genius but is finding new purchase in the era of global circulations and the digital age of reproduction and re-makings. Adaptation and appropriation now provide their own intertexts such that they often perform in dialogue with one another so perhaps it will increasingly serve us better to think in terms of complex processes of filtration, and in terms of networks, webs and signifying fields [2006: intertextual webs or signifying fields] rather than simplistic one-way lines of movement from source to adaptation. In the latter model, certainly, the importance of audience, reception and contextualized production of meaning is made properly visible. (33)

Timothy Corrigan's article "Defining Adaptation" is worth mentioning, in that to the typical use of the word adaptation as defining both the process (of transposing a story from one media to another) and the (final) product,⁸² Corrigan adds a third perspective, more common in contemporaneity, of "adaptation as an act of reception in which the reading or viewing of that work is actively adapted as a specific form of enjoyment and understanding" (23). Following also on the considerations on reception formulated and quoted in the previous section, I intend to consider adaptation in these three dimensions, which seem to be not self-excluding but complementary and particularly useful when approaching a cultural object as complex as Jane Austen. In that line, adaptation's intrinsic value and its double interpretative/creative nature are two of the most basic assumptions and I still find Hutcheon's words particularly to the point when she says that "[a]daptation is an act of appropriating or salvaging, and this is always a double process of interpreting and then creating something new" (20). In this particular case, Hutcheon was referring to the adapter's take on adaptation but in our participative world, where receiving an adaptation is no longer a passive or solitary activity, her definition has a more general reach. When it comes to definitions, Hutcheon is also particularly remembered for choosing to finish her theoretical approach to adaptation by enunciating what is not an adaptation, excluding referencing forms from her wide-ranging notion of adaptation. Such move is replicated by Cartmell and Whelehan, who in doing so also provide us with a useful (partial) definition:

In common with Linda Hutcheon we would not count allusion, quotation or other brief acquaintances with a text as 'adaptation', but rather as a condition of

⁸² For more on adaptation as product and process see Cardwell (*Adaptation Revisited*).

our cultural embracing of intertextuality or the ‘postmodern’ condition of quoting and alluding; but adaptation for us must posit a more influential relationship than this. It is not that we demand adaptations acknowledge their status as such, but that it is a sustained recognition where the adaptation utilises the text it appropriates or adapts with a purpose, even if that purpose isn’t explicitly announced. (*Screen Adaptation* 18)

As such, all adaptations I will analyse in the course of the second part are all assumed adaptations of Jane Austen’s fourth published novel, *Emma* (1815). Finally, it will not be my aim to categorize specific adaptations under the now multiple available taxonomies proposed by several critics, even if I recognize their work has informed my own analysis, in the sense that, as Kamilla Elliott put it, “[g]rouping adaptations and setting those groups in dialogue with each other has been and will continue to be essential to theorizing adaptations as adaptations” (“*Badaptation*” 23).⁸³ In this sense, I am more interested in how each new adaptations both reconfigures *Emma* in its own terms and reflects or responds to previous *Emma*(s). In order to do so I will finish this chapter with a brief consideration on how Jane Austen (as I have attempted to define her in the previous chapter) is a major force in both the practice of and studies on adaptation and how discourse on Austen and adaptation has been informed by other concepts, such as heritage film.

Despite the fact that (not so) simple definitions such as the one(s) above will always be subject to contradiction, discussion and attempts of redefinition, such is not my objective in this study. I aim only at acknowledging those developments in the field that better frame the analysis I intend to conduct in the next chapter. Beyond definitions, it is imperative to emphasize that this study of adaptations is based on the premise that they are objects of academic study in their own right and although the relationship they establish with a literary work – Austen’s *Emma*, in this case – is obviously of great relevance, it will be done bearing in mind the multi-way exchanges that occur in such multi-layered product/process of intertextuality. Therefore, taking into consideration both Jane Austen’s significance in contemporary culture and the

⁸³ Or as Cartmell and Whelehan state, “the will to taxonomise is a distinctive feature of adaptation studies, which reflects more than anything its need to establish a critical perspective of its own.” (*Screen Adaptation* 6). See for instance Geoffrey Wagner’s tripartite division in transposition, commentary and analogue (222) or Dudley Andrew’s in borrowing, intersection, and fidelity of transformation (98). See also Thomas Leitch’s chapter “Between Adaptation and Allusion” (*Discontents* 93-126) and Kamilla Elliott (*Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate*), but especially Cartmell and Whelehan’s own criticism of this tendency (21).

position of *Emma* as a textual macro-reference, the adaptations I will analyse cannot be seen as isolated objects, establishing one-way dialogues with Austen's text. They constitute a network, the analysis of which might prove fruitful in providing insight into our own society's values and priorities and how we, as individuals but also as part of a community increasingly prone to sharing, make sense of the world.

Adaptation and Heritage film: the case of Austen

One other element Sanders highlights concerning the definition of adaptation is its connection to the canon: "Adaptation appears both to require and to perpetuate the existence of a canon, although it may in turn contribute to its on-going reformulation and expansion." (11) If we take Sanders view of the close relation between a text's canonicity – along with a "strong presence in the popular cultural imagination" – and its propensity for being adapted (152), then Austen's visible position both in the canon and in popular culture functions as the lever pushing her to omnipresence in adaptation. Such affirmation is based on the premise that Austen is an undeniable part of the canon, although that position was not always evident in the past. In the previous chapter I have discussed how Austen has, quite surprisingly, become a household name in both the history of English Literature and popular culture. Now, however, I wish to briefly focus my attention on how she became a staple example in adaptation studies – originating both studies focused on adaptations of specific Austen novels and others taking her as a paradigmatic case study –⁸⁴ and how such a fact may influence any new adaptation of her works.

In his influential *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents*, Thomas Leitch points the tendency of "organizing themselves around canonical authors" as one of the ways studies of adaptation have favoured literature over film, thus "establish[ing] a presumptive criterion for each new adaptation" (3). Although this is true, a case like Jane Austen's, one of the most cited examples in studies of adaptation, may also prove challenging to the field. It is not a coincidence that Leitch uses Austen adaptations as a source of examples for nine out of his ten categories in adaptation

⁸⁴ Such as Cartmell's *Screen Adaptations of Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice* or *Adaptation's* 2017 special online issue, "Adapting Jane Austen" (https://academic.oup.com/adaptation/pages/adapting_jane_austen).

(96-126). Furthermore, if we accept Leitch's claim that adaptation itself is "the master Hollywood genre that sets the pattern for all the others" – given that "it presumes by definition audiences who are experiencing each new text in the context of earlier texts" (117) –, then Austen adaptations must certainly be under our attention, even if we take adaptation as meaning (much) more than novel-to-film transpositions.

The history of Austen adaptations is long and impossible to exhaust in a study such as this one. However, some remarks may prove to be usefully made, namely concerning the general fame attached to Austen adaptations on screen, no doubt the ones receiving most academic attention. In 2004, Emily Auerbach rightfully complained, still, of how "[d]espite the admirable efforts of Harold Bloom, Joseph Wisenfarth, Tony Tanner, and a host of other critics who write of Austen, not Jane, she remains for many readers a little lady writing little books for other little ladies." (32)

If we are thinking of screen adaptations of Austen, then it is safe to presume that Auerbach's last expression could be replaced for "little films for little ladies". However, even if it is true that adaptations based on Austen, both her works and her life, suffer from an initial prejudice potentially biasing to any serious analysis, it is also easy to fall in a high vs. low culture antagonism that does no service to either film, literature, adaptation, or Jane Austen for that matter. John Wiltshire, for instance, contradicts such conservative ideas conveyed in 'Jane Austen', as well as the normally assumed superiority of those elements with claims to the other, authentic Jane Austen. Contrary to the duality with which Jane Austen is customarily presented – an ambivalence that seems to repeatedly contrast literary high culture with popular culture – Wiltshire proposes the possibility of yet another Austen (7-9). An interesting starting point for the analysis to follow in the next chapter might be to see how twenty-first century reinterpretations have either reversed or confirmed this tendency.

The rise of the convergence media paradigm also brings new challenges to studies on Austen and adaptation. Because of Austen fans' fidelity to (or obsession with) everything Austen related, Jenkins ideas are even more valuable, especially since new worldwide phenomena such as Harry Potter and the rebooted Star Wars franchise prove the centrality of such storytelling strategies today, even if the sheer abundance of material is daunting. That scenario inevitably brings back the issue of how loose can our working concept for adaptation be. When revising her theoretical considerations for the second edition's preface of *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda

Hutcheon questioned: “[W]hen it is not a single, fixed, recognizable story that is being adapted, but rather an on-going, unstable, open-ended “multitext,” where do we draw the line at what we call an adaptation? And what is actually being adapted?” (xxiv)

Nevertheless, as I intend to show in the next chapter, the fact that we depart from one text does not ensure a “single, fixed, recognizable story”, even if we may have the illusion of that. The first chapter of this thesis dwelled on how Jane Austen herself has been an unstable cultural object, subject to different and often conflicting appropriations. Her works, though sometimes portrayed as more stable at least in the visual interpretation of cinema and TV, are in fact no different.

Yet, when taking into consideration adaptation and Austen, another concept, one with strong cultural significance, inevitably comes into play: that of heritage film. Although already briefly mentioned in the first chapter in the context of the multiple uses of Austen by contemporaneity, I find it now necessary to further explore the concept of heritage in its particular theorization under the (more general) framework of film studies, and particularly in terms of adaptation studies. Taking the more general perspective, heritage film (or its correlate and wider-ranging terms such as period film and costume drama)⁸⁵ is a key element in both the history and the criticism of British film production. In Belén Vidal’s terms, it inevitably comes to “the problematic place of heritage film in relation to realism and quality, two pillars in the formation of discourses of British national cinema.” (22)

Although this still remains today an important line of argument in the heritage film debate, my own focus will not be on how (and why) the heritage film constitutes a realisation of British national cinema, despite the fact that occasional considerations on a (mainly visual) exploitation of Britishness/Englishness will be made. My own research will instead frame and make sense of the concept as it helped reinforce a particular perspective on Jane Austen, via the “heritage” adaptations of her novels, which was itself subject to further additions and reinterpretations later on, as the continuing process of re-adapting Austen for contemporary publics continued.

⁸⁵ *The Oxford Dictionary of Film Studies* lists costume drama and period film under the same entry, as synonyms, although signalling the latter’s greater accuracy – for more see Kuhn and Westwell (97-98).

In the case of Jane Austen screen adaptations, a rather fixed notion of realism in terms of both historical and literary accuracy is linked to a tradition of quality,⁸⁶ assured over decades by cinema but also television. This said quality frequently translates into high-end productions, distinguished by lavish settings and picturesque photography, careful mise-en-scène, attention to period detail and use of experienced, frequently re-cast, actors and actresses. In addition to being recognised as defining features of Austen adaptations, all of these elements are also recurrently enumerated as characteristics in any definition of heritage film, from the seminal academic work on the (sub)genre (Higson, “Re-presenting” 117) to more contemporary, dictionary-like entries (Kuhn and Westwell 203). Beyond definitions however, what interests me the most in this debate on heritage film is how notions of quality and authenticity, inherent to discourse on adaptation itself, come to conflate with the escapist fantasy (or at least more-than-perfect view of the past) with which Jane Austen adaptations are frequently labelled. As John Hill put it, “[t]he presentation of the past by the heritage film not only involves a degree of ‘spectacularization’ of the past but also a certain concern with period detail and ‘authenticity’.”(82) Hill of course questions this notion of authenticity by exposing its pseudo-existence and importance in post-modernity:

The cult of ‘authenticity’ has been a feature of contemporary postmodern culture and has been in evidence not only in the conservationist concern for the built environment but also the return to ‘authentic’ instruments in ‘early music’ or the enthusiasm for ‘original’ editions of literary works or ‘original’ musical recordings. However, there is a sense in which this concern with ‘authenticity’ simply produces what is, in effect, ‘inauthentic’ simulation. (83)

The notions of authenticity and realism (as it is being used in this context of heritage film) bring us back to the earlier discussion of adaptation, its functions and how both critics and audiences perceive it. Realism for instance, which Robert Stam has shown to be connected to fidelity discourse, gains particular significance when referring to the construction of a specific historical moment such as the Regency, as is the case with Austen adaptations. Stam’s words are again applicable when he affirms that: “[t]he key point here is that realism is itself a discourse, an artful fabrication, one that

⁸⁶ The use of the expressions “tradition of quality” and “quality film” obviously points to John Ellis’ work on the subject. Although the discussion of such concepts falls back from the scope of the present work, my own use of the expression here refers to the use of that criterion as established in the 1940s discourse by film critics on English cinema – see Ellis.

creates and reshapes what it speaks” (Stam, *Literature through Film* 11). This fabrication of the past, particularly in ways relevant to the present, has been most significant, in filmic terms, in the so-called heritage (sub-)genre. However, a definition of what is heritage, in film terms, is not consensual and it is not unusual to find descriptions suggesting its minor status:

heritage film 1. A body of lavishly-produced ‘quality’ costume films made in Britain and elsewhere since the 1980s, usually based on popular literary classics, and having the pace and tone of art cinema while lacking a distinctive directorial voice and being relatively conventional in terms of narrative form and style. 2. A variant of art cinema that derives its cultural credentials from (usually literary) source materials rather than from any aspiration to aesthetic or cinematic innovativeness. The heritage film is widely regarded as part of a ‘heritage culture’ which emerged in the 1980s as a strategy for promoting Britain and ‘Britishness’ (or more accurately ‘Englishness’) in terms of the nation’s traditions and past. [...]

In film studies, the heritage film has been the subject of lively debates about the conservatism (or otherwise) of the *genre*, with the films sometimes defended on grounds of their challenge to mainstream representations of gender and sexuality.” (Kuhn and Westwell 203, my emphasis)

That heritage is a genre, or at least a sub-genre of historical/period film, is not in itself a fact accepted by most critics in film studies, which can explain the hesitancy in the above definition which relegates to the end of a rather long entry that same assumption. A closer look into this issue is, nonetheless, justifiable for the importance that both academic criticism and general public reception on heritage film as a genre (and the specific characteristics attributed to it in the course of that discussion) will bear on how Austen adaptations in particular are perceived.

Ginette Vincendeau, for example, affirms that “[h]eritage films constitute a ‘genre’ only in a loose sense”, being “neither defined by a unified iconography [...], nor a type of narrative [...], nor an affect” (xviii). In the most recent study devoted to the definition of heritage film, Belén Vidal also considers that “the heritage film is not a genre in the industrial sense of the term” despite being “a distinctive strand in contemporary cinema” with “[...] roots in British film studies, where it has become associated with a powerful undercurrent of nostalgia for the past conveyed by historical dramas, romantic costume films and literary adaptations.”(1)

There is nothing new in the idea that part of the difficulty in accepting the generic status of heritage film lies in it being a critically built construct rather than emerging from filmmaking. Claire Monk also claimed heritage to be of critical rather than of industrial making (*Heritage Film Audiences 2*) and, even earlier, questioned “the usefulness and coherence of the heritage film as genre category outside the highly specific cultural and political circumstances which formed ‘the heritage-film idea’” (Monk and Sargeant 3).

Calling attention to both the ideological nature of its conceptualisation and the diverse generic characteristics depending on the film in question, Monk’s highly persuasive argument is in favour of “‘heritage’ characteristics as pan-generic, potentially present across a range of period genres” (“The British heritage-film debate revisited” 192).⁸⁷ However, because the work under progress here will address objects that either directly correspond or inevitably derive from the highly specific cultural and political circumstances referred to above, I believe the use of the term heritage film (and the understanding of it as a specific genre) to be both suitable and justifiable. Given the particular relevance critical discourse assumed in defining the heritage film, I will briefly look into some relevant opinions and studies (including a return to Monk’s position on the subject), as a way to better inform my subsequent analysis of Austen-based adaptations.

Traditionally seen as linked to conservative viewpoints, in both political and social terms, and as lacking innovation in film aesthetics, the heritage film genre, with its connection to the heritage industry in tourism, has been routinely downgraded by critics, academic or otherwise, despite countless productions and public success particularly during the 1980s, but also well into the 1990s and now the twenty-first century.⁸⁸ Particularly connected to Margaret Thatcher’s years as head of the British government and her National Heritage Acts of 1980 and 1983, heritage cinema quickly became synonymous of a nostalgic movement in which a revisionist (and reactionary-looking) view of the past was associated to a conservative political agenda bent on building a constructed national memory on the basis of an apparently more democratic middlebrow approach. Accused of effacing the reality of the

⁸⁷ For more on this critic’s arguments see Monk (“The British heritage-film debate revisited” 191-195). Building-up for her argument, Monk also enumerates the characteristics most commonly attributed to heritage films – see 178-179.

⁸⁸ One of the most relentless of such critics was Cairns Craig – see for instance his critique of the genre he sees as “a theme park of the past” in “Rooms Without A View” (1991), as well as a later response to it (proving the essay’s importance) in Jeffrey Richards, “Smart-asses fail to see past gentility” (2002).

working and low(er)-middle classes, during the peak of critical debate in the 1980s the heritage label was frequently applied in opposition to another strand of more contemporary located and focused British cinema.⁸⁹ The genre then came to be defined negatively and frequently as a reaction by those who dismissed its aesthetic and even social significance. As Belén Vidal put it, it became a strict, negative definition, working in conjunction with a wider consumerist industry:

The projection of a nostalgic, upper-class version of Englishness solidified into a national myth that found unparalleled success in the international image markets. This imaginary reinvention of the nation could be absorbed within the principles of enterprise and heritage enshrined by the successive Conservative governments of Thatcher and John Major (1991-1997). The heritage film was accused of functioning as a selective ‘theme park of the past’ (Craig 2001: 4) perfectly attuned to the ideological principles of a highly divisive political establishment, and to the interest of the heritage industry as a whole. (14)

However, despite frequent identification with Thatcherism, the kind of historical strand of which heritage film is a part of stretches much further back, right up to the early days of cinema in Britain, with pioneers such as film producers George Berthold ‘Bertie’ Samuelson and William George ‘Will’ Barker with their highly successful *Sixty Years a Queen* (1913). Even looking back only as far as the more established film studio period, films such as *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933, dir. Alexander Korda) definitely contributed to establishing a particular kind of Britishness/Englishness-infused historical film, marketable within and beyond the national borders.⁹⁰ As it cannot be ignored that Gainsborough Studios highly successful but also mostly dismissed series of period melodramas helped shape British cinema, in both national and international terms.⁹¹

Despite the undeniable success of films such as *The Private Life of Henry VIII* and, much in the same line although much more recent, *Elizabeth* (1998, dir. Shekhar Kapur), heritage film remained to be seen as visually lavishing productions driven by

⁸⁹ The discussion of the concept of middlebrow, in-between those of highbrow and lowbrow culture, is outside the objectives of the present work. For more on how heritage film is part of a middlebrow culture see Vidal (27-28). Lawrence Napper also makes an interesting point, by locating the birth of the middlebrow cinema in England in the 1930s, as a result of the 1927 Cinematograph Act. For an account of how the expression “heritage cinema” itself came to evolve within these terms see Monk (“The British heritage-film debate revisited” 187-191).

⁹⁰ Although the roots of heritage film can be traced far back, this does not mean these films themselves can be said to be heritage films. See for instance Ginette Vincendeau’s discussion of this issue (xviii-xix).

⁹¹ See Harper (*Picturing the Past*) and also Walden.

exploitative commercial interests mindful of spectacle and profit, or hidden conservative agendas, rather than creative exercises in the art of filmmaking. As the “uniqueness of vision of the individual artist” (Vidal 23) came to dominate film criticism from the 1960s, heritage’s label as conforming to safe recipes became established even when films such as *Barry Lyndon* (1975, dir. Stanley Kubrick) and *The Draughtsman’s Contract* (1982, dir. Peter Greenaway) proved the genre’s flexibility and variety. Notwithstanding such innovative examples, heritage remained also strongly connected to the escapist and exaggerated vein of British filmmaking – shared by Gainsborough melodramas, for instance – and thus considered at odds with the realist, “constraint” school of filmmaking that, for many critics, defined the best of English film.⁹²

As heritage cinema was dismissed by some critics “not so much for a style of filmmaking, but for the ideological mode” (Vidal 14-15) it was supposedly a part of, other voices rose in defence of the genre as relevant in both filmic and social terms. Vidal herself reacts against “the limited reach of the ideological critique that simply sees heritage film as one of the by-products of political economy of Thatcherism.” (18) Particularly common in the 1990s, such views tended to dismiss heritage film’s significance by focusing almost exclusively of the exploitation of visual pleasure, with Vidal suggesting that there are

[...] more dynamic ways of reading the mise-en-scène of heritage film. The past returns, in the film image as in other manifestations of contemporary culture, through reconstructions rather than preservation, mediated by generic motifs and intertextual references. (18)

As the expression heritage film became more common and as a significant number of British films thus classified became box-office successes, debate around the genre grew wider and increasingly more serious, with a number of academics devoting their production to its definition and critique. Among them the work of Andrew Higson in the last two decades is of particular relevance.⁹³ Some of his production, particularly during the 1990s, was subject to criticism for, despite giving

⁹² See Monk (“The British heritage-film debate revisited” 184-186).

⁹³ Higson has devoted his career to the study of costume drama, heritage film and the notion of a national (British) cinema. His earliest titles include *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain* (1995) and *British Cinema, Past and Present* (co-edited with Justine Ashby, 2000). Given the nature of this work, I will focus my attention on his most recent publications, also the ones in which a focus on heritage film is more evident.

heritage part of the attention it lacked, he still seemed at times to stand by the more restrictive view of the genre as mentioned above.⁹⁴ His views seem to have broadened during the years nonetheless and his timely and prolific contribution to the discussion of the genre still makes him an unavoidable reference. In “Representing the National Past: Nostalgia and Pastiche in the Heritage Film” (1993) Higson famously circumscribed the heritage film’s characteristics, describing them as “quality costume dramas” which display images of Englishness as “commodities for consumption in the international market” (109). Situating heritage in the context of Thatcherite Britain, Higson highlighted the contrast between visual splendour/nostalgia and any elements of social critique (particularly relevant in Austen’s texts), the latter necessarily undercut by the former.⁹⁵

In the years to follow, Higson would continue to publish in the area, drawing attention to the genre’s pervasiveness, even if he avoided privileging the word *heritage* above other concurrent options, no doubt as a form of avoiding a compromise with a genre still very much connected to conservative movements, inside and out of the film industry. However, in *English Heritage, English Cinema: Costume Drama Since 1980* (2003) he highlights the heritage perspective, not only by identifying it in his title, but also by univocally linking it to English identity and cinema. Although still hesitating between the concurrent but not synonymous terms *period film*, *costume drama*, and *heritage film*, Higson privileges the last one and debates its viability as an independent cinematic genre, contending for its flexibility:

If we construct limits, we must be prepared to deconstruct them as well. There is no point in defining a term like heritage film too tightly – no point, for instance, in saying that the heritage film never deals with the great events of national history (that would exclude a film like *Elizabeth*), or that all heritage films are literary adaptations (*Chariots of Fire* (1981) is a good example). (13)

This enlarged notion of heritage focuses less on certain defining (and excluding) features and more on the sociological process it represents. For Higson, heritage becomes “a selective preoccupation with the past”, a process in which “a particular individual or group takes from the past in order to define itself in the present, to give

⁹⁴ See Vidal (19-20).

⁹⁵ In the beginning of his article Higson states his intentions clearly: “I will argue that the past is displayed as visually spectacular pastiche, inviting a nostalgic gaze that resists the ironies and social critiques so often suggested narratively by these films.” (“Representing the National Past” 109)

it an identity” (50).⁹⁶ This selective approach to the past fluctuates between a claim to authenticity and a tendency for pastiche, with a tendency, in Higson’s opinion, for the latter, “an imagined Englishness, an imagined national past: not the 'real thing', but a pot-pourri of imitations, homages, gestures.” (63)

As Higson, I would also keep to the designation of heritage film,⁹⁷ even if I find it not to be limited to cinema alone but inalienable from television productions as well: by focusing exclusively on cinema, Higson ignored the powerful influence of television productions in defining the heritage genre, even in cinematic terms. That influence was too strong to be simply dismissed, particularly after the success of the 1995 BBC adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*.⁹⁸ It is of course arguable to claim that the greater proximity, in terms of both production values and public recognition, between cinematic and television productions is a feature of contemporary times, particularly visible from the 2010s onwards.

Nonetheless, signs that the times were indeed changing were already visible at the end of the last century, precisely the peak of Austen productions in both media. Given that in the case of Jane Austen’s adaptations film and television productions seem to be equally important, and also that the adaptations I will be analysing are all from the twenty-first century, I will be applying the concept of heritage film to both feature film and television serials, as well as transporting elements of that concept to other formats.

Despite the valuable contribution to the debate on and around heritage film, in *English Heritage, English Cinema* Higson seems at times to partake in the argument accusing heritage of being overly fantasist, instead of critical, of its own representation of the English past. The quote above seems to indicate exactly that, just as Higson’s now famous use of the expression “Laura Ashley School of filmmaking” (181), first coined in a cartoon by British writer/director Alan Parker (Fig. 3). It identified the Merchant-Ivory productions with Laura Ashley, a Welsh design brand

⁹⁶ The establishment of a heritage genre in film and television is also a result of the socio-economic as well as political context in the United Kingdom, in the 1980s and 1990s. For more on the subject see Hill (53-70) and Higson (*English Heritage, English Cinema* 86-118).

⁹⁷ See for instance Higson’s defence here: “Heritage, alternative heritage, post-heritage, anti-heritage: the proliferation of terms indicates just how central the heritage idea became in contemporary cultural debate in general and British film culture in particular in the 1980s and 1990s.” (*English Heritage, English Cinema* 36)

⁹⁸ Curiously a decade earlier Higson himself had acknowledged television’s importance in both financing and providing experienced crew to what he calls the cycle of heritage films – see Higson (“Re-presenting the National Past” 111).

known for its floral textile prints, by having an element of a middle-aged couple (presumably the man) say, when exiting a cinema where a Merchant Ivory was being exhibited: “God, how I hate the Laura Ashley school of filmmaking”. The use of the expression by Higson highlights not only the pervasiveness of the expression itself,⁹⁹ but more importantly the tension between the prettiness of a constructed English heritage, targeted at a middlebrow, female audience, against “a much darker narrative exploring the social inequities of the period in a way that makes the film relevant to the 1990s” (184). The issue at stake here is that Higson himself seems to pend towards the view that the genre was generally dominated by the first of those conflicting tendencies, the one described as “the Laura Ashley school of filmmaking”, even while gathering an impressive number (and variety) of critical reviews. The argument never seems to be that, even if to some extent these 1990s films are in fact escapist and indulge in the middle-classes desire for gazing on the privileged classes’ lifestyle, it is in the way they display such agenda they better reveal their relevance to their own contemporaneity. Each vision of the past is necessarily a mirror for the present and dismissing the important sociological role of heritage film risks a truncated version of that same present.

With the beginning of the second decade of the twenty-first century, Higson returned to his work on national cinema with *Film England: Culturally English Filmmaking since the 1990s* (2011). Although still keeping with his limitation to film only, Higson’s most recent book on the theme tackles the issue of globalization and how it affects notions of national cinema, something which had been included but not taken central stage in his previous publications. Particularly noteworthy for this study is his focus on Austen as one of the driving forces in changing heritage, to a great extent due to her singularity as a marketable cultural good:

[I]n a film business increasingly driven by franchises, there is some logic to seeing the fascination with Austen in terms of a franchise or a brand, a sort of respectable middlebrow niche version of the Harry Potter or the James Bond movies [...]. The brand extends beyond the film/television/publishing tie-ins too. Outlets like the gift shop at the Jane Austen Centre in Bath do a good business in Austen-branded fridge magnets, mugs, figurines, prints, tea towels, cross-stitch kits, needlepoint gifts, stationery sets, board games and foodstuffs,

⁹⁹ Its influence was such that it kept being used by both partisans and critics of such view of the Merchant Ivory productions, with Alan Parker himself lamenting its use even in obituaries of Ismail Merchant – see Parker (9) and Shoard.

as well as books, audio CDs, DVDs and magazines like *Jane Austen's Regency World*, 'the only colour magazine about Jane Austen'. (127)

I find Higson's paralleling of Austen with a franchise particularly adequate, but I disagree with his subsequent classing of Austen's texts "as a particular type of period chick lit, albeit an upscale version of chick lit much appreciated by male intellectuals" (130). It betrays a vision of the author herself as somewhat trapped in the early twentieth century view of the first Janeites, thus dismissing the (pop) cultural significance Jane Austen had been gaining throughout the entire century and made much more visible with the advent of the new millennium. Much more relevant is the reason he presents for the Austenmania in film production during the 1990s: as a manifestation of the broader "Anglo-Hollywood costume drama production trend" (136) of that decade. His approach to heritage and Austen adaptations in particular is guided by a notion of Englishness as a constructed, marketable commodity that has everything to do with the kind of "Jane Austen" I have been defining since the first chapter:

[the images] also provide a strong sense of spectacle – of costumes and interior decor, of architecture and landscape. It is a spectacle of the past; it is a spectacle of luxury; and it is a spectacle of Englishness. But if it is a spectacle of the past, it is a past that emerges out of the present, a spectacle that chimes with the interests of heritage tourism. In this context, Englishness is a brand, which can be marketed as one of the commodities one buys into through heritage tourism. (149)

Higson thus presents heritage and its relation to the past in terms not so very different from the ones normally used when debating adaptation studies in general. In this sense, heritage film comes to share with adaptation a strong proximity: not only do heritage films tend to be adaptations of literary works, but they also raise similar issues to the ones being discussed in this chapter, namely the nature of the relationship with the period of the past of which they are a representation/interpretation.

Apart from Higson's long developed work on English national cinema¹⁰⁰ in general and heritage in particular, a recent rise in interest seems to have originated

¹⁰⁰ The use of the adjective English, instead of British, is premeditated and an issue raised by Higson himself: "It would be difficult to deny that there is still a strong vein of what we might describe as nationalist filmmaking in England today, especially in terms of films exploring the national heritage. But if there is an English cinema or an English film industry, it is very difficult to identify or to demarcate, and it is rarely spoken of. Anglophone film historians conventionally speak of British

multiple publications, as Belén Vidal's *Heritage Film: Nation, Genre and Representation* (2012), already referred to above. Although clearly an introductory study, Vidal makes an important contribution to the critical reflection on the (sub)genre, by means of a concise and focused approach. Like Higson, and of greatest importance for the work here developed, Vidal emphasizes, from the very beginning, the "constructed" nature of heritage, particularly in cultural terms, as its defining characteristic:

The heritage film thus needs to be considered as a 'critically or theoretically constructed genre' rather than as industrial one (Neale 1990: 52). The heritage film debate connects the period film to a network of cultural and industrial practices that relate to the construction of a collective cultural memory. (2)

Also Claire Monk added important elements to the ongoing discussion of heritage cinema and, like Higson, she has a long list of contributions to the critical debate on the genre. As already mentioned, in "The British heritage-film debate revisited" (in Monk and Sargeant 2002) she directly tackled that said debate, affirming that heritage film criticism "has become as effective a commodity in the academy as heritage films have been in the cinema" (162), a loose categorization which has come to be applied indiscriminately to very different period-set films.¹⁰¹

However, her purpose in this essay is not to diminish the importance of a debate on heritage film, but to clarify the boundaries (and past history) of the said debate, in order to propose a clearer critical perspective on what she classifies as "a complex, hybrid and contradictory terrain" (177). Choosing to demarcate from "binaristic, conflationary tendencies generated in a particularly simplistic politics of representation" that oppose heritage film to realistic film,¹⁰² Monk calls for different

cinema, as do contemporary professional English-speaking film critics and reviewers – although the film business is now regulated through the UK Film Council. It is commonplace now to speak of the Scottish film industry and the Irish film industry (north and south of the border) – and even occasionally of the Welsh film industry. It's very rare however to speak of the English film industry, even if the majority of film-related activity in the UK takes place in England. Even then, much of the activity in England involves foreign and especially American films, much of it is sponsored by companies based elsewhere and much of it is undertaken in conjunction with filmmakers who are not English. Englishness in cinema is thus profoundly caught up in the changing circumstances of nationalism, transnationalism and globalisation." (*Film England* 4-5)

¹⁰¹ This is a claim she will maintain in more recent works, reaffirming for instance in 2011 that "the popularisation of the term 'heritage film'" has led to it becoming a "widely accepted, if problematic, genre label applied more neutrally to an ever-widening range of films." (*Heritage Film Audiences* 3)

¹⁰² Monk refers to "the heritage film being frequently defined negatively, and in binary terms" against other films "which were either 'set firmly in the present [in a] postimperialist and/or working-class Britain' (Higson 1993: 110) and perceived as realist, socially critical and/or politically engaged; or

perspectives that move beyond the pre-established ideological features of heritage film. She takes up this task in a later publication: *Heritage Film Audiences: Period Film Audiences and Contemporary Films in the UK* (2011). This title is a valuable addition to the debate, particularly because it focuses on an important, yet frequently dismissed, element defining heritage film's significance: its audiences. As the only study of its kind, in *Heritage Film Audiences* Monk draws attention to:

[...] the heritage-film debate's neglect of the question of audiences and their relationship(s) with period films. The very notion – and certainly the critique – of heritage cinema have depended upon a range of spoken and unspoken (and, as we have seen, largely negative) conjectures about period-film audiences and their political-cultural orientation towards 'heritage films'. (3)

Although a thorough exploration of such issues is beyond the claims of both this study and this particular contextual incursion into the heritage film debate, I would like to stress the importance of Monk's study, in particular to Jane Austen's adaptation studies.¹⁰³ Starting by debasing the idea that the heritage film audience is the stable, anonymous and in effect abstract entity most critics take for granted, she moves to conclude that "the audiences who enjoy period films consist of overlapping, dynamic groups, positioned in varied relationships to both commercial and art cinema, who make sense of the films from a variety of cultural-political perspectives." (167)¹⁰⁴

Furthermore, Monk's study seems to have detected, among heritage film audiences, both the obsessed, fan-like devotion that is so often associated with Austen adaptations,¹⁰⁵ as well as a more eclectic, mainstream and cinematically informed audience, thus challenging the usual preconceptions concerning the public-type of heritage film. Moreover, Monk also reached some interesting conclusions concerning

were held to engage more authentically or more critically with 'historical reality', usually because they were set in a regional or working-class past." ("The British heritage-film debate revisited" 178)

¹⁰³ For specific data on Monk's study concerning Austen adaptations see Monk (*Heritage Film Audiences* 110-115; 160-161).

¹⁰⁴ Monk based her study on the Heritage Audience Survey, a questionnaire she applied to two very different groups that share nonetheless their preference for heritage films: "Survey participants were drawn from two highly contrasting sections of this audience: the predominantly young readership of the (sexually liberal and, traditionally, left-leaning) London listings magazine *Time Out*, and the older membership of the National Trust's UK local Associations and Centres." (*Heritage Film Audiences* 4-5)

¹⁰⁵ "a significant number of NTs [National Trust respondents] watched heritage and other period films less for pleasures such as narrative or character engagement than in order to scrutinise and police small details (of the period *mise-en scène* or actors' speech and deportment) and to gain pleasure from this – including self-admitted pleasure in identifying errors and lapses, and the social pleasure of discussing such details with friends." (Monk, *Heritage Film Audiences* 172)

audiences' awareness and response to the heritage debate, with one group showing "evident self-consciousness, and even dissociative embarrassment, [...] about enjoying period films [which] confirmed their consciousness of a negative critical debate and 'cultural cringe' around heritage cinema", while another was "clearly aligned with aesthetically, culturally – and often politically – conservative celebratory discourses in which the period films [...] were equated with 'quality' itself." (175)¹⁰⁶

In the same year she published *Heritage Film Audiences*, Monk also published an article titled "Heritage Film Audiences 2.0: Period Film Audiences and Online Fan Cultures" (2011), which constitutes an update of the first study. Integrating "forms of online audience behaviour and participatory fan activity around contemporary period films" which were virtually absent from her monograph, Monk adjusts her conclusions to the newer forms of reception and interaction made increasingly more visible as the new millennium progressed. Monk had previously raised some issues concerning the "active audience" thesis¹⁰⁷ and related questions of audience autonomy and interpretative freedom, namely where she found it permeable to the influence of the biased critical debate around heritage film in the 1980s and 1990s (Monk, *Heritage Film Audiences* 170-178). In updating her study on heritage audiences however, Monk confirms how the heritage "genre" became a particular, and surprising, case study in terms of newly enthusiastic reception via online platforms and participatory fan cultures. In her words:

In the pre-Web 2.0 universe, we might rationally have expected heritage films or 'quality' period films (and certainly the audience segments and demographics traditionally associated with them) to attract forms of audience/fan appreciation that were more reactive than participatory, relatively differentiated rather than 'infinite', and typically both respectful and respectable (characterised by notions of respect for canon, source authors, directors, 'their creations', characters and performers) rather than their opposites (potentially implying overtly libidinous or transgressive forms of engagement). [...] [H]owever, [...] audience and fan behaviour in the Web 2.0 era around (what used to be defined as) 'heritage films' is a complicated field in which more or less participatory, differentiated,

¹⁰⁶ The first of such positions is more clearly shown by the younger *Time Out* readership, while the second belongs to the generally older National Trust subscribers, a result Monk contextualizes against responders' social, economical and educational background that further confirm the "the established binarisms of the heritage-film debate" (*Heritage Film Audiences* 179).

¹⁰⁷ The *Dictionary of Media and Communication Studies* states that: "The notion of the active audience considers audiences to be proactive and independent rather than docile and accepting. The active audience is seen to use the media rather than be used by it." The thesis, although responding to visible changes in audience behaviour as diverse media themselves evolved, has been subject to ongoing debate. For more on the subject see the complete entry in Watson and Hill (17).

and dis/respectful forms of fandom coexist, while such distinctions often cut across the various forms and forums of online audience/fan activity. (*Heritage Film Audiences 2.0* 451)

Given that the study of such phenomenon does not constitute the core of the present work I will refrain from a deeper consideration of it for now, but I will return to Monk's study in the course of the next chapter, when looking into adaptations of *Emma* which share in some of these phenomena.

As may be clear by now, debate on (and around) heritage film has been prolific and diverse. From the theorization linking it to issues of national identity (and thus as a by-product of heritage culture) as is the case if Andrew Higson, to Claire Monk's approach in favour of the usually neglected "pleasures" which attract diversified audiences,¹⁰⁸ critical stances on heritage film tend to be as divided as the opinions the genre usually incites among audiences. What interests me most, however, is not reaching a conclusive view of heritage film, an objective this rather brief foray into the theme may already have proven as unattainable. I am, on the contrary, interested in seeing how a certain heritage identity has helped form Austen's image in contemporaneity. For that reason, I will now refocus my attention on Austen.

In a fundamental monograph already referred to in a previous section of this chapter, Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan offer the following reflexion on this subject, motivated by the first feature film adapting Austen's most well-know novel:

[D]ifferent conceptions of authorial identities lend their imprint to the scope of subsequent adaptations. In this way the 'lawks-a-daisy' light comedy of the 1940 Robert Z. Leonard *Pride and Prejudice* initiates a 'house style' for Austen talkie adaptations, where romance and comedy and the central couple are foregrounded above social context, class and gender concerns; the Bronte's are clustered together and the moody chiaroscuro cinematography of William Wyler's *Wuthering Heights* (1939), starring Laurence Olivier, and Robert Stevenson's *Jane Eyre* (1944), starring Orson Welles, owes more to the gothic tendency in film [...]. Such house styles extend, of course, to music choices, costume, and the reliance on a certain 'camp' of stars in any given generation; and the literary 'classics', instead of being freed from their authors in the melting pot of cross-media transformation, become visually fixed to an imagined identity just as strong as the name on the title page of the printed book. (Cartmell and Whelehan, *Screen Adaptation* 25-26)

¹⁰⁸ See Monk, "The British 'Heritage Film' and Its Critics".

In her *A Theory of Adaptation* Linda Hutcheon had made a similar affirmation when stating that “[p]alimpsests make for permanent change.” (29)¹⁰⁹ That cinematic adaptations have the power to create enduring, and even fixed, visual images seems too obvious to open it up to discussion. Thus it seems to me that the importance of heritage film in particular, with its rather characteristic visual features, cannot be downplayed in any study of Austen’s significance in contemporaneity as this one aims to be.

Furthermore, and as I mentioned before, it cannot be forgotten that heritage, in the British context especially, is very much connected to television, as well as cinema.¹¹⁰ A proof of this is *Upstairs and Downstairs: British Costume Drama Television from The Forsyte Saga to Downton Abbey* (2015), a recently published volume of essays edited by James Leggott and Julie Anne Taddeo. Although the word heritage is absent from this publication’s title and subtitle, it permeates its content: using the word heritage in the very first sentence of his foreword, Jerome de Groot starts off by reflecting on how costume drama, the single most exportable genre of British television, has regularly marked British screen production (ix). Just as had happened with discourse on cinematic heritage decades earlier, de Groot’s analysis links heritage on television to the tourism industry and commercial exploitation that overruns any national boundaries:

Costume drama intertwines with heritage; it is part of a peculiarly British vernacular that has international impact. Shows are developed with an eye to the export market and form part of a complex fiction-heritage aesthetic that contributes a great deal to the domestic economy. (ix-x)

Nonetheless, and as Leggott and Taddeo complain in their introduction, “traditions of costume drama on television have—until recently—received comparatively scant attention”, a fact they justify not only with “the relative infancy of television studies as a disciplinary field” (xix) but more importantly with the greater difficulty in analysing in detail an object potentially spanning through many hours.

¹⁰⁹ Hutcheon was referring to adaptations of fantasy writers such as J.R.R. Tolkien, Philip Pullman, and J.K. Rowling: “Now that I know what an enemy orc or a game of Quidditch (can) look like (from the movies), I suspect I will never be able to recapture my first imagined versions again.” Despite her claim that “new electronic technologies have made what we might call fidelity to the imagination—rather than a more obvious fidelity to reality—possible in new ways” (*Theory* 29), I find that her conclusion applies to Austen adaptations just as well.

¹¹⁰ For an account of the television serial in the British context and with a particular focus on adaptation see Rokosz-Piejko.

And even if productions made specifically for television have gained greater prominence with recent streaming services, the fact is television already played a major role in the development of the heritage genre in the past. Thus, despite many publications' focus on cinema alone, the history of heritage cannot be complete without the inclusion of television, especially given the importance of what is normally called costume drama in British television. Heritage television, particularly as it takes shape in contemporaneity (and as I will analyse more closely in the next chapter), is not a by-product of cinematic influences on television. It is on the contrary deeply ingrained in television's diverse functions, not the least of these being the educational value (in adapting literary classics for instance) traditionally assigned to broadcast networks such as the BBC. Also Granada, now a part of the ITV group, was an important developer of heritage pieces, which were, for the majority, literary adaptations.¹¹¹

Proximity between cinema and television has also been a reality via the (frequently successful) strategy in which television networks, such as the public BBC, the independent ITV, and the later Channel 4 established partnerships with filmmaking companies, both national and international ones, in order to produce the quality and high-production values films or short serials their audiences were known to adhere to.¹¹² Thus, as Vidal concluded, “[t]he heritage aesthetic has given the literary adaptation a central role in the image of British cinema abroad, but it is quality television, and in particular the classical serial, that has cemented the relationship between the two.” (29)

Working precisely on the importance of the “classic-novel adaptation”,¹¹³ Sarah Cardwell had already argued for the identification of a specific genre, recognized by audiences and critics alike:

The ‘strong group style’ of classic-novel adaptations has been widely noted, especially since its contemporary style was consolidated in the 1980s and early

¹¹¹ See, for instance, the number of Granada productions in the filmography by Cardwell (*Adaptation Revisited*).

¹¹² For more on the alliances between British heritage production as “international film format” see Krewani.

¹¹³ Cardwell explains in the beginning of her work what she means by this expression: “I intend ‘classic novels’ to be descriptive of certain texts which are commonly held by television viewers to be ‘classics’. [...] There is a circular affirmation of a certain range of books commonly perceived as classics. Consistency across various areas of the public sphere means that certain texts (or, more noticeably, certain authors) are held by the reading and viewing public, programme-makers and educationalists to be classics; in this way the identity of some novels as ‘classic novels’ is accepted and perpetuated in common parlance.” (*Adaptation Revisited* 2-3)

1990's. [...] What is evident here is a fundamental agreement between these writers [Bentley, Gervais, Thomson] on several defining features of classic-novel adaptations: their sumptuous, beautiful, pictorial images, strung together smoothly, slowly and carefully, resulting in an identifiable, distinctive style.

The way adaptations look (their visual style, recurring motifs, generic traits and stylistic conventions – all those things that, in combination, set them apart from other programmes enough to constitute a set or genre), and indeed their use of a certain type of elegant, decorous or wistful orchestral music on their soundtracks, cannot be explained in literary terms. [...]

The style described can be explained partly as a amalgamation of markers of 'quality' which confirm adaptations as examples of 'bourgeois' television, claiming a certain cultural status not just through their extratextual links with 'great literature' (...) but also through their use of a 'cinematic' style – in particular, through their aesthetic links with the stylistic qualities of 'highbrow' films. (80)

Thus Cardwell further argued for the importance of television adaptation and its distinctive features of fidelity, nostalgia and quality (129), in terms that are in fact much similar to those used for heritage in cinema. For example, apart from specific audiovisual conventions, Cardwell also notes how generic markers were frequently used by critics of the 1980s and 1990s classic serials as distinguishing elements setting those productions apart from other (deemed) inferior TV products, thus making clear the importance of critical discourse in establishing this "'strong group style' of classic-novel adaptations" (34).

Specifically in terms of these "classic serials", and as might be expected, Austen-based adaptations led the way, with the much acclaimed 1995 *Pride and Prejudice* signalling the triumph of both the genre and this particular model of production. Although recognized as the maximum exponent of the quality classic-serial, this particular adaptation has also been responsible for signalling a change in the adaptations that would follow it, particularly as the twentieth century came to an end. Above all, the relationship between creator and receptor was about to alter dramatically and the particularly successful reception of *Pride and Prejudice* (1995), namely the quite unexpected Darcymania that followed, already anticipated some of the new forms of interaction which would come into being in the new millennium:

[T]he serial's organic relationship with source text is taken over by a new mode of historicity that arises from the status of the televisual as a popular, participatory event, linked to the extratextual ways in which *Pride and Prejudice* defined a singular moment in British television of the 1990s. The

high audience ratings of the series impacted on magazine covers and ancillary products (most notably the VHS and, later, the DVD package). Rather than maintaining the ‘assumption of cultural hegemony associated to the “quality” literary adaptation’ (De Groot 2009: 190), *Pride and Prejudice* brought to the fore the adaptation as a televisual event that expresses nation and community ‘from below’. (Vidal 30-31)

One aspect that needs stressing may be the importance of the concept of “quality” – or related notions such as “high-end production” – as a recurrent defining element in heritage films, with those adapting Jane Austen’s works or time being perfect (if not always the chosen) examples of.¹¹⁴ In the beginning of the 2000s and looking back to the heritage criticism in the 1990s, a particularly crucial decade for this matter, Claire Monk addressed the importance of a discourse on quality:

The use of the term ‘quality’ here is negative. For heritage-film critics, the films were aesthetically conservative; uncinematic in that they favoured a static pictorialism rather than making the fullest use of the *moving image*; and their claims to ‘quality’ rested on a second-hand affiliation with ‘high’ literary and theatrical culture which flattered audiences while appealing to cultural snobberies. The films were identified with a particular aesthetic approach to the visualisation of the past: a ‘museum’ look: apparently meticulous period accuracy, but clean, beautifully lit, and clearly on display’ (Dyer and Vincendeau 1995). (“Debate Revisited” 178)

Thus the concept of quality, abundantly repeated or remarked by several critics working on the subject of heritage, inevitable ties in with that of fidelity, as I have tried to question it during the course of this chapter. Accordingly, like the latter, tagging a Jane Austen adaptation as a quality or high-end production frequently means stressing the link to the literary work it adapts, as the original source of those qualities. Higson had previously connected one of the most recognizable traits of the heritage film – its attention to period authenticity – as a kind of faithfulness of a superficial kind. He also regretted that, on the contrary, the genre failed to mirror such fidelity in terms of transposing the often ironic and critically positioned essence of the literary work that same heritage film so frequently adapts (“Re-presenting” 119-120). A parallel with the issues raised earlier in this chapter concerning adaptation is obvious, especially since many of the heritage films accused of derogatory practices

¹¹⁴ The choice seems to fall first on the Merchant Ivory productions, thus adaptations based on E. M. Forster’s already backward-looking novels become a staple example – see Higson (“Re-presenting the National Past”) or Monk (“The British heritage-film debate revisited”), for example.

are also adaptations. Monk and Sargeant have dismissed as a burden the sheer (but widespread) assumption that films set in past are bound to faithfully depict (and inevitably fail in the attempt to recreate) the historical period they represent (2). It then becomes clear that this sort of criticism, from academic and more general sources alike, is very similar to the general discourse on adaptation.

Even so, in reaction to the height of period productions in the late 1980s and the 1990s, twenty-first century adaptations of Austen assumed their intention of departing from the previous television adaptations, namely the heritage and picturesque imagery, trademarks of the BBC, Granada and Merchant Ivory productions of the late twentieth century. What Vidal calls “the ‘update’ of the markers of quality to attract new audiences” but still keeping within (and reinforcing) “the genrification of the Austen franchise” (31). Under such objectives we find a new wave of Austen-based adaptations in the beginning of the twenty-first century in examples such as: *Pride and Prejudice* (2005, dir. Joe Wright), *Sense and Sensibility* (2008, BBC), and *Emma* (2009, BBC). Also popular and sharing in the same innovative trend were Austen-inspired productions, or in Vidal’s words, “the ‘Austen without Austen’ trend” (31) in titles such as: *Bride and Prejudice* (2004, dir. Gurinder Chadha), *The Jane Austen Book Club* (2007, dir. Robin Swicord), *Lost in Austen* (2008, ITV) as well as the two Austen biopics, *Becoming Jane* (2007, ITV) and *Miss Austen Regrets* (2008, BBC). Some of these were the result of joint production strategies such as BBC films, in which television broadcasters assumed the role of small-scale studios, thus proving again the importance of television in both developing the heritage genre and using it as a catapult for English film and television production abroad.

Proof of the genre’s dynamism and enduring relevance is the noticeable turn it underwent during the late 1990s, and then the beginning of the 2000s, with the new millennium bringing changes in perspective and modes of approach, in aesthetic, critical and commercial terms. One of such changes relates to the fact that these productions have also become more obviously global, in funding and in production terms, turning heritage, and specifically English heritage, into a marketable commodity, easily distributed through new media technologies, that may have little to

do with the idea of national cinema.¹¹⁵ Not surprisingly, Austen-based films fit quite well into this approach and although it might be nothing really new, the increasingly more globalised world we have been living in has certainly made such issues more evident for adaptations produced in the twenty-first century.

On a different note, heritage has also been influenced by common trends in filmmaking, namely postmodernist takes that themselves reflect more generalized cultural movements. No doubt also as a consequence of the continued criticism it received during the climatic production period of the 1980s and 1990s, heritage thus became growingly more self-aware of its relation to the past it represented. This has led some critics to talk about “the emergence of a post-heritage paradigm”, a development combining “a celebratory turn to postmodern cultural recycling and the aesthetic possibilities offered by pastiche” (Vidal 100).

Nevertheless, and despite a growing self-reflexivity, some critics still see heritage as a genre of compromise, particularly when an enlarged target audience, as typical of the crossover film,¹¹⁶ is at stake. Ginette Vincendeau for instance claims that, despite visible innovations, contemporary heritage remains “mainstream in terms of mise-en-scène” (xxii). Other critics however, have continued to argue in favour of the genre’s diversity: reflecting on “post-heritage labels”, Vidal claims how these mirror “the need to address the hybrid styles of the period film beyond the no longer satisfying association of period aesthetics with conservative nostalgia.” (104) In fact, I would go beyond Vidal in arguing that even notions of nostalgia, a defining feature of contemporary culture whose origin lies in the same postmodern paradigm (or post-paradigm) framing a change in heritage productions, need to be addressed in a more encompassing way. Early in her introductory book to heritage film, Vidal herself had remarked that, despite cinema’s more visible presence, heritage is not exclusive either to the Anglo-American culture,¹¹⁷ nor to the filmic experience itself:

¹¹⁵ For more data on funding and how this relates to the idea of a national cinema see Higson’s sub-chapter “Film production in the UK in the 1990s and 2000s” (*Film England* 13-38) as well as his earlier “The Instability of the National” (2000) in which he discusses such issues in light of the proposed concept of “post-national cinema”. His influential essay “The Concept of National Cinema” (first published in *Screen* in 1989) is also of importance if one means to understand the evolution both of the concept as applied to British/English cinema and of Higson’s use of it throughout the years.

¹¹⁶ In Madeleine Dobie’s view “*crossover movies*” are heritage productions, which, nevertheless, are appealing to a wider audience by sharing characteristics with other popular genres in cinema and television (251).

¹¹⁷ Vidal herself addresses the issue in an chapter titled “Production Cycles and Cultural Significance: A European Heritage Film?” (52-90). Richard Dyer and Ginette Vincendeau famously defended the thesis of a heritage filmmaking movement through Europe in the 1980s in their introduction to *Popular*

The heritage industry is by no means an exclusively British phenomenon, or one specifically tied to the heritage film genre. It is but one of various aspects of postmodern culture pertaining to the revival and recycling of past aesthetics in contemporary fashion and the construction of a ‘hyper-history’, ‘inviting us to look at artefacts, buildings and historical reconstructions rather than understand them in a historical context’ (Ludmilla Jordanova quoted in Hill 1999: 76). (16)¹¹⁸

If we are to understand the true significance of heritage productions we must then take them as part of this complex cultural framework, which negotiates both present and past identities as intertwining elements in entertainment as well as in “real” life. Much for the same reason, it will not be useful to limit too much our view on heritage and nostalgia as rigid, and thus necessarily restricted, categories. Already in 2008, in a review of two books mentioned above,¹¹⁹ Sue Harper lamented on the undue attention given to listing and prescribing what counts as proper ‘heritage’ film, instead of looking into the ways in which film appropriates historical material:

And that is why academic writing on historical (and indeed any) films must not remain on the descriptive level; it should analyse, with as much rigour as possible, the reasons why, and the ways in which, film-makers select and nuance historical material. That is why analysis of the production context is so vital. Film scholars should have an explanatory model for the process of historical representation, and the role of artistic agency within it, rather than just squabbling about taxonomy, playing with terminology or paraphrasing the plot. (“Taxonomy” 138)

In such terms, it is easy to establish a parallel for Jane Austen’s adaptations in particular, claiming that attention must be given to the way she has been received and reinterpreted for the past two centuries. Researching into Austen film and television adaptations implies taking as a starting point the idea that heritage is far from being a stable, formulaic genre, despite frequent critical reviews pointing in that direction.¹²⁰ It has remained a challenging genre, generating conflicting, evolving positions even

European Cinema (1992), with Vincendeau reaffirming that claim in the introduction to *Film/Literature/Heritage: a Sight and Sound Reader* (2001). For a more recent and expanded view on the subject see also Cooke and Stone (2016), as well as their AHRC funded project ‘Screening European Heritage’ (<https://arts.leeds.ac.uk/screeningeuropeanheritage/about/>). The focus of this study will be, nonetheless and for obvious reasons, on the British context.

¹¹⁸ See also Hill.

¹¹⁹ Claire Monk and Amy Sargeant’s edited volume *British Historical Cinema* (2002) and Andrew Higson’s *English Heritage, English Cinema: Costume Drama since 1980* (2003).

¹²⁰ See for instance David Bennun’s “Modern recipe no.21: Costume drama”, reproduced in Higson (*English Heritage, English Cinema* 33).

among the work of a single scholar, of which Andrew Higson's production is proof. When the perspective from which we approach the heritage genre is, as commonly happens, that of adaptation, particularly Jane Austen adaptations, then the complexity rises accordingly. The issue at stake here is not to prove wrong the common assumptions on heritage presented above, some of which remain incisive particularly as they relate to Jane Austen adaptations. The more interesting question is: how do more recent adaptations respond to the "quality" model, defined by the successful period adaptations of the late 1990s? As such, time has now come to see how these and other issues come together in the very concrete examples chosen as the focus of this thesis, a task I will now undertake.

PART II

BREAKING THE MOULD?

ADAPTING *EMMA* FOR A NEW AGE

For adaptation studies, is ours a transitional time
or are we facing a totally new world?

Linda Hutcheon, Preface to the 2nd edition of *A Theory of Adaptation* (xix)

[Adaptations] do not derive from the cinema as an art form but as a sociological and industrial fact.”

André Bazin, “In Defense of Mixed Cinema” (65)

We live in a world of adaptation, and failure to study that world means we must ignore an increasingly important part of contemporary culture.

Dennis Cutchins, Introduction to *The Routledge Companion to Adaptation* (2)

[C]onvergence culture represents a shift in the ways we think about our relations to media, that we are making that shift first through our relations with popular culture, but that the skills we acquire through play may have implications for how we learn, work, participate in the political process, and connect with other people around the world.

Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (23)

Chapter 1.

***Emma* – “a heroine whom no one
but myself will much like”**

The hair was curled, and the maid sent away, and Emma sat down to think and be miserable.—It was a wretched business indeed!—Such an overthrow of every thing she had been wishing for!—Such a development of every thing most unwelcome! (*E* 145)

On adaptation as layering

After having discussed the evolution of adaptation theory and announced a new era for both academic work and audience reception in this field, it may seem counter-productive to go back to Austen and start this chapter, as I intend to, with a look at an Austen novel and its cinematic and television adaptations. A word of justification before the reader concludes that this is just another case of returning to the many-times vilified but ever-repeated methodologies of frameworks that have hindered adaptation studies since its inception. Even if, like Deborah Cartmell, I may risk having to state the obvious:

It is my contention that the word “literature” is not restricted to so-called classic texts, but includes popular fiction, cartoons, newspapers, advertisements, instruction manuals, anything that appears on paper. The trajectory can be reversed – adaptations can be, possibly should be, conceptualized as film on literature rather than literature on film (Cartmell and Whelehan, 2010). [...] Video games, comic books, and popular cinema are all deserving objects of consideration and they can be approached from a variety of perspectives, including consideration of economic, historical, commercial, and industrial conditions. Adaptation studies have finally begun to celebrate rather than conceal its early identification with “the art form of democracy”. (Cartmell 4)

Just like Cartmell, in an introduction suggestively titled “100+ Years of Adaptations, or, Adaptation as the Art Form of Democracy”, justified the use of the word literature in the discourse of adaptation, I believe that a new look into adaptations of Austen’s *Emma* does not have to signify a complete departure from the “traditional” forms of adaptation, particularly when such forms were as fundamental in defining what I have discussed in the first chapter as an iconographic Austen.

On another interesting note Cartmell’s title invokes – only to dispute its claims – William Hunter’s essay on cinema for the inaugural volume of *Scrutiny*, “The Art-Form of Democracy” (1932). And just as Hunter’s claim “on how films, in particular,

narrative films, target the lowest possible denominator” (Cartmell and Whelehan, *Screen Adaptation 2*) may seem now ludicrous and unfair,¹²¹ a similar attitude cannot be now refashioned to criticise the use of “traditional” cinema and television adaptations in an era of more “modern” adaptations. Furthermore, the need to include and even start with literature does not imply a reductionist view on what counts as literature and I fully agree with Cartmell’s broader notion as quoted above.

Thus, re-introducing literature as an important element when analysing adaptation must not however lead the reader to the assumption that it holds a pre-eminent place in this study. In fact, such methodological position may find its justification in even the most clear non-literary views on adaptation. In her *Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon established that “[a]lthough adaptations are also aesthetic objects in their own right, it is only as inherently double or multilaminated works that they can be theorized as adaptations.” (6) In doing so she was pointing out that the value and independence of adaptations cannot blind us to the fact that adaptations openly acknowledge the palimpsestic nature that may in reality be said to exist in every art form. She was thus claiming the relevance of all of those elements in analysing any given adaptation.

Briefly after, Christine Geraghty counter proposed to the notion of doubling that of layering, more plural and less bound to establish a one-way relationship in which a given original necessarily dominates its copy/adaptation, arguing that “[t]he doubling that is a feature of adaptations might be inspired by the movement between adaptation and source but is not confined to it.” (197) Conceptually speaking, her notion is not so far removed from Hutcheon who, before reaching her own formulation, had departed from references to “Scottish poet and scholar Michael Alexander’s great term (Ermarth 2001: 47), inherently ‘palimpsestuous’ works, haunted at all times by their adapted texts”, and Gérard Genette’s “second degree” text.” (6) Although with a focus predominantly on film, Geraghty quotes Dudley Andrew only to recover the same palimpsestic imagery when talking about adaptation:

The celluloid of an adaptation resembles that of other films: meaning rises from images and sounds inscribed on its surface. However, the value of an

¹²¹ Hunter’s own words run as: “The cinema is unlikely ever to reach the level of the best literature (for reasons which I have explained elsewhere), and will never satisfy the most exacting demands of the minority. It must always remain to some extent popular and democratic, and on a lower level than its contemporary art-forms.” (62)

adaptation's meaning ... depends on an additional dimension, the dimension of depth provided by the substrate text that supports what is on the celluloid. A palimpsest, we might say, but a peculiar one, in that the surface layer engages, rather than replaces, a previous inscription. (qtd in Geraghty 195)

Her own subsequent comment on Andrew's quotation emphasizes the usefulness of considering adaptations in term of layers, or layering:

This comment plays with the double meaning of the word [sic] 'film' — as a textual work and as layer itself. [...] [T]hinking about adaptations in terms of layering at least allows for the possibility of seeing through one film (in both senses) to another and acknowledges that the effect of simultaneity might draw on understandings built up through time and knowledge. The layering process involves an accretion of deposits over time, a recognition of ghostly presences, a shadowing or doubling of what is on the surface by what is glimpsed behind." (Geraghty 195)

Geraghty herself of course dismisses the literary text as one of those layers in her *Now a Major Motion Picture: Film Adaptations of Literature and Drama*, wishing to avoid the limiting grip of literature over film. Her choice (though certainly justifiable in the terms of her own proposed methodology and even more so considering the time of her study, when adaptation struggled to be acknowledged as a discipline apart from literary and/or film studies) is not the one I would take here, particularly as my own corpus includes more than film adaptations of literature.

Hutcheon and Geraghty thus seem to be arguing for the same kind of take on adaptation, one which recognizes that its palimpsestic nature calls for a recognition, if not analysis, of several layers of meaning added through a vast number of previous or afterlives of a text. The notion of layering is one I would adopt, as it suits my own approach to the adaptations of *Emma* I will analyse subsequently. In this view, and even if my objects of analysis are the adaptations of *Emma*, with a particular emphasis on twenty-first century adaptations to different media and formats, I will now briefly look into Austen's novel and its twentieth century afterlives as those layers without which any analysis of contemporary adaptations would necessarily be poorer if not downright incomplete or even misguided.

***Emma*: starting with the text**

When writing *Emma* (1816), Jane Austen reportedly described its unlikeliness as a favourite among her readers. According to her first full-length biography (published in 1869, second extended edition in 1871, and more than 50 years after her death) by her nephew James Edward Austen-Leigh (1798-1894),¹²² the then-experienced novelist had some reservations as to the reception of her fourth published work: “She was very fond of *Emma*, but did not reckon on her being a general favourite; for, when commencing that work, she said, ‘I am going to take a heroine whom no one but myself will much like’.” (241) For many decades considered the authoritative biography of Austen, Austen-Leigh’s *A Memoir of Jane Austen* has since been revised as not only incomplete (the work of one branch of the Austen family, as the descendants of Jane Austen’s older brother, James, failed to engage the collaboration of Austen’s favourite niece, Fanny),¹²³ but also as a necessary product of its age which shows Austen through a Victorian lens.¹²⁴ The quotation itself has now become so frequent, and often misapplied, that it has in some degree mangled the interpretation of *Emma*, both the character and the novel. Even so, and despite its second-hand nature, its accurateness seems to be confirmed by another very similar remark made by its author. In one of her own letters, on the occasion of the publication of *Emma* (11 December, 1815), Austen writes:

[...] whatever may be my wishes for its’ success, I am very strongly haunted by the idea that those Readers who have preferred P&P. [*Pride and Prejudice*] it will appear inferior in wit, & to those who have preferred MP. [*Mansfield Park*] very inferior in good Sense. (Le Faye, *Jane Austen’s Letters* 319)

Although Austen’s comment seems to echo her nephew’s account, its context should not be overlooked. Austen was addressing the Librarian at Carlton House, James

¹²² Before this and on Austen’s death, a short *Biographical Note*, traditionally attributed to her brother Henry, was published to accompany the posthumous publication, in 1818, of *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey*. Apart from finally revealing Austen as the author of the previously published novels, the *Note* is known for being notoriously scarce in objective information on Jane Austen. For more on the subject see Emily Auerbach (4-10). For more on proof of Henry Austen’s authorship of the *Note* see Wells, “A Note on Henry Austen’s Authorship”.

¹²³ Fanny Austen Knight (1793-1882), later Lady Knatchbull, held on to the great bulk of Austen’s surviving letters, left to her by Cassandra Austen. Only at her death did her son, Edward Hugessen Knatchbull-Hugessen (1829-1893), first Lord Brabourne, publish these letters, in 1884. For more on this see Le Faye’s, “Lord Brabourne’s Edition of Jane Austen’s Letters”.

¹²⁴ Claire Harman thoroughly analyses the making of this biography in its Victorian context in a chapter of her *Jane’s Fame* intitled “A Vexed Question” (120-154).

Stanier Clarke, who had informed her earlier that year that a dedication to the Prince Regent, the future George IV and a reported admirer of her novels, would be well received (Le Faye, *Jane Austen's Letters* 308–09). It is by now impossible to ascertain whether Austen's unwillingness to praise her novel originates in her nervousness in the face of an aristocratic reader such as the Prince Regent, or whether it reveals a more begrudging politeness in the face of a dedication that was nearly imposed upon her. In fact, in almost all surviving letters addressed to the Prince Regent's librarian, Austen claims her modesty as an authoress, an attitude that seems to originate in Clarke's tendency to suggest themes or characters for her future works.¹²⁵ And even if Austen's dislike of the future George IV is generally accepted,¹²⁶ the prospect of the dedication seems, at the very least, to have caused her a considerable amount of anxiety (Le Faye, *Jane Austen's Letters* 318). Either way, such conditions were bound to make any consideration of the novel's quality modest.

Austen's reserve also speaks to *Emma*'s uniqueness among the other novels in her moderately short body of work. In general terms, it emerges as a more mature novel when compared to her previously published works, particularly *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) and *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). A general tendency among critics is to divide Austen's novels into two groups:¹²⁷ *Emma*, together with *Persuasion* (1818) and *Mansfield Park* (1814), belonging to a more mature set, in opposition to her lighter, earlier though later revised works, *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and *Northanger Abbey* (1818). Others, like the influential Marilyn Butler, go so far as to acknowledge it as “[e]asily the most brilliant novel of the period, and one of the most brilliant of all English novels, it masters the subjective insights which help to make the nineteenth-century novel what it is, and denies them validity.” (274)

Such distinctiveness has, perhaps unsurprisingly, been transferred to screen adaptations of *Emma*, where the reputation of its heroine as a less empathetic character seems to have haunted her adapters, determined to prove her a true Austen

¹²⁵ It is in fact thanks to Clarke's obtrusive suggestions that we now have *Plan of a Novel, according to hints from various quarters*, one of the few pieces Austen left that comes remotely close to a reflection on her art. For more on this manuscript see <https://janeausten.ac.uk/manuscripts/pmplan/1.html>.

¹²⁶ See Sheehan.

¹²⁷ A consideration of the complex chronology of Austen's process of composition and publication may put this simplistic division into question, even if thematically the novels do seem to group well together in this way. For more on the subject see for example Sutherland (“Chronology of composition and publication”).

heroine in the model of Elizabeth Bennett or the Dashwood sisters. How this raises some potentially problematic issues concerning adapting *Emma* is one of the conflating points of discussion for the next section. For the moment, I wish to focus my attention on some of the aspects that have contributed to such uniqueness, which also has been responsible for attracting the attention of some of Austen's greatest critics throughout the decades. Their contributions over the years have also added layers of meaning to *Emma*, modelling our interpretation of both the character and the novel.

In "*Emma* and the Legend of Jane Austen" (1963), Lionel Trilling chooses *Emma* as an example for his proposed thesis that there must be something in Austen's novels to generate such uncommon (and frequently uncritical) devotion for the author. *Emma* he sees as "surely the one that is most fully representative of its author" (34), the "greater book" (35) when compared to the other five novels, an opinion he attests to be both dominant and correct among "thoughtful readers". In fact, the opinion that *Emma* constitutes Austen's best-achieved novel is shared by other critics such as Mark Schorer – who claims it "stands at the head of her achievements, and [...] discriminating readers have thought the novel her greatest" (98) – and Wayne Booth, who in commenting Henry James's (in)famous comment that Austen's competence as a novelist was "part of her unconsciousness", says:¹²⁸

Although we cannot hope to decide whether Jane Austen was entirely conscious of her artistry, a careful look at the technique of any of her novels reveals a rather different picture from that of the unconscious spinster with her knitting needles. In *Emma* especially, where the chances for technical failure are great indeed, we find at work one of the unquestionable masters of the rhetoric of narration. (244)

As Butler, Sue Parrill affirms "*Emma* [...] represents Jane Austen at her complicated best." (107). The difficulty of the novel is something Trilling also attests to,¹²⁹ a

¹²⁸ James's full (and oft repeated) quotation goes: "The key to Jane Austen's fortune with posterity has been in part the extraordinary grace of her facility, in fact of her unconsciousness: as if, at the most, for difficulty, for embarrassment, she sometimes, over her work basket, her tapestry flowers, in the spare, cool drawing-room of other days, fell a-musing, lapsed too metaphorically, as one may say, into wool-gathering, and her dropped stitches, of these pardonable, of these precious moments, were afterwards picked up as little touches of human truth, little glimpses of steady vision, little master-strokes of imagination." ("The Lesson of Balzac" 63) Earlier, in a letter to George Pellew, who had written a dissertation on Jane Austen, James had written of "her narrow unconscious perfection of form." (*The Critical Muse* 173)

¹²⁹ "Reginald Farrer speaks at length of the difficulty of *Emma* and then goes on to compare its effect to that of *Pride and Prejudice*. 'While twelve readings of *Pride and Prejudice* give you twelve periods of pleasure repeated, as many readings of *Emma* give you that pleasure, not repeated only, but squared

feature he sees in part a result of the protagonist's character whose quest for "better acquaintance with herself" proves Jane Austen's position in the canon as "the first truly modern novelist of England" ("Emma" 46). Of particular interest for me, and also Trilling's main argument in this essay concerning *Emma*, is that its heroine is guilty of "self-love", a trait normally taken differently in women and in men:

But we distinguish between our response to the self-love of men and the self-love of women. [...] We understand self-love to be part of the moral life of all men; in men of genius we expect it to appear in unusual intensity and we take it to be an essential element of their power. The extraordinary thing about Emma is that she has a moral life as a man has a moral life. And she doesn't have it as a special instance [...], but quite as a matter of course, as a given quality of her nature. [...] Women in fiction rarely have the peculiar reality of the moral life that self-love bestows. Most commonly they exist in a moonlike way, shining by the reflected moral light of men. (38)

To Trilling that is a distinguishing and defying trait for a heroine and its comprehension a necessity "if she is to be accepted in her exceptional actuality" (38). His recognition of Emma's exceptionality as demonstrated by characteristics that propose an unusual feminine model is the reason why I choose to start with his text, despite it being now over five decades old. In his text, and in his injunction to "[accept] her exceptional actuality", we can still find an insight into what is fundamental in *Emma* and, perhaps more important, how this particular novel and its heroine are relevant in contemporaneity.

Apart from Trilling, many other twentieth century critics have taken to *Emma/Emma* as a particularly challenging object in Austen criticism. In the past several have remarked her unconformity to rules: Mark Schorer's revealing title "The Humiliation of Emma Woodhouse" (1963 [1959]) introduces the argument that the novel balances, better than any other of Austen's novels, the moral and material value of its time: "this is not simply a novel of courtship and marriage, but a novel about the economic and social significance of courtship and marriage." (101)

If this can be said of every Austen novel – all acutely criticize the social structures they seem to enforce – it is also clear that *Emma* more openly exposes such

and squared again with each perusal, till at every fresh reading you feel anew that you never understood anything like the widening sum of its delights.' This is so, and for the reason that none of the twelve readings permits us to flatter ourselves that we have fully understood what the novel is doing. The effect is extraordinary, perhaps unique. The book is like a person – not to be comprehended fully and finally by any other person. It is perhaps to the point that it is the only one of Jane Austen's novels that has for its title a person's name." (36)

trait by means of a very unique heroine whose views on marriage are an important catalyst for the plot. Other critics go further than Schorer in suggesting that Emma does not quite conform to the general Austenian scheme of heterosexual romance/marriage plot: Edmund Wilson stated, in “A Long Talk About Jane Austen (first published in *The New Yorker*, in 1944), that “Emma, who was relatively indifferent to men, was inclined to infatuations with women”.

In much the same line Trilling refers that “Professor Mudrick¹³⁰ associates the deficiency [her lack of tenderness] with Emma’s being not susceptible to men” (“Emma” 46).¹³¹ The idea that a rational woman must be incapable of loving or that her objective views on marriage must imply homosexuality may seem preposterous but maybe not completely out-dated. Readings such as these inevitably bring to mind the ones misreading Terry Castle’s review essay in *The London Review of Books*, titled by an editor “Was Jane Austen Gay?” (1995).¹³² Unsupported as they seem by the novel itself, they risk effacing the real innovative features of Austen’s heroine: Emma is the only of the Austen heroines to openly acknowledge marriage as a social contract, a necessity she, as a rich heiress entitled to thirty thousand pounds, is not forced to submit to.

However, even if such views may seem too far behind now, turned dated by decades of feminist (and post-feminist) criticism, they are still worth mentioning as they have, in my opinion, held such an important influence on Austen studies as to still be traceable in the Austen-as-icon phenomenon explored in the first chapter. As such, some important questions must be raised, the first two being: (i) How far do these male critics see beyond the patriarchal mould that Emma actually breaks, making her a heroine like no other in Austen’s novels? (ii) How much of “an heroine no one will much like” results from the fact that Emma does not match but defies the feminine ideal, a lens through which Austen’s scholarship was viewed through the greater part of the twentieth century? To our initial two questions, one other must be added: (iii) How many of such traits are transposed to the adaptations?

¹³⁰ Marvin Mudrick, *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery* (1952).

¹³¹ Wendy Anne Lee references other similar (perhaps more polemic) readings by Mudrick of both *Emma* and *Pride and Prejudice*, saying that “Mudrick excludes these passions from the realm of “adult” sexuality, noting that such relations “have always been considered safe and conventional in bourgeois society, and certainly unsuggestive of the direct physical commitment of sexual love” (I, 30).” (1012)

¹³² See note 35 on page 42.

Nonetheless, as characteristic of Austen's deeply complex and multi-layered fictional creations, Emma is not a privileged female character because she shares attributes usually bestowed on male heroes alone. Thus despite being apparently freed from the marriage constraints binding Elizabeth Bennett or Jane Fairfax, Emma is also the most constrained of Austen's heroines in terms of spatial (and arguably social) liberty, her world being limited to her father's estate, Hartfield, and Highbury's society, "the large and populous village almost amounting to a town" (*E* 5, emphasis added). This detail, exposed to the attentive reader's consideration in the first paragraph, should throw a different light onto the heroine's apparently unempathetic nature. Austen's characteristically subtle irony must as always be carefully analysed as the opening words of the novel, describing its heroine, are meant to put the readers on their guard in terms of what to expect:

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. (*E* 3, emphasis added)

A careful reading of this passage offers a potential reason for the novel's difficulty: despite the apparent advantages in comparison to other Austen heroines, Emma's existence is monotonous and her perspectives in terms of future improvement rather narrow. In truth, her "blessings" are limited to her wealth, as her intelligence and lively character are restrained by an oppressive (if kind) father in a very small rural society. As Isabel Fernandes noticed however, irony in Austen goes beyond words on page amounting to a figure of speech:

What is characteristic of it is that being a presented irony (and not a verbal one) it is not formally marked as irony at the level of speech but consists simply of the assimilation of apparently dissimilar elements with the aim of better dissociating them. (47)

Although what Fernandes refers to is obviously only hinted at in this very short, blunt description of Emma, it sets the tone for the rest of the novel. It also sets Emma apart from other Austen heroines and, in doing so from the very start of the novel, disrupts the reader's expectations concerning the literary (and, as we will see later, social) conventions of the early nineteenth century novel. Butler, for instance, described this unique Austen heroine by emulating, in critical terms, the structure of the first lines in the novel:

Emma is healthy, vigorous, almost aggressive. She is the real ruler of the household at Hartfield — in her domestic ascendancy she is unique among Jane Austen’s heroines. She is also the only one who is the natural feminine leader of her whole community. (251)

Butler sees in Emma the same characteristics which made her male colleagues react, but unsurprisingly, being a (pre)feminist critic,¹³³ she sees such traits as potentially enriching in looking at the Austen model of a heroine. In fact, Butler’s contribution to changing the way we see Austen, and *Emma* in particular, justifies a closer look at her work.

In 1975, Marilyn Butler published the still influential *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*. It proved as ground-breaking as, or even more than, D. W. Harding’s essay “Regulated Hatred: An Aspect of the Work of Jane Austen” (1940), which “decided the shift in the novelist’s reputation from delicate satirist to fierce critic, shutting the door on ‘Gentle Jane.’”¹³⁴ Harding is still often quoted on the statement that “[...] her books are, as she meant them to be, read and enjoyed by precisely the sort of people whom she disliked” (167), a statement that substantiated an enduring and seemingly unbridgeable division between Austen enthusiasts and Austen critics. But whereas Harding argued for disguised “regulated hatred” in Austen’s novels that contradicted her fame as a safe and even escapist read, Butler more extensively defended a reading of Austen in her own context, even if that meant acknowledging her conservative side.

More significant is the fact that while Harding punctuated his thesis with a few examples without a positive contribution to a change in the way to approach to Austen studies,¹³⁵ Butler argued for a revision of many assumptions made on Austen, namely that she was a stranger to “the events and issues of her time” (294).¹³⁶ In a

¹³³ It is Butler who defines herself as “pre-feminist in tone and in strategy” (xx) in the new introduction she wrote to *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* when the book, first published in 1975, was reissued in paperback format in 1987.

¹³⁴ From the abstract of “Resituating ‘Regulated Hatred’: D. W. Harding’s Jane Austen” (Lee 2010). Lee conducts a revision of Harding’s seminal essay, including the analysis of a draft manuscript with the claim, toned-down for publication, that Austen should not be read “with a sense of relief but with the zest with which you turn to a formidable ally who stands with you against the things you hate” (3). Lee also looks into the influence of Harding’s text on Mudrick’s “highly acerbic” *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery* (1952) and Miller’s much more recent *Jane Austen, or The Secret of Style* (2003), and underlines, in the expression “regulated hatred”, the importance of the first term, despite general insistence over the decades on the second.

¹³⁵ See Waldron (7).

¹³⁶ Butler’s main argument in her book being: “The crucial aspect of her novels is in itself expressive of the conservative side in an active war of ideas.” (294)

way, both critics refocus attention on how Austen was part of her society in order to understand her importance in our own. And not surprisingly, both critics look to *Emma* as particularly exemplary both of Austen's display of artistry and their own theories on the novelist.

Butler's contribution remains, for the purpose of the present work, particularly relevant and some of her views on *Emma* are worth going back to, particularly as they veered from the interpretations either held or circulated by several mid-century (mostly male) critics, as Butler herself recognized in the extensive introduction she added in 1987. They are particularly useful in what concerns *Emma/Emma* because they allow for a re-evaluation of an extraordinary heroine even in the midst of what for Butler is a socially conservative fictional environment. As such, even if Emma seems to enforce the social harmony of the small microcosm that Highbury constitutes in marrying Mr Knightley, her rational attitude towards marriage, the cement of such harmony, reveals Austen's well-known ironic look on her own society. As Wayne Booth summarised, "[i]t is more than just the marriage: it is the *rightness* of *this* marriage, as a conclusion to all of the comic wrongness that has gone before." (260) In the first part of the novel, when stating her reasons for not marrying, Emma is openly defying the rules binding women to their place of submission, so much so that even the docile and uncritical Harriet notices the disruption:

"And I am not only, not going to be married, at present, but have very little intention of ever marrying at all."

"Ah!—so you say; but I cannot believe it."

"I must see somebody very superior to any one I have seen yet, to be tempted; Mr. Elton, you know, (recollecting herself,) is out of the question: and I do not wish to see any such person. I would rather not be tempted. I cannot really change for the better. If I were to marry, I must expect to repent it."

"Dear me!—it is so odd to hear a woman talk so!" (*E* 90)

Her dismissive attitude towards marriage when applied to herself is very far from even Elizabeth Bennett's, whose determination resides in an idealistic determination of marrying only if love and respect are part of the equation.¹³⁷ Although as the reader

¹³⁷ I am referring to Elizabeth's judging of her friend Charlotte Lucas' choice of accepting Mr Collins' offer of marriage (*P&P* 124-125). Adaptations however have been even more assertive in making Elizabeth's thoughts on the subject audible, both in very similar terms and in a moment of confidence the two eldest Bennet sisters share in the intimacy of their bedrooms, well before the Mr Collins/Charlotte Lucas affair: the 1995 Elizabeth Bennett states "I am determined that nothing but the very deepest love will induce me into matrimony. So I shall end an old maid and teach your ten

will discover (and probably already hint at now), Emma is a victim of her self-deception, but that fact does not diminish her defiant attitude towards society's binding rules concerning young women in particular. Moreover, the famous passage quoted above in which she discusses the matter with, and quite scandalizes, Harriet, is not the only of such occurrences in the novel. Her reaction to the realisation she is not in fact in love with Frank Churchill is perhaps more telling:

A very little quiet reflection was enough to satisfy Emma as to the nature of her agitation on hearing this news of Frank Churchill. She was soon convinced that it was not for herself she was feeling at all apprehensive or embarrassed; it was for him. Her own attachment had really subsided into a mere nothing; it was not worth thinking of;—but if he, who had undoubtedly been always so much the most in love of the two, were to be returning with the same warmth of sentiment which he had taken away, it would be very distressing. If a separation of two months should not have cooled him, there were dangers and evils before her:—caution for him and for herself would be necessary. She did not mean to have her own affections entangled again, and it would be incumbent on her to avoid any encouragement of his. (*E* 341)

And her calculation is evident even before that moment of final recognition when, after Mr Woodhouse's condemnation of Frank's thoughtlessness concerning his plans for a ball, she puts the issue of marrying him clearly as a mere hypothesis (and one with no great chance of coming true):

Had she intended *ever* to marry him, it might have been worth while to pause and consider, and try to understand the value of his preference, and the character of his temper; but for all the purposes of their acquaintance, he was quite amiable enough. (*E* 269, my emphases)¹³⁸

Emma's rationality wins over any sentimental hope the reader might have been entertaining concerning herself and Frank Churchill. The final (and alternative, happy) ending with Mr Knightley does not change this significantly: in much the same line of thought, several critics have rightly seen Emma's marriage to Mr Knightley as the logical conclusion, "part of the business of manners in Highbury" (Grossman 150), or in Casey Finch and Peter Bowen's more Austenian terms:

[T]he politically inevitable fulfilment of the most vigorously enforced social and novelistic expectations. It is, as Austen's exact diction underscores, neither

children to embroider cushions and play their instruments very ill", whereas the 2005 one says "Only the deepest love will persuade me into matrimony which is why I will end up an old maid".

¹³⁸ For a deeper analysis of this particular passage see Grossman (146-148).

an aberration nor a convenient device for closing an otherwise unmanageable plot but an instantly recognizable “sagacity,” an aspect of universal wisdom. (1)

Emma’s decision to marry may be seen not as a contradiction of her stated intentions to Harriet in the beginning of the novel, but as a realisation that in order to maintain the ascendancy over Highbury’s society, she must be a married woman and mistress of Donwell. That is for instance what the repeated use of the word “first” in the following passages may reveal:

Till now that she was threatened with its loss, Emma had never known how much of her happiness depended on being *first* with Mr. Knightley, *first* in interest and affection.—Satisfied that it was so, and feeling it her due, she had enjoyed it without reflection; and only in the dread of being supplanted, found how inexpressibly important it had been.—Long, very long, she felt she had been *first*; for, having no female connexions of his own, there had been only Isabella whose claims could be compared with hers, and she had always known exactly how far he loved and esteemed Isabella. She had herself been *first* with him for many years past. (*E* 452, my emphases)

All that were good would be withdrawn; and if to these losses, the loss of Donwell were to be added, what would remain of cheerful or of rational society within their reach? [...] How was it to be endured? [...] if Harriet were to be the chosen, the *first*, the dearest, the friend, the wife to whom he looked for all the best blessings of existence; what could be increasing Emma's wretchedness but the reflection never far distant from her mind, that it had been all her own work? (*E* 460, my emphases)

In addition, Emma’s final realisation that Mr Knightley is infinitely superior to Frank Churchill and her only real option in terms of marriage is therefore unsurprisingly rational:

How long had Mr Knightley been so dear to her, as every feeling declared him now to be? When had his influence, such influence begun?— When had he succeeded to that place in her affection, which Frank Churchill had once, for a short period, occupied?—She looked back; she compared the two—compared them, as they had always stood in her estimation, from the time of the latter's becoming known to her—and as they must at any time have been compared by her, had it—oh! had it, by any blessed felicity, occurred to her, to institute the comparison.—She saw that there never had been a time when she did not consider Mr Knightley as infinitely the superior, or when his regard for her had not been infinitely the most dear. She saw, that in persuading herself, in fancying, in acting to the contrary, she had been entirely under a delusion,

totally ignorant of her own heart—and, in short, that she had never really cared for Frank Churchill at all! (*E* 449)

Emma's realisation of this fact is surprisingly fast, the result of a quick reasoning once she allows for it to run free. J. P. C Brown made a similar argument when noting how Austen made this clear by narrating Emma's feelings, while hearing Harriet talking of her feelings for Mr Knightley: "It darted through her, with the speed of an arrow, that Mr Knightley must marry no one but herself!" (*E* 444) Brown then adds that: "She may be the victim of love's dart, at last; but she also has its speed." (223) To this Butler adds an interesting perspective, according to which Emma's realisation that she has never loved Frank Churchill but Mr Knightley instead is a triumph of her rationality above any sentimentality:

At least she accepts the need for self-criticism. 'To understand, thoroughly understand her own heart, was the first endeavour.' [*E* 449] Such a recognition implies (for the first time in Emma's consciousness) total scepticism about her herself, admission that her processes have been irrational, obscure, delusory. It implies the rejection, in fact, of 'individual' lights in favour of the more reliable guides of external evidence and impartial reasoning. (258)

One of Butler's main point of reasoning is that Emma's blunders are mostly caused by her own wilful dismissing of her first, rational impressions in a number of situations,¹³⁹ so it is interesting that her final reformation comes not from a denial of such peculiar, unfeminine rationality, but from its reinforcement. J. P. C. Brown makes a similar point when analysing Emma's reaction in the "proposal scene": "Emma is never more truly herself than when her mind runs like this at such surefooted speed [...]. Nothing more truly shows her delight in Mr Knightley's proposal than the way it sets not just her heart, but her brain racing." (220)

The conflict between feminine and masculine (or rather un-feminine) traits in Emma is possibly one of the main reasons for the enduring debate (and frequent opposite stances) on both the novel and its heroine. Another argument in favour of Emma's seemingly unfeminine traits is the fact that she both trumps and uses vulnerable female characters – Harriet Smith, Jane Fairfax, Miss Bates – the way one might expect of a roguish male protagonist.¹⁴⁰ Thus, while Emma's affinity with other

¹³⁹ See Butler (252-257).

¹⁴⁰ Butler makes exactly this point when she compares Emma and Frank Churchill's behaviour (256-257).

female characters is clear in a number of occasions, both in positive and negative aspects, she is also frequently shown in contrast to those same figures. Many of the characters in *Emma* are defined in contrast to the heroine herself, with whom, in the end, they share some basic traits. Thus, as Flavin notices, although Miss Bates “has none of the gifts and privileges united in Emma Woodhouse” (50) and is presented in opposite terms to the heroine, she “cares for an aging parent and has a happy and contented disposition”, being accepted and valued by everyone in the community, despite her apparent flaws, namely her untiring conversation and her social status.

Mark Schorer has made a similar analysis of Emma and Mrs Elton (106-107) and of Emma and Jane Fairfax (107). Emma is thus a complex character whose most interesting trait may reside in how she subtly defies gender boundaries, and most importantly, prejudices. And still, as the following analysis will show, several adaptations have gone beyond their way to establish Emma as the ultimate feminine heroine. Therefore, on the one hand, Emma’s distinctiveness is in her being an exceptional character when compared to those she interacts with in the course of the story, and thus it will be interesting to see how, in the adaptations, Emma is defined by contrast and interaction with other female characters. On the other hand, as Harding puts it, “the story no longer progresses towards her vindication or consolation; it consists in her gradual, humbling self-enlightenment” (177). To this goal concurs, in Butler’s view, Emma’s “ascendency” both at home and in the community, as an effective leading matron, which “leave[s] her free to act out her wilful errors, for which she must take entire moral responsibility.” (251)

Returning to the subject of marriage however, we may need to keep in mind that Mr Knightley’s attitude towards it does not diverge much from Emma’s. Early in the novel, when discussing with Mrs Weston, recently married, the possible consequences of Emma and Harriet’s friendship, he states, evidently teasing his interlocutor:

“Yes,” said he, smiling. “You are better placed *here*; very fit for a wife, but not at all for a governess. But you were preparing yourself to be an excellent wife all the time you were at Hartfield. You might not give Emma such a complete education as your powers would seem to promise; but you were receiving a very good education from *her*, on the very material matrimonial point of submitting your own will, and doing as you were bid; and if Weston had asked me to recommend him a wife, I should certainly have named Miss Taylor.” (*E* 38)

And of course, although Donwell Abbey is the most important estate, Hartfield “being but a sort of notch in the Donwell Abbey estate, to which all the rest of Highbury belonged” (*E* 147), the match allows for the injection of Emma’s fortune into Mr Knightley’s inheritance, significant in terms of land but not in monetary terms. It is a perfect match in all the aspects relevant to social order and harmony.

Moreover, let us not forget that Emma’s role as matchmaker also puts her in a different position towards marriage, when compared to all the other Austen heroines. She is the only one to embody the Austen novel itself, if we accept, as I believe we must, that Austen’s novels are about matchmaking and marriage as instruments of social definition (and criticism) and not as sentimental plot devices. As Finch and Bowen remind us, even her final declaration to quit matchmaking is in fact the final turn that allows a full circle, as her own marriage to Mr Knightley fulfils this novel’s promise of matchmaking and marriage:

[I]t is Emma’s matchmaking, of course, that leads her to the series of blunders over which so many Austen critics are fond of moralizing. But while critics – along with Mr. Knightley – chastise Emma for her weakness for matchmaking, few remember at the same time that the novel itself is unashamedly in the business of matchmaking. Few remember that at the very moment when Emma upbraids herself for attempting to “arrange everybody’s destiny,” at the very moment when she attempts to renounce matchmaking forever, the novel itself has brought to shimmering completion its own arrangement of everybody’s destiny. At the very moment Emma foregoes matchmaking, in one and the same movement Emma has made its most glorious match. (13)

Thus, if we accept John Hagan’s suggestion that by the end of the novel, Emma accepts Mr Knightley has a result of her own growing self-awareness which positions her rationally above even Mr Knightley himself (555), then both Emma’s extraordinary position among other Austen heroines and the technical accomplishment Austen manages in *Emma* are demonstrated.

Kathy Mezei adopted a similar perspective: her feminist approach to narratology in “Who is Speaking Here? Free Indirect Discourse, Gender, and Authority in *Emma*, *Howards End*, and *Mrs. Dalloway*” (1996) looks into the ending of *Emma*, focusing on the role of the narrated discourse and concluding that

[t]he irony of the closing, in which the narrator has the last word, lies in its patness. [...] The parody of a romance ending absolves the reader from feeling that Emma has capitulated either to a marriage plot or to the narrator’s authority. (75)

Mezei's main focus point is not this specific moment in the narrative, but Austen's use of free indirect style (or FID).¹⁴¹ Thus, apart from such narrative issues involving the characters and the novel, elements belonging to its narratology also contribute to make of *Emma* an exceptionally complex case, particularly when, as is the case here, one means to consider its adaptable characteristics.¹⁴² Probably the most recognisable stylistic device of Austen's writing, and one she is held the master genius of, several critics have seen in *Emma* the zenith of its use, thus justifying in good measure the supreme artistry of this novel.¹⁴³

Indeed, the free indirect style that Austen brought so skillfully to completion – the technique,” as Dorrit Cohn defines it, “for rendering a character's thoughts in his own idiom while maintaining the third-person reference and the basic tense of narration” – marks a reconfiguration of “internal” and “external” approaches to character.

Free indirect style achieves this by drawing characterological utterance into the wider narrative cadences of the novel. (Mezei 5)

Likewise, Finch and Bowen have also emphasized the distinctive function of free indirect style in the structure of *Emma*, even if by levelling it with Austen's use of gossip as both a driving force for the plot and as an evidence of power of the collective over the individual in *Emma*:

Like the free indirect style – but not as it – gossip in *Highbury* functions as a dispersed rather than a concentrated form of authority that derives its power neither from the opinion of a single individual nor from the dictates of an identifiable institution – the police, the law courts – but from the collectivity of voices that whisper about neighbors in private rooms and across gateways. Just as the free indirect style of the novel functions as a form of narrative

¹⁴¹ Also frequent are the designations “free indirect speech” or “free indirect discourse”, among others of less proximity such as “narrated monologue”. Mezei suggests that “The debate over naming reflects a further taxonomic controversy over whether FID is a linguistic phenomenon best defined by linguistic features such as tense, person, and relation to direct and indirect discourse and interior monologue or whether it is a literary phenomenon marked by the context of its utterance, the narrative instance (Genette), and its relation to diegesis and mimesis.” (67)

¹⁴² This expression refers to the long held position, particularly common in the early decades of adaptation studies, that some texts were more adaptable than others, which invariably culminated in the advocacy for the classic novel as the perfect object for adaptation in detriment of other genres and formats, such as poetry or the modernist novel – see Bluestone.

¹⁴³ One is Ian Watt in *The Rise of the Novel* (1987 [1957]) – even if Watt does not clearly mention free indirect style, for Finch and Bowen (4-5) it is as if he did when he discusses how Austen reconciles “the two major differences of narrative method between the novels of Richardson [internal approach to character] and Fielding [external approach to character].” (Watt 296-299);

surveillance over the novel's characters, so gossip in the novel deploys a mild surveillance over the members of the Highbury community.” (7)

Finch and Bowen's narrow focus on this technique leads Rachel Provenzano Oberman to counter-argument: “Finch and Bowen conflate the narrative voice with the communal voice, whereas Austen's narrative voice is continually at odds with the communal voice of gossip, undermining rather than naturalizing it.” (8)

Although I tend to agree with Oberman's point, both stances signal out the importance (and singularity) of Austen's narrative voice in *Emma*, in particular the use of the free indirect style as a primary tool in shaping the novel and its reading. I have no intention of conducting an in-depth analysis of such narrative strategy in *Emma*, exemplifying for instance the difference between free indirect speech and narrated monologue.¹⁴⁴ However, I would still call attention to it, both for its presence in the novel and for the relevance it assumes in the novel's reception, in academic but also non-academic environment. Critics are unanimous in singling out *Emma* as the novel in which Austen better seems to command this particular narrative strategy in order to manipulate the reader and weave his/her interpretation of the heroine as part of the plot's intended development. That aspect will inform my subsequent analysis, as an analogous reaction to the novel may be said to be the cause for most adapters' claim in the added difficulty posed by adapting *Emma*, when compared to other Austen novels.

If one can say of all Austen's novels that a cautious reader has to constantly be on his/her guard to avoid missing the underlying narrative flowing by means of a catalysing irony meant to undermine the social and literary conventions the novels inscribe themselves into, nowhere but in *Emma* is that feature stronger. This is due not only to the fact that, by presenting a heroine bent on marrying everyone off, *Emma* puts on display the farcical potential of the marriage plot, but also to the use of free indirect discourse as a strategy to further destabilize the reader's expectations concerning the novel.

This is revealed first and foremost in the gender indeterminacy of the narrator in *Emma*, for, as Mezei notes “[free indirect discourse's] structural indeterminacy shelters and accentuates forms of gender indeterminacy” (67). She later elaborates to

¹⁴⁴ For more on this distinction see Cohn. Roy Pascal also looks into the use of free indirect speech (the designation he prefers above others – see 31-32), with a particular emphasis on the nineteenth century novel and taking as one of his examples Jane Austen (45-60).

the following: “Because of its own indeterminate form, FID offers a coded structure within the text to reveal authors’ discomfort with conventional gender roles and forms of gender polarization.” (71) Such an argument seems particularly interesting if we consider the importance gender roles play in *Emma*. It also brings to the fore the issue of the narrator’s own gender in *Emma*, a particularly important, if not easily answerable question when we consider the morally superior attitude she/he often has over Emma’s behaviour. Although Mezei herself partakes in the opinion that the narrator in *Emma* “remains ambiguous, fluctuating” but has “a tendency to resemble Mr. Knightley in (his) discourse and views of Emma” (72). More importantly, however, is Mezei’s conclusion on how the use of free indirect discourse affects the underlying marriage plot of the novel and its critique of the status quo:

One of the characteristics of FID [...] is its slippage between narrator and the character-focalizer. Because of this slippage, the reader has been deliberately destabilized, swaying between the narrator’s authoritative and slightly amused, slightly reproving voice and Emma’s wit, courage, and rebellion. This destabilization of the reader through the indeterminacy created by FID is important, for it cleverly unsettles the reader’s expectations of both the plot and of Emma, paradoxically creating a reader more open to changes, shifts, and twists. The narrator has “refracted” (Bakhtin) her discourse through Emma, in this way diffusing the authority of the monologic authorial voice, permitting a voice of resistance to the marriage plot, to restrictive social codes and conventions, and to the constrained lives of women. (75)

From another perspective, Rachel Provenzano Oberman sees the approximating figures of heroine and narrator as the former grows in self-awareness and the novel reaches its end as revealing of Emma’s singularity and even superiority, instead of the humiliation suggested earlier by Schorer:

Emma’s voice becomes more difficult to distinguish from that of the narrator by the novel’s end because they have grown more alike and the narrator’s distancing irony is less evident. [...] The Emma that we see at the end of the novel is not sad or chastened; she is not smaller, but larger. (13)

For Oberman, it is as if Emma “has learned the narrative technique that Austen herself uses. [...] Emma’s ability to learn narrative ‘skills’ such as the fusing of other voices into her own represents the true mark of her maturity.” (15) However, readings of not only the function of free indirect discourse but also of its effects in *Emma* and even in particular passages are varied and numerous, offering just as many insights into the

novel, the character and, may I add, the adaptations that followed. For instance, what Wayne Booth described as Austen's controlled use of distance, and particularly her use of free indirect discourse to give the reader access to Emma's thoughts and feelings (and also of other characters) has been interpreted by some critics as a strategy allowing the development of a sympathetic response to the heroine (Mezei 73-74) and by others as having the exact opposite result of ironic distance (Flavin 51-55). Booth's own argument is that, on the one hand, "[s]ympathy for Emma can be heightened by withholding inside views of others as well as by granting them of her" (249) and that, on the other hand, "the crosslights thrown by other minds prevent our being blinded by Emma's radiance." (256)

Although it is not my purpose to conduct a close reading of the text in order to investigate this line of reasoning, it is, however, an issue I will bear in mind in the upcoming analysis of the adaptations of *Emma*. The choice before adapters seems to be between breaking this strategy and "[inviting] the audience to take up a critical stance towards the heroine" (Cano 100) or trying in some way to transpose it on screen. Going back to Butler: "It has been called the first and one of the greatest of psychological novels. If so, it resembles no other, for its attitude to the workings of Emma's consciousness is steadily critical." (273) For that reason alone, it certainly poses a challenge for adapters and public alike, whenever any new adaptation claims to update *Emma*/Emma to contemporary audiences.

Chapter 2.
Emma Adapted:
Your (Not So) Typical Heroine
on Screen

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 [...]. (*E* 470)

From stage to screen: early adaptations and critical survey¹⁴⁵

The next section will focus on the analysis of the specific twenty-first century *Emma* adaptations in order to see how they simultaneously reflect and continue to add on Austen as a complex construct. I will also attempt to demonstrate how these case studies may contribute to the on-going debate on the future of adaptation studies. Before moving on to that analysis, however, I find it necessary to look into the history of adaptations of *Emma*, as knowing the layers that have contributed to today's complex notion of the novel, its heroine and even its author is the only way to work in view of a network of adaptation. I return to Linda Hutcheon and one of her Biology-influenced texts on adaptation:

It is obviously important to the understanding of an adaptation as an adaptation that we investigate where it has come from (in other words, what biologists would call its phylogeny or evolutionary history). When we shift from “fidelity” concerns to undertaking this related but different kind of study, new analytic opportunities present themselves. By revealing lineages of descent, not similarities of form alone, we can understand how a specific narrative changes over time. (Bortolotti & Hutcheon 245)

Arguments establishing a parallel between biological adaptation and cultural adaptation are useful primarily in the way they make clear the double standard with which these two types of adaptation are assessed. Much in the same conceptual framework, Sarah Cardwell had previously argued on such difference in treatment:

Unlike genetic adaptations, which exist within a trajectory of linear development, each new cultural adaptation appears to magically cross the chronological gap dividing it from the original text, and is seen as more closely related to that original text than to preceding or contemporaneous adaptations. [...] This methodology is rooted in a centre-based conceptualisation of adaptation, which posits a direct relationship between the original source – the ‘centre which is the source of life’ (Easthope, 1991: 23) – and each new

¹⁴⁵ Parts of the text in this chapter were previously published in Coelho (“[H]andsome”) and Coelho (“Watching Austen”).

adaptation. [...] Traditional critical or theoretical writing on adaptation thus frequently finds itself undertaking a stubborn project of dehistoricisation on two counts: it denies the linear, textual history of adaptation available to each new adapter, and the relationships through time that an adaptation might bear to other adaptations. (*Adaptation Revisited* 14)

Thus, going back to the common denominator between biological adaptation and cultural adaptations may prove useful in the sense that it makes clear, in the case of the latter, how unexplainable the preponderance given to the departing element really is. In a line of reasoning not far from the anti-fidelity discourse, Cardwell continued to argue against those who evaluate adaptations based on the author's intention, as if the author of the original books was also in some way the author of the adaptation (*Adaptation Revisited* 20-25). In her *A Theory of Adaptation*, Hutcheon also considered the subject of intention, claiming it however for adapters, instead of original writers, underlining the importance of intention in making evident a particular adaptation's significance in its own time and space:

[...] the political, aesthetic, and autobiographical intentions of the various adapters are potentially relevant to the audience's interpretation. They are often recoverable, and their traces are visible in the text. [...] In what some call our "posthumanist" times, with our suspicions of and challenges to notions of coherent subjectivity, what I am proposing may at first appear to be a step backward in theoretical-historical terms. But adaptation teaches that if we cannot talk about the creative process, we cannot fully understand the urge to adapt and therefore perhaps the very process of adaptation. We need to know "why." (107)

In the context of later developments on her "biological/cultural homology", she admitted that contrary to what happens in nature, cultural adaptation is not random, but intentional, a feature that despite evidencing the limits of the homology itself, also reinforces adaptation's value, particularly as creators of new meaning.

Thinking in terms closer to biological adaptation also reveals how the dismissive attitude towards the different stages in between two chosen objects (i.e. the history of adaptations of a given object) may be a mistake even when considering cultural adaptation. In that sense, I would like to pick up on both Cardwell's and Hutcheon's argument in order to propose a working hypothesis for my subsequent analysis: what if adaptations have collectively built a new author, a new centre to

which they now refer to? In order to advance any answer it is probably best to start with how adaptations of *Emma* have been received in critical terms.

Although *Emma* is frequently presented as Austen's most well-achieved novel, critical studies on adaptations of the novel tend to be scarce, despite the abundance of adaptations. One of the first surveys on the adaptations of *Emma* appears in Andrew Wright's "Jane Austen Adapted" (1975). Although in truth an article on the many abridged school editions, sequels and (mainly) stage adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice*, it does include at the end "An Annotated List of Adaptations, School Editions, and Performances" of all six completed novels, minor works and "miscellanea" (439-453). Of *Emma* (447-449) it lists, under the category "Dramatizations and Performances" a total of thirteen productions, between 1936 and 1972, making it the second most adapted novel in such terms. This includes stage and radio plays, as well as television adaptations, made both in the UK (predominantly) and in the USA.¹⁴⁶ As term of comparison, the novel with the greatest number of adaptations in the same category is unsurprisingly *Pride and Prejudice*, with thirty entries.

After 1975, the year Wright's survey stops, and up until 2010, five other television and cinematic adaptations of *Emma* were produced. This included period pieces, both for television (*Emma*, 1996, A&E/Meridian; *Emma*, 2009, BBC) and cinema (*Emma*, 1996) and also adaptations taking place in contemporary America (*Clueless*, 1995) or India (*Aisha*, 2010). And although studies such as Wright's have not been frequent, other critics have since then contributed to map out *Emma*'s screen afterlives. Among those I must highlight the contributions by Sue Parrill (2002) and J. P. C. Brown (2015).

Sue Parrill's monograph *Jane Austen on Film and Television* is perhaps the most complete survey of on-screen adaptations of Austen's six completed novels. It includes, up to the year of its publication in 2002, a comparative analysis of the adaptations, many of which no longer available but still presented in detail as a result of a thorough and careful research. Parrill's dedicated chapter to *Emma* looks into adaptations of the novel, starting with the first television dramatization by the BBC, in 1948, a live, in-studio, black and white dramatization lasting 105 minutes of which only the screenplay survives. Her look into the 1954 American adaptation by NBC's

¹⁴⁶ The Internet Movie Data Base (IMDB) lists also a TV episode, Matinee Theatre: "Emma", in 1957 – see https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0068068/movieconnections/?tab=mc&ref_=tt_trv_cnn.

long-running weekly programme *Kraft Television Theatre* (1947-1958) is more developed. An hour-long production, it shared the usual characteristics of early television adaptations: live, studio-bound, in black and white. Parrill classifies it as “giv[ing] little indication of the novel’s core ideas” and “exploit[ing] only the most superficial elements of the novel” (114), focusing on Emma’s misguided attempts to match Harriet to Mr Elton, omitting characters such as the Bateses, Mr Churchill and Jane Fairfax and turning Mr Martin into “a country bumpkin [which] makes for an incongruous kind of low comedy that is typical of American television of that time.” (114)

When she turns to the 1960 BBC adaptation, already in the soon-to-be-norm form of six episodes, of half-hour each, also live and in black and white, Parrill highlights the ending, which shows “Emma and Knightley in a carriage, immediately following their marriage, discussing what name she is to call him. She says he will always be Mr Knightley to her” (115), an element inherited from the 1954 American production. Although a matter of detail, this shows how much adaptations are indebted not only to the novel they are adapting, but also to previous adaptations. As certain features pass from one adaptation to the next (and the one after that), the notion of adaptation as a process of layering becomes clear, even if, or perhaps more interestingly, such influences are absorbed unconsciously by the new team of adapters. In fact, it is frequent for adapters to claim their lack of knowledge concerning previous adaptations of the same novel, probably more often than not little more than a strategy aiming at recognition of the originality and independence of their own work.¹⁴⁷

Parrill’s study remains a useful and thorough analysis of screen adaptations of Austen (and *Emma* in particular), produced in the twentieth century. The novel and its adaptations have not however been the prime object of interest for scholars of adaptation studies.¹⁴⁸ J. P. C. Brown’s article “Screening Austen: The Case of Emma” (2015) is one of the other few dedicated studies to take upon *Emma* as a particular

¹⁴⁷ Take for instance Joe Wright’s claim that he did not know the previous adaptations made of *Pride and Prejudice* – see *Pride & Prejudice: Production Notes* (4). That novel, although the most famous by Austen, was not in fact a favourite when adapting for the cinema, with just one other period film having been made before, in 1940 (dir. Robert Z. Leonard). However, if Wright’s claim could have been believable for the 1940 feature film, it is less so concerning the 1995 BBC series (dir. Simon Langton, script Andrew Davies), given that series’ enduring impact.

¹⁴⁸ Mention must be made here to Marc Di Paolo’s extensive documentation of *Emma* adaptations, in *Emma Adapted: Jane Austen’s Heroine from Book to Film*.

case study among Austen adaptation studies. In addition to an initial consideration of the reworking of Austen's image (from scarce depictions to fabricated portraits), what is particularly thought-provoking in this article is Brown's consideration of some particular passages in screen versions of *Emma*, such as the "proposal scene" which he sees as actually neither a scene nor a proposal:

This conversation in *Emma* is a test case that reveals aspects of Jane Austen's work that resist translation into other forms, and the ways in which adaptations tend to assimilate her generically complex work to more readily identifiable and consumable genres: in other words, of the ways in which in screening Austen one may screen certain things out, in particular in relation to the construction of subjectivity. (219)

Among the things Brown connects to the "more readily identifiable and consumable genres" are, for instance, that fact that "since the 1990s Mr Knightley has become a more romantic figure and usually a somewhat younger one" (219) or the tendency to downplay Emma's rationality and quickness of mind, also in favour of a more romantic representation. These two modifications are better seen in the proposal scene, which invariably takes up central stage in screen adaptations of *Emma* and to which Brown dedicates a close analysis, focusing on how and why this particular moment in the novel has proved difficult to bring on screen:

[Austen] does four things in the chapter which film versions have difficulty rendering. One of them is to decline to show us everything. This is partly done by switching our attention away from what is happening between the characters at the climax of the scene, to direct it instead to what is happening within Emma. [...] That points to the second thing Jane Austen's doing: she is drawing upon a then popular psychology which allows cognition a greater role than the popular depth psychology of today. The effect of our attention shifting from the immediate scene to what is going on inside Emma's mind is, ironically, to insist that, even in the moment in which it unfolds, this scene of romantic love cannot be only about the lovers, and is certainly not about a romantic unity which saves them from having to worry how they will appear to each other never mind anyone else. So the third feature of the conversation is the sustained awareness Austen communicates of its implications for people other than the principals. Lastly, the narrator's ironic asides and turns of phrase highlight the incongruities of the resulting narration. (219-220)

Further analysing the same scene in several adaptations, Brown finds that the difficulty in adapting *Emma* in particular may reside in our time's complex notions concerning the realistic representation of subjectivity:

To the extent that we've internalized film's ways of representing people, and allowed ourselves to assume that by a kind of naive photographic realism the inner life of characters can be communicated merely by pointing a camera at them (which cannot literally be the case, but it's a seductive and pervasive idea), we've adopted a model of subjectivity and how to communicate it which, at crucial points, is incompatible with Austen's. (224)

Although Brown does not extrapolate in that direction, it seems obvious nonetheless that such incompatibility is one of the reasons for the creation of an alternative, composite idea of Austen (the one I have been trying to discuss since the first chapter), which owes its existence and evolution to the two centuries of reworking and reception of Austen's novels. And although screen adaptations only occupy the later half of that period, their ability to visually imprint on audiences' memories makes them major contributors to Austen's image in the twenty-first century.

Besides Parrill and Brown I would also briefly mention Marina Cano's contribution to the discussion of *Emma's* afterlives. In her monograph *Jane Austen and Performance* (2017), Cano looks into the appropriation of Austen's text from the perspective of performance. This she sees as a broad(ening) process which comes close to the notion of adaptation itself:

Austen wrote in scenes (like a dramatist) and her writing has the capacity to rapidly transport readers to the scenes she created. [...] It is this performative force of Jane Austen (of her work and its afterlives) that explains her longstanding popularity. Austen's work "acts" by producing more of itself, duplicating itself amoeba-like, just as it acts on the lives of ordinary readers by bringing reparation, communality and even writing inspiration—whether this be to soldiers reading Austen's novels in the trenches during World War I or modern readers discovering writing through Austen fan fiction. [...] Readers have been "doing things" with Austen and her novels for the last two hundred years. Austen's works act and are acted upon through the plethora of adaptations, prequels, sequels, continuations, rewritings and spin-offs that reinterpret the earlier texts in various media. If the performative enacts what it names, these derivate (and often denigrated) works have been instrumental in creating the Austen name and the Austen myth, which they supposedly fete and signify. (3-4)

Cano later makes her broad notion of performance clearer, stating “[it] does not require a stage as it penetrates every act of communication and is present in all aspects of life—from the street and the shopping mall to the court of law.” (7) – a notion very close to the way I understand adaptation in the context of the present work. Cano’s insight into *Emma* (the only novel she signals out by devoting it an entire chapter) includes amateur theatricals alongside the already known stage versions.¹⁴⁹ With a focus on “theatrical and printed recalibrations” (11) instead of the more common film adaptations, Cano focuses on the (post-)war period of the 1940s and 1950s in order to uncover the reasons for an unusual preference for performing *Emma* during that particularly troubled time. In her opinion *Emma* distinguishes itself from the other Austen novels for another trait signalling its peculiarity:

Emma in particular functions as a cultural thermometer, measuring the temperature of the nation: this is a nation struggling to renew itself, and Austen’s most English novel, where national identity is of the essence, is a pre-eminent site for debating what the modern English nation should be. The Austen classic is recalibrated in light of contemporary concerns, but contemporary concerns are also recalibrated through the Austen classic. Her work remains integral to the identity of the nation and to what it means to be English for those at home and abroad. (102)

This characteristic of *Emma* as “a cultural thermometer” is particularly thought provoking. Partly it is nothing new, in the sense that this is an intrinsic feature of adaptations, as both the history of adaptation and the previous chapter help to make clear. However, limited focus on a particular adaptation, or even several adaptations based on the same work or works by the same author (be that writer, director, or other creator), risks making us blind to the more general context surrounding one particular, or several, adaptation(s). In a way, the obsession with fidelity to a previous written text, an issue dealt with on the previous chapter, may be seen as a consequence of such approach. Andrew Higson’s word of caution inevitably comes to mind:

[T]here is an extensive academic debate about Austen screen dramas as literary adaptations, a debate which itself, even when it is least complimentary about the dramas, reinforces the relationship between them and their literary forebears. It is therefore important to engage with the adaptation debate and to consider its terms of reference. But it is also important to move beyond that debate and to

¹⁴⁹ She gives relevance to the 1944 theatrical adaptation by the Progressive Players of Gateshead, which “transforms *Emma* into a social, even socialist, tale” (90) and the popular, recurrently staged script by Gordon Glennon (published in 1945) – see Cano (81-105).

look at the films and television programmes as cultural products in their own right, cultural products that engage with other concerns besides Austen's, and whose intertextual references are by no means limited to her novels. Indeed, for some audiences, the novels are simply not part of the world in which the films and television programmes operate. (*Film England* 128)

Although Higson's position risks dismissing, along with the fidelity shackles, the meaningful layers brought by closely looking into adapted text and adaptation,¹⁵⁰ the emphasis on the cultural significance of a particular adaptation in a given moment in time seems to me still worth calling attention to. When the adapted text is Austen's *Emma*, a particularly complex text by a uniquely complex authorial figure, then this issue gains even more relevance and as such it will also guide my subsequent analysis of the chosen adaptations.

A closer (if brief) look into the screen adaptations of *Emma* that might have contributed to our own contemporary notion of both the character and the book is now needed. In order to establish a working corpus, I will briefly analyse all available adaptations of *Emma* made for screen before the new millennium by focusing on specific scenes/sequences: the initial sequence, the Box Hill picnic, and the proposal scene and final sequence (whether they are one or two separate moments in the adaptations). I will also pay attention to the characterisation of the heroine as well as to some additional scenes whenever they make a special contribution to that object's identity.

The golden age of TV and film: from the 1970s to the 1990s

Emma (1972, BBC)

Of all the adaptations listed by Wright, the only one available today to a general audience is the 1972 BBC production, directed by John Glenister and with a screenplay by Denis Constanduros. Composed of 6 episodes, it is of all the available adaptations the one more markedly dated. Although this is to some extent a

¹⁵⁰ In 2003 Higson had already departed from the adaptation discussion, leaving it out of that book's scope – see introduction to *English Heritage, English Cinema*. In this more recent book he addresses the issue more directly (see 130-131), but still in reductionist terms, namely as he classifies every adaptation study starting with the adapted literary text as short-sighted.

consequence of technological limitations in television production at the time, for critics such as Sarah Cardwell it is also part of an aesthetic and commercial strategy. When looking into the early “classic serials” which marked the beginning of adaptations made exclusively for television, Cardwell claimed that:

Textually, 1970s adaptations [...] exhibit an overt ‘literariness’ through an excessive reliance upon language and a downplaying of the pictorial or visually impressive or expressive. They are understated, slow-paced and somewhat prosaic by today’s standards, but these features worked to mark them out as quality pieces, as different from other television. (*Adaptation Revisited* 82)

Thus, although not in itself a filmed stage production as previous adaptations, the 1972 BBC adaptation of *Emma* is, in several aspects, still close to those earlier filmed dramatizations, a trait shared with other similar productions of the period. In fact, Cardwell finds that, unlike other contemporary television programmes, “classic-novel adaptations conventionalized many of these early aesthetic traits and one can find them in adaptations up to and into the 1970s.” (“Literature on the small screen” 185)

These early aesthetic traits include a tendency to value writing and words above other modes of communicating meaning and the predominant use of indoor sets and fixed cameras. The feeling is thus of a “stagy” production, an effect which being at least in part intentional, reaffirms the production’s claim to a higher cultural status, closer to the literary classic it adapts. This closeness has contributed to the labelling of this (and other more or less contemporary) television adaptation(s) of Austen’s novels as a classic serial, a perspective that has framed one of the earliest and most-thorough *Emma*-focused academic studies, Monica Lauritzen’s *Jane Austen’s Emma on television: a study of a BBC classic serial* (1981).

The adaptation starts with the title *Emma* appearing on screen over a close-up of pink hydrangeas, quickly followed by the indications “by Jane Austen” and “dramatized by Denis Constanduros”, accompanied by a piano piece as soundtrack.¹⁵¹ The choice of the hydrangeas was meaningful: according to Parril, “[the director, John] Glenister said in a letter that he consciously began and ended his film showing hydrangeas in bloom, flowers which he says bloom in early autumn.” (144) The adaptation therefore begins by subtly claiming its closeness to the novel, whose plot develops between late September and November of the following year.

¹⁵¹ An instrumental version of “The Twenty-Ninth of May”, by John Playford (1623-1686).

Although keeping with Austen's well-known temporal accuracy (a detail which would become a staple in BBC adaptations of the novelist), the result is nonetheless static and unimpressive, making clear from the very beginning this adaptation's closeness to the earlier televised dramatizations. In Parrill's view, it is evidence that "[t]he makers of this film were obviously not much concerned with immediately catching the attention of the viewer." (133) After this close-up of the hydrangeas, the camera moves to a shot encompassing a typical English (red-brick) country mansion, meant to stand for Hartfield, from where some carriages are departing. This shot also allows for a picturesque effect, made possible not only by the quite long static shot but also by the framing of Hartfield as if it were the principal subject of a painting (Fig. 4). The composition is itself evocative of the improved natural landscaping work of Lancelot "Capability" Brown (c. 1715-1783) and others, which had as one of its chief principles to shape a unified picture of the English country house in its natural setting, creating a standard image we now have come to recognise as typically English even if forgetting the former highly elaborate formal (French) gardens that were once in vogue. Thus this opening sequence also reinforces the adaptation's "quality" status.

The camera then cuts to the indoor setting of Hartfield's entrance hall (clearly a studio set which will feature prominently throughout the adaptation), as Emma (Doran Goodwin) turns back inside the house (presumably she has just said goodbye to the Westons), followed by a maid who closes the door. She reaches the staircase and pauses, apparently reflecting on the change this wedding might cause to her daily life, before going to an upstairs room to join her father and Mr Knightley. The whole sequence is, apart from the brief piece used in the title scene, without musical cues or soundtrack, the only sound being diegetic (footsteps, the ruffle of Emma's long dress, doors opening and closing, and, in the last part of the sequence, dialogue). The dialogue between Emma, Mr Knightley and Mr Woodhouse (also in studio set) follows closely, in general terms, on Austen's novel and constitutes the longer part of this initial sequence (Fig. 5). It evidences Emma and Mr Knightley's lively and intelligent conversations as well as Emma's ability to manage her father's complaints and preoccupations.

The Box-Hill picnic scene (episode 5) features one of several cuttings in this adaptation, no doubt for reasons of screen economy. Both Mr Elton and, more surprisingly, Jane Fairfax are absent, thus the scene loses part of its impact in

exposing Emma's insensitive behaviour to Jane Fairfax, while following Frank Churchill's lead. As it is, the scene, one of the few entirely filmed outdoors, is limited to Emma's insult on Miss Bates with the consequent scolding by Mr Knightley, the famous "Badly done, Emma!" (written by Austen and ever since often repeated by admirers of the novel), being left out. The shortness of the scene however limits the display of Emma's lack of thoughtfulness, even if the next and last episode begins with Emma visiting Miss Bates and apologising.

When adaptations of *Emma* are concerned, the proposal scene of this production is notoriously known for its downplayed romantic appeal. Although the scene starts and is meant to be outdoors, the proposal scene itself is filmed in a studio standing for a quiet corner on Hartfield's park, inside a gazebo (Fig. 6). This structure frames (and unites) Emma and Mr Knightley and precludes a change in Emma's situation for the better if compared with a previous scene in which Emma was framed standing alone by a window, as she looked outside, on a gloomy and rainy view. With both Emma and Mr Knightley sitting down the camera is practically static (which again is not unusual in this adaptation), alternating or tilting between several medium or two shots. Because the scene in which Emma realises she had mistaken Harriet's object of affection is cut short without Harriet ever understanding Emma's error, we are kept from witnessing Emma's quick intellect at work, not to mention her open acknowledgment of the fact that Mr Knightley must be no one else's but her own.

The adaptation chooses to keep Emma silenced, as we watch her looking sadly out of a window at first and then taking a lonely stroll in the park: it seems to rely on the audience's previous knowledge of the adaptation to whom Emma's melancholic behaviour must be enough. As for the proposal itself, the fact that it takes place early in the last episode also does not add to the romantic climax, which is safely said to be missing from this particular adaptation. Unlike most of *Emma*'s adaptations the final sequence is a social meeting (on occasion of visiting the Westons' newly born child) in which the two forthcoming happy couples (Emma and Mr Knightley, Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill) are seen side by side for the first time. The scene seems made to celebrate the restoration of generalized harmony, in social, rather than in romantic, terms (Fig. 7).

As for Emma, the casting of Doran Goodwin (Fig. 8) has frequently been criticised by viewers and critics alike,¹⁵² mostly based on an overtly theatrical performance, with her studied pronunciation and rigid posture. In this initial sequence, she is presented as a cold, calculating character. Even if her dissimulation and studied air may be justified as a way of coping with the loss of her invaluable companion, Miss Taylor, the unavoidable effect is, from the very first moments of the adaptation, that of pushing her away from the viewers' empathy and, consequently, their sympathy as well. Some lighter moments do occur, especially when she interacts with Mr Knightley, to whom she does connect very well, at an intellectual level. However, she is usually arrogant and cold, even to Harriet later on, who almost always seems to put her out of her nerves. Again, director John Glenister said of Emma that she "seemed to fit the classic case of psychoneurotic" and that being the case he wanted "somebody who would appear highly strung" (Parrill 117). It seems the 1972 adapters have taken Austen's reported and often repeated comments too seriously, and unlike what happens in subsequent adaptations, there is no real attempt to make Emma a heroine whom the audience might identify with.

After the 1972 adaptation by the BBC, no other adaptation of Emma was made, for television or cinema, despite the golden decade for heritage in 1980s, which included several other Austen adaptations, namely *Pride and Prejudice* (1980, dir. Cyril Coke), *Sense and Sensibility* (1981, dir. Rodney Bennett), *Mansfield Park* (1983, dir. David Giles), and *Northanger Abbey* (1986, dir. Giles Foster). The next decade, on the contrary, was prolific and no less than three different adaptations of *Emma* – two feature films (only one of which is a period film) and one TV film – came out in 1996.

Emma (1996, A&E/Meridian)

A&E/Meridian's 1996 adaptation is a particularly valuable example of how the process of adapting *Emma/Emma* is revealing of Austen's composite reconstruction as it shows us how each adaptation tries to find its place in this very particular construct. One of the lesser known of *Emma*'s screen versions – it is frequently neglected in favour of the other two recent and better known adaptations of

¹⁵² See for instance <https://madeleinejust.livejournal.com/tag/emma%201972> or <http://old-fashionedcharm.blogspot.pt/2010/02/bbc-emma-1972.html>.

the novel, Miramax's 1996 film and BBC's 2009 series – the production of A&E/Meridian's television film stands as a significant moment in the evolution of how this novel and this heroine's singularity is successfully adapted on-screen. This particular production does not stand alone in the ITV production and broadcasting scheme (Meridian being a part of the ITV group), and it would become part of what is known as "The Jane Austen Season".¹⁵³ Following fast on BBC's major success, *Pride and Prejudice* (1995), this production aimed at becoming the new costume drama hit by enrolling several members of the latter crew, including acclaimed screenwriter Andrew Davies, as well as creating a winning cast list by combining a number of experienced actors, such as Bernard Hepton, with rising stars Mark Strong and Kate Beckinsale.

As had been the case with *Pride and Prejudice*, the way in which Davies' script re-interpreted Austen's work would both update the novel and the heroine to a 1990s' audience and influence subsequent re-creations of Emma. Nevertheless, it had also many challenges put before it, the first being, to use Austen's own words, how could *Emma* compete with such "delightful a creature" as Lizzie Bennett (Le Faye, *Jane Austen's Letters* 210), especially given the success of BBC's 1995 adaptation, which it immediately succeeded and which was created by the same team although for a different network? The adaptation's team was well aware of such challenges, with producers Sue Birtwistle and Susie Conklin acknowledging just that:

Unlike most of Austen's other heroines, Emma doesn't need to marry for financial security which, as she points out to Harriet one day, means she can see no reason for marrying at all. But these aren't the only qualities which set her apart. More disturbingly, particularly for a modern audience, she's a social snob who wants everything done in her own terms, and she interferes (often with disastrous results) in other people's lives. Without softening Jane Austen's intentions for television, there was a need to dramatize her in such a way as to prevent the audience from switching off. (*The Making Of Jane Austen's Emma* 8)

This adaptation of *Emma*, in the form of a 107-minute-long TV film, works its transformation of the heroine through a carefully constructed screenplay and Davies'

¹⁵³ *Emma* actually inaugurated ITV's incursion into Austen, re-inspiring a production/exhibition phase, in 2007, which included, apart from a repeat-showing of *Emma*, the newly-aired: *Mansfield Park* (dir. Iain B. MacDonald), *Northanger Abbey* (dir. Jon Jones), and *Persuasion* (dir. Simon Burke). Unlike the BBC, ITV has not abandoned Austen adaptations, having recently aired an adaptation of Austen's unfinished novel *Sanditon* (2019, dir. Blackburn, Clarke, and Sturridge), scripted by Andrew Davies.

strategies are particularly thought provoking for the reshaping of Emma as a character for modern audiences and are evident in effect even in the initial sequence. In what had already developed as a trademark of his scripts, Andrew Davies contradicts the established cliché of the genre, as defined by Sarah Cardwell (when analysing another Davies script):

On almost every occasion, and markedly in the case of *Pride and Prejudice*, classic-novel adaptations begin with generic long-take long shots accompanied by elegant classical music. These shot sequences establish a mood that is then reinforced, developed and heightened through the use of other generic shots and scenes throughout the adaptation. (146)

However, even in Cardwell's chosen example, the 1995 *Pride and Prejudice*, Davies subverted viewers expectations by contrasting a classical title sequence with an initial sequence in which two galloping horses and then their riders literally stir the *status quo*, both in the fictional and the non-fictional universes. His take on *Emma* shares in the same strategy by inaugurating its screen time with a brief and unexpected night scene of poultry theft, in which poachers raise uproar in an otherwise quiet and dormant Hartfield. After the title comes on-screen, the film begins with a scene of Emma (Kate Beckinsale) and her father, Mr Woodhouse (Bernard Hepton), in their carriage as they drive Miss Taylor to her wedding to Mr Weston (Fig. 9).

The first impression of this Emma is that of a sweet young girl, loving to her friends and particularly to her valetudinarian father. In the short carriage scene, the script makes this obvious in two specific references, "Emma, already in, leans towards him to give him a hand..." and "Emma arranges the rug over Mr Woodhouse's knees" (Birtwistle and Conklin, *The Making Of Jane Austen's Emma* 78). Although none of the indications made it through on-screen, her care and patience are evident enough, even in such a brief sequence. When alone at night with her father, Emma appears rather calm and reserved, content with her situation, which, although privileged, is somewhat sad and lonely when considering her age: an idea particularly emphasized by the gloomy and grim atmosphere of the poorly lit set used for this first scene of Hartfield at night. Choosing to emphasize these characteristics of Emma in presenting her to the viewers is important for, as Lauritzen argued "Emma's behaviour to her father serves [...] as a counterbalance to the more offensive aspects of her character, in that it demonstrates her capacity for consideration and unselfish affection" (72).

The snobbishness for which Emma is perhaps best known is thus absent from the viewer's first impression of the character. The various short scenes that depict Emma and her father's attendance of Miss Taylor's wedding and their return home also seem far from Austen's very blunt description of her as "having too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself" (*E* 3). Curiously enough, the final product goes beyond Davies' smoothing of Emma's character, as the only hint on the script of Emma's snob attitude never makes it into the final cut.¹⁵⁴ Although this omission may well be a matter of screen economy, it is interesting to find that the only hint of Emma's pride in the first scene of Davies' screenplay is cut, favouring instead a representation of her father, who promptly greets a group of farm workers as the carriage drives past them. The next scene shows us Mr Knightley (Mark Strong) as he arrives at Hartfield, at night, his first line directed at a servant to ask about him and his family (Fig. 10). Because Emma's snobbish attitude towards the farm workers was never shown, the contrast with Mr Knightley's superior attitude is not offered to the viewers' contemplation. As for Emma, even when she proclaims her abilities in matchmaking she does so in a rather timid and naïve way, thus reinforcing her positive image during the entire initial sequence. The casting of rising star Kate Beckinsale, very young at the time, also reaffirms this initial evaluation of the character.

Unlike the case of the previous adaptation, the Box Hill scene in this adaptation is allotted extended screen time, as both the journey of the travellers as well as the efforts of the many servants needed to make a picnic possible on top of a steep hill are both depicted (Fig. 11). The latter is of particular significance: the inclusion of the servants and the degree of frivolous entertainment to which their effort is spent on is often presented by critics as evidence of Davies' social-politically conscious script (Brown 227).¹⁵⁵ As for the main events of the scene – the game of anagrams in which Emma misreads the exchange between Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax and her own insult to Miss Bates –, these seem to be adapted as closely as possible to the novel and as such they must strike the viewer as different for displaying a side of Emma, particularly as the two games in which Emma's behaviour

¹⁵⁴ “[Mr. Woodhouse, Emma and Miss Taylor are in the carriage, on the way to the latter's wedding] Respectful villagers on the road are raising their hats. Emma acknowledges them graciously too, rather like royalty... When they've passed, the villagers [as you might] look at each other, as though to say 'All right for them'. (Birtwistle and Conklin, *The Making of Jane Austen's Emma* 79, original emphasis)”

¹⁵⁵ For more on the subject see also Hopkins (“Servants”).

is reproachable are here joint together in the same scene.¹⁵⁶ Emma must thus be censured by the viewer, just as she is by the looks of the patriarchs, Mr Weston and Mr Knightley. Even so, the scene seems to suggest that Emma is guilty only of a momentarily mistake, a slip which does not derive from a defect of character, like arrogance or pride, but from her being immature and influenceable. This is reinforced in the way she reacts to Mr Knightley's scolding (avoiding to look at him and crying) and even in her penitence scene with Miss Bates the following morning, in which she stays silent, eyes and head bowed down. She also seems more heartily committed to refrain from meddling in other people's lives, the dialogue in which Harriet reveals she admires someone far above her in social terms being particularly short and with no real encouragement on Emma's side.

As for the proposal scene it is, of the three to be considered at the moment, the most natural: Strong's portrayal of Mr Knightley's feelings of fear, compassion, hope, and tenderness (for Emma) as well as jealousy and anger – DiPaolo, for instance, claimed for Mark Strong that “it is possible that he plays Mr. Knightley as somewhat too jealous and a bit too angry” (114) – are intertwined in well-acted sequence and Beckinsale's Emma manages to match his acting with both youthful modesty and the serenity of the now more self-aware character. This does not exclude a more cinematically romantic take on the proposal scene, as Emma's reply to Mr Knightley's proposal – “I do, I do” – is more reminiscent of the sentimentally imbued repetitions of the final chapter in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (435-6) than of the rational treatment of the same moment in Austen's *Emma* (469). Even so, in the end the scene comes out as a more successful adaptation to screen of one of the less romantic of Austen's unromantic marriage proposals and it also becomes much easier to accept the pairing up of these two characters than was the case with the 1972 adaptation. Following the proposal scene itself (which takes place at the Hartfield garden, near a low stone fountain) (Fig. 12) the adaptation moves to three short scenes – one of Emma realising at night she must tell Harriet, the next of Harriet telling Emma she has accepted Mr Martin, and another of Mr Woodhouse being told the news – before introducing the final sequence: the harvest supper.

Even if the proposal scene manages to balance Austen's text with screen conventions, it is its final sequence, the harvest supper (Fig. 13), that makes possible

¹⁵⁶ In the novel, the game with the alphabet letters takes place in Hartfield, in chapter forty-one, and the Box-Hill picnic happens later on chapter forty-three.

the climax of romantic fulfilment in this adaptation, proving to be another manifestation of the screenwriter's intervention in the novel's romantic politics. This scene is intended, according to Davies, to give "a sense of [...] wholeness in the community" (qtd in Birtwistle and Conklin, *The Making Of Jane Austen's Emma* 58), as well as to offer a balanced ending to this adaptation of *Emma*. As an alternative to the traditional final wedding scene of Austen adaptations, the harvest supper (which ends with a dance where the three soon-to-be-wed couples take centre-stage) also responds to the audience's expectations of a romantic climax: "Though the last shot in the telefilm is of turkey thieves, reminding us there is still trouble in paradise, the images before that generally reinforce a sense of expanded community as the clincher for the happy ending." (Troost and Greenfield, "Filming Highbury")

The harvest supper scene is also significant for an additional reason. In Parrill's opinion, this is one of multiple scenes in this adaptation where a clear modern revisionist strategy is revealed, the harvest supper turning into a moment in the script in which Andrew Davies "created an idealized situation which would be appealing to people who are ignorant of the reality of the early nineteenth century but who would like for it to have been that way." (*Jane Austen on Film and Television* 132)¹⁵⁷ In this interpretation she is joined by Brown who states, "[i]t has an air of wish-fulfilment – for us as much as for Emma" (229).¹⁵⁸ This could in fact be the reason why the scripted conversation between Emma and Jane Fairfax, in which they apologise for each other's behaviour, is cut from the final product.¹⁵⁹ The only remnant of this conciliatory moment is the final conversation between Emma and Frank Churchill. But this conversation is, instead, one that ultimately serves to underline the truthfulness of Emma and Knightley's future life by hinting at its contrast in Frank and Jane's.¹⁶⁰ In light of both Parrill's and Brown's reading, the question which must be raised however is how much of this scene works to indulge

¹⁵⁷ Parrill had already classified this adaptation as "the most socially revisionist of the three films", saying that it introduced a social critique on the times of the novel, apparently breaking with the fabricated heavenly image of Regency England. She further claimed that "[w]hereas the other films appear to accept the social environment of the early nineteenth century, the Meridian/A&E *Emma* contains fairly explicit critiques of it." (*Jane Austen on Film and Television* 131).

¹⁵⁸ Brown elaborates on this further: "In the context of a film which has used noir cinematography to show us both Emma's fantasies and her nightmares, it is reasonable to wonder whether this scene also is not a fantasy. Perhaps not Emma's fantasy, though it plainly does represent the realization of her wishes, so much as ours: a democratic fantasy of Austen as essentially one of us." (230)

¹⁵⁹ See Birtwistle and Conklin (*The Making of Jane Austen's Emma* 152-153).

¹⁶⁰ From J.P.C. Brown's perspective "A distinctly modern, somewhat Freudian and unforgiving psychology informs Davies's diagnosis and condemnation of Frank. Austen's interest, by comparison, is more in cognition and in the possibility that Frank will learn from Jane." (229)

viewers in a certain nostalgia for a constructed past or is set as mere backdrop against which the better fortunes of the main characters look even more appealing to a modern audience?

Davies' greater contribution to the afterlives of *Emma* nevertheless may be in reshaping its main character into someone the audience can, indisputably, identify with. Unlike Austen, Davies' screenplay avoids the potentially alienating strategy of confronting the audience with a heroine apparently so unlike any other Austen heroine. Opposed to the reader of the novel, confronted with an apparently unsuitable heroine whose limitations (personal and socially imposed) he or she is challenged to understand, the viewer is presented from the start with an empathetic heroine whose failings are meant to be framed and, ultimately, forgiven. Davies' conscious interpretation of *Emma* implies, therefore, a reworking of a snobbish and proud character into an empathetic if flawed heroine whose personal improvement the viewer is meant to appraise. Perhaps such a complex character, with a long psychological and emotional growth throughout the narrative, would be difficult to portray in an already particularly fast-paced film.

Screen economy may on several occasions have imposed a greater softening of the character, just as *Emma*'s on-screen likeability may have to the series' executive producers, but in its essence Davies' screenplay works to build a multi-layered heroine whose flaws are meant to be displayed and taken as part of a believable heroine. As the narrative goes on, and *Emma*'s meddling character stands out, that which Austen had defined as "a disposition to think a little too well of herself" is continually lessened, as screenwriter Andrew Davies chooses to emphasize *Emma*'s "artistic sensibility", thus softening her possibly annoying attitudes by making them the result of an over sensitive character who, much like that of a novelist, cannot restrain herself from imagining (sometimes wildly) and controlling other characters' narratives.¹⁶¹ One of the devices used to attain this purpose is by filming *Emma*'s reveries or fantasies as a way to bring her closer to the audience, for as Davies explains: "It makes her much more likeable, because we all day-dream" (qtd. in Birtwistle and Conklin, *The Making Of Jane Austen's Emma* 9). Such an option, while making her a more likeable character, has perhaps an unintended effect.

¹⁶¹ See Davies in Birtwistle and Conklin (*The Making of Jane Austen's Emma* 9).

In fact, the proliferation of such scenes (a total of five)¹⁶² tends to draw attention to Emma's immaturity, as aspect further emphasized by the casting of a very young-looking Kate Beckinsale (Fig. 14).¹⁶³ On the other hand, the absence of a sexual dimension prevents the effect infused by Davies in the 1995 TV adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*. Apart from that, and in J. P. C. Brown's view, Davies' Emma has also been slowed down, with a scripted exclamation "Oh Lord, Harriet!" coming hours after the encounter with Mr. Knightley and "a *daze of love*" (222). Even given this detail, no doubt meant to emphasize the emotional (rather than the rational) side of the heroine, this adaptation does seem to be compensate it in the scene with Mr Woodhouse in which Emma's quickness of mind surprises even Mr Knightley: in bringing out the issue of the poultry thieves (as an argument for the need of having a young man around) she ultimately convinces a fearful Mr Woodhouse to consent for the marriage.

As a contrast, particularly in terms of representing the heroine on screen, one might look into McGrath's film, which premiered the same year. Although also attempting to round Emma's harsher edges for its audience, this screen adaptation of *Emma* adopts a different strategy. Probably the most well-known film adaptation of *Emma*, McGrath's adaptation for Miramax and Matchmaker Films has left an enduring, if not necessarily successful, image of Emma as a modern, feminine, intelligent and fashionable girl. Building on Gwyneth Paltrow's rising status as a star at the time, the film creates a feeling of "youthful country freshness and city-chick sophistication" (Schwarzbaum), a significant divergence from the literary character but an effective compensation for the supposed less-likeable aspects of the heroine.

Emma (1996, Miramax)

The 1996 *Emma* produced by Miramax (with Matchmaker Films and Haft Entertainment) is a romantic comedy much in the same way as the other titles released in the 1990s, such as *You've Got Mail* (1998, dir. Nora Ephron) or *Notting Hill* (1999, dir. Roger Mitchell). Andrew Higson notes that such generic fitting is

¹⁶² Mr Elton and Harriet's wedding, Emma and Frank Churchill's imaginary meeting, a storm off Weymouth, Mr Knightley and Jane Fairfax' wedding, Frank Churchill and Harriet galloping away as a couple.

¹⁶³ At the time 23, playing the 21-year-old Emma. Although it does not seem like it, Beckinsale was slightly older than Doran Godwin, who was 22 when she played Emma.

evident in the tagline promoting the film (“this season, cupid is armed and dangerous”), to the extent that it overshadows a mention of Austen’s authorship (Fig. 15).¹⁶⁴ A box-office success grossing 22 million dollars in the USA, with production costs of only 6.3 million pounds (Higson, *Film England* 157), the film stars Gwyneth Paltrow, to whom it served as star-vehicle. On the subject of casting Paltrow as Emma, Parrill for instance sides with that choice, particularly when comparing her to Kate Beckinsale and Doran Godwin:

Since Emma is a character who is easy to dislike, having an appealing actress like Paltrow play the role is an advantage. She makes Emma a sympathetic figure, even when she is at her most wrong-headed, and she is easy to forgive when she admits that she has been wrong. [...] Beckinsale, on the other hand, seems querulous and cold; Godwin, stiff and superior. [...] Janey Fothergill, the casting director for the Meridian/A&E version, felt that Beckinsale possesses many of Emma’s personality traits: “She has a great confidence, is very intelligent and is aware of the fact that she’s good-looking, and well spoken” (Bistwistle, *Emma* 15). This concept of Emma is the more traditional one. These same qualities could be stated of Gwyneth Paltrow. The big difference is a matter of charisma, and Paltrow has it. (123-124)¹⁶⁵

In *Entertainment Weekly*’s original 1996 review of *Emma* (which the magazine republished online to celebrate the film’s 20th anniversary), Paltrow’s emerging persona as a celebrity and her interpretation of Emma are seen as intimately linked:

[I]n her first starring role, her signature style of youthful country freshness and city-chick sophistication are used to good advantage to create a heroine clever enough to strategize about the matrimonial welfare of others, but blind to her own romantic happiness. (Schwarzbaum)

That contemporary “city-chick sophistication”, which is actually a significant divergence from the literary character, seems to have been used as a kind of compensation for the supposed less likeable aspects of this very unique Austen heroine. Missing the more socially conscious details of the Andrew Davies’s script, this film is, in Lisa Hopkins’s words, “an altogether prettier, glossier affair than the A&E/Meridian version” (“Servants”).

¹⁶⁴ He also remarks that “[...] strangely, in the publicity images used in the USA, Emma is armed with a bow and arrow, and a very cheeky expression, whereas in the images used in the UK, she’s armed with a teacup!” (*Film England* 141) Stereotypical representations apart, the aid tagline seem to work better with the American version of the poster.

¹⁶⁵ Parrill also compares casting choices for other characters, including Mr Knightley, Harriet Smith, Frank Churchill, Jane Fairfax and other minor characters (124-131).

As was the case with A&E/Meridian's film, this adaptation begins with a full credit sequence. This sequence is, however, particularly meaningful in the Miramax film, where the first object to appear on screen is a planet similar to Earth, spinning very fast against a black, starry background/universe against which the credits appear. As we close in on the planet, the title sequence turns into the initial scene proper by means of a transition from this image of a rotating planet Earth to a painted globe held by Emma and presented as a wedding gift she made herself for the Westons (Fig. 16).¹⁶⁶ The globe is thus revealed as being quite small and the fact that it being held spinning by Emma (of whom we have an immediate close-up) means it stands metaphorically for the small microcosms of the story and, in Parril's interpretation, "[i]t suggests the little world of Highbury of which Emma is the queen, and also prepares the viewer to focus on this world." (134) It also affirms from the very beginning both the centrality and the exceptionality of Emma herself who, holding the globe by a string, assumes her role of master puppeteer, visually representing what Rachel M. Brownstein described for the novel: "Emma [...] dangerously imagines herself a splendid free young goddess whose connection to most people is an amused puppeteer's (or novelist's)." (*Becoming* 104)

The Miramax film also assumes from the beginning that, although a period adaptation of Austen (taking care, for instance, to locate its story in Highbury, England as the above mentioned globe stops and the screen frames Great Britain), it is also an American production following different conventions from its British television counterparts. That identity is literally expressed in the typical voiceover narration (here remarkably done with a female voice) effecting the transition between the title sequence and the initial scene proper: "In a time when one's town was one's world ... and the actions at a dance excited greater interest than the movement of armies ... there lived a young woman who knew how this world should be run."

More than promoting reverence towards the canonical author and her work, this adaptation is built on the premise that the Austen it adapts is the post-modern construct known by its target audience. This brief introduction thus takes for granted long-repeated critical notions of Austen (namely that her works are oblivious to the troubled politics of their time) while at the same time assuring audiences'

¹⁶⁶ It is interesting to note that the style of the painting (miniaturised and linking different parts with threads or ribbons) as well as its use of colour (blue and gold) is reminiscent of the title page in the 1909 Dent/Dutton edition, which includes C.E. Brock's illustrations – see <http://www.strangeirl.org/emma/gallery/v/brock1909/Emma+title.jpg.html> .

expectations concerning the inclusion of that unavoidable staple element of on-screen Austen, Regency balls. The clear-cut description of Emma as “a young woman who knew how this world should be run” works to present her apparent defects in a benign light, even if it omits the complex situation of the heroine at the beginning of the novel. The strategy of presenting Emma as sweet and well intentioned is continued in the initial scene, which Emma dominates: in the very first moments, she either occupies the entirety of the screen or is right at the centre of it, like a queen bee surrounded by her subjects. In this sequence, as in the rest of the film, the camera delights in displaying Emma’s beauty. Unlike the 1972 series, this adaptation thus attempts, for its very first moments, to round Emma’s harsher edges for its audience. Thus we are shown, in this scene and the next at Hartfield in the first dinner without Miss Taylor, how Emma is sad for the loss of her friend but still manages to keep in good spirits for the sake of others. The scene at Hartfield, with her father and Mr Knightley, aims at intimacy, with lighting mimicking candle-lit rooms, and the three characters sitting down around the fireplace (of which we can even hear the crackling sounds). The placing of Emma and Mr Knightley, one at each side of the screen, facing each other on the foreground (Mr Woodhouse sitting at the background) also hints at their final paring (Fig. 17). In fact, for Nora Nachumi this is only the first of several instances in this film in which “the camera [...] insists that the two be viewed as a pair.” (134)

The Box Hill picnic scene, which in this version seems to follow the strawberry picking in the woods rather than at Donwell Abbey (Fig. 18), is interesting for the way it positions Frank Churchill: his suggestion of a game is meant to work as a distraction (and interruption) from Mrs Elton’s pressure on Jane Fairfax to take a governess place and it is reasonable to suggest that Emma perceives as much, Mrs Elton’s lack of courtesy being noted by the entire party. Emma’s offense to Miss Bates however is more acerbic, as a result of her frustration for not responding to Mrs Elton’s uncivil response in denying playing the game. Nonetheless, the stronger reaction on Emma’s side serves the economy of the film better, as it heightens the confrontation between Emma and Mr Knightley when he chastises her for her behaviour: her almost continuous crying and his obvious regret in speaking to her in that manner makes this scene the most emotional among the ones seen so far.

Also meaningful is the following scene, when Emma tries to apologise by visiting Miss Bates the following day and she does not receive her. Apart from being

an opportunity to further show Emma's repentance and sadness (just as had happened with the first sequence, the viewer cannot help but to feel empathy towards Emma), this scene is also an opportunity for a glimpse of Old England charm, as Miss Bates's stone cottage, covered in ivy and flowers (Fig. 19) fits the romanticized view of the past. As a particularly acute but by no means isolated example of such strategy, this adaptation does seem to serve as an example to the often repeated accusations that heritage film, and linked to it a certain notion of national identity or Englishness, tends to become "an empty signifier, a brand name for a particular type of commodity or a particular economic space" (Higson, *Film England* 47).

As might be expected, the proposal scene in the case of this adaptation fits well into the clichéd rom-com recipe. The scene begins with Emma praying in a chapel after having realised (in what seems to her too late) that she is in love with Mr Knightley. As she exits the chapel through a stone archway (toppled with what seems to be mistletoe), the camera's perspective – a God's eye view – suggests her prayers were heard and she is met by Mr Knightley just as she goes round the chapel. Their walk back to Hartfield is an excuse for displaying some typically English scenery, from a flowery meadow, to a tree-shadowed lane by a river and finally a framing century old oak tree. The scene is then the climatic finale of a romantic, pretty and glossy adaptation, with every detail concurring to that end, from the bird sounds to a particularly flattering high-necked collar for Mr Knightley. His declaration speech is also the clearest of the late twentieth-century adaptations, with a full explanation of his attitudes and a straightforward declaration of his love:

I do not wish to call you my friend because I hope to call you something infinitely more dear. Have you not wondered why I never befriended Frank Churchill? It was because I knew he was intended for you. Indeed, when you insulted Miss Bates at the picnic, I thought that evidence of his influence over you. And I could not bear to see it. So I went away. But I went to the wrong place. My brother's house is usually a place of comfort for me but seeing your sister there kept you fresh in my mind. [background music restarts, low] And the torture, I assure you, was acute. I only felt hope again when I heard of Mr Churchill's engagement. And I rushed back... anxious for your feelings. Came to be near you. I rode through the rain. I... I'd ride through worse than that if I could just hear your voice telling me that I might at least have some chance to win you. [music grows]

The proposal scene offers a romantic closure and also an explanatory one, replacing Austen's unsentimental and even unsettling scene with a plainer, more satisfying experience for the viewer. It is interesting to see that Emma stays silent during Mr Knightley's long speech, frequently bowing her head down as if humbled by his declaration and finally smiling, as if thankful. Her first answer confirms the fairy-tale like feeling of the scene: "Mr Knightley, if I have not spoken it is because I am afraid I will waken myself from this dream."

Also, of the three adaptations, this is the only one in which Mr Knightley not only does not voice the novel's line "I cannot make speeches, Emma [...]. If I loved you less, I might be able to talk about it more." (*E* 469), but also the only one with the straightforward "Marry me? Marry me, my wonderful, darling friend", followed by a passionate kiss (and again two more, at the close of the scene, when the camera zooms out as if returning to the God's eye view perspective and the couple is again framed by the old tree) (Fig. 20). On a final note, if we agree with Brown that the Emma from the A&E/Meridian adaptation has been slowed down, then this Emma is no less deprived of her quickness of rationality, particularly as it attributes to Mr Knightley the final reasoning in favour of their union: "Maybe it is our imperfections which make us so perfect for one another." In Thornell's view, this line in particular also makes Knightley more the perfect choice for Emma as it "contributes to a sense of their equal footing" and "attenuates his role as a pedagogic voice of reason and censure." (29)

After the proposal, the scene in which first Mr Woodhouse (who surprisingly reacts cheerfully to the news) and then the Westons, the Bateses and finally Harriet are told the good news is shown at a distance, with the camera peering through a window, as one scene fades into the next one and the same voiceover from the title sequence quickly summarizes the action. Although this adaptation does not have a final celebration scene like the A&E/Meridian production, the one that follows the sequence above described does share in the same "air of wish-fulfilment" that Brown saw in the harvest supper. As Harriet comes to a gold-lighted greenhouse at Hartfield to tell Emma she has accepted Mr Martin's proposal, Emma's reply – "I hope you know I only wanted your happiness. Now that you have found it, it makes my own complete." – not only hints at a democratic equality in status (avoiding to hint at the obvious end of their friendship) but it also confirms Emma's ultimate good nature, thus justifying our own partiality towards her.

Finally, although this adaptation ends with Emma and Mr Knightley's wedding, it does give central stage, just like in the novel, to Mrs Elton's comment, speaking directly to the camera, on the "shocking lack of satin". Unlike the novel's deeply ironic tone, this seems just an opportunity to keep with the light tone of romantic-comedy conventions. The final sequence, in which the same voiceover narration reads almost *verbatim* the last words of the novel, is accompanied by a return to the painted globe motif, now depicting all of the happy couples joined through the course of the story – again the highly subversive words of Austen's novel gain the assurance of a happy ending, much in tune with Hollywood and romantic comedy generic conventions and also with what Jane Austen's stories have come to signify in terms of screen adaptations.

What happens before this scene, as had happened with other adaptations, is also of significance. In her conversation with Harriet, Emma's reaction is more open: she is unable to sit down and makes it clear, even to Harriet, that she is deeply upset by the revelation of her admiration of Mr Knightley. Emma's realisation of her love for Mr Knightley is also something that this adaptation makes sure is clear to the audience, making her voice it to Mrs Weston in the following scene, in an also typical girl-to-girl confidence moment, instead of somehow giving us direct access to Emma's thoughts. Keeping with the convention of such best friend scenes, this one is also not without its lighter moments, with Emma suggesting that Harriet's parents might be pirates and stating that she both loves and hates John Knightley as she imagines the contradictory advice he might give his brother as to a possible wedding to Harriet! The following sequence, which summarized how Emma spent her days in anticipation of Mr Knightley's return, continues with this jesting tone, playing with the audience's knowledge that everything will be alright in the end, perhaps not so much because they already know the story but because there can be no other possible outcome within the genre.

From a different perspective, but still in terms of a modernizing take, the 1996 Miramax adaptation stands out in the number scenes in which Emma is seen engaging in physical activities. Never mentioned in the novel, these scenes display this film's take on its heroine. These activities include her driving a gig all alone and shooting with a bow in company of Mr Knightley. These Parrill sees as symbolic of her character: "Both her control of her horse and her mastery of the bow function

symbolically to show her will to control situations. However, her control is threatened when her gig becomes stuck and when her aim goes awry.” (141)

Despite being used by the film to stress Emma’s strong and independent character, they are not, as might be thought, anachronistic, as both activities might be plausibly practiced by women in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth centuries.¹⁶⁷ Nonetheless, these scenes do serve this adaptation’s strategy of modernizing its heroine: Emma’s boosted independence seems aimed at siding with her the young female viewers of the 1990s, the time of girl power. This is achieved not only via visual cues but also verbal ones, as Suzanne Ferriss claims for the bow and arrow scene:

The image of Emma engaging simultaneously in athletic and verbal competition with Knightley has a particular resonance for contemporary women, who are regularly exhorted to “Just Do It” like their male counterparts. McGrath’s version thus offers an active, competitive heroine, whose physical daring mirrors her outspokenness and verbal self-confidence. In the film, Emma accuses men of “preferring superficial qualities,” such as physical beauty, a charge that clearly invokes contemporary feminist objections to the over-emphasis on the female body characteristic of consumer culture. (127)

The bow and arrow scene also further inscribes this adaptation as a romantic comedy, playing with the very obvious metaphor of Emma as a blundering Cupid and reinforcing at the same time the idea of a naïve but well-intentioned girl. Curiously it also re-enacts an archery scene between Elizabeth and Mr Darcy from the first film adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* (1940, dir. Leonard), where an outspoken Elizabeth Bennett confronts Mr Darcy, both in speech and in a target shooting competition, in one of the most memorable scenes of what was then categorised as a screwball comedy.

In the Miramax film, the bow and arrow scene also provides another opportunity to indulge the audience in visual pleasure: the framing of Emma/Paltrow’s face, especially in the close-ups, with a spectacular natural and sunlit background offer her as an object of gaze, stealing the viewer’s attention from the discussion between the two characters (in which, of course, Mr Knightley is right) (Fig. 21). This scene is representative of the adaptation’s representation of Emma as an ideal of femininity, bound to conservative gender politics, much in line with Laura

¹⁶⁷ See Troost’s reference work on the subject –“Diana’s Votaries” (10-11) – and again Troost’s updated publication, “Archery in the Long Eighteenth Century”.

Mulvey's description of a "traditional exhibitionist role of women" in mainstream cinema, where the feminine figures are "simultaneously looked at and displayed with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*" (19).

Despite being generally accepted as a star-vehicle for its leading actress and a clear-cut American-styled romantic comedy, McGrath's *Emma* is still seen by some critics as an irreverent take on adapting Austen's, in the line of Patricia Rozema's 1999 *Mansfield Park* (1999):

[E]ven the film version of *Emma* can be seen as irreverent: on the one hand, it is a charming, tasteful and reasonably intelligent film that makes some effort to establish historical realism; on the other, the filmmakers brought in an American star, Gwyneth Paltrow, to play the eponymous heroine, while commentators noted that the film was very fast-moving and emphasized the comic aspects of the plot. Reviewers were not slow to note how this coloured the production, remarking that the director 'keeps things moving at a delirious trot', producing an 'anachronistic snap bordering on irreverence', and 'grasping the screwball possibilities' of the plot. (Higson, *Film England* 145)

Although Higson is not alone in this position: Hilary Schor, for instance, argues for the film's "self-consciously postmodern elements" (162-165), namely as she analyses the use of speech in the film, particularly voiceover, to rival the novel's well-known masterly use of free indirect speech.

Despite the prominent (and well-founded) arguments, most critics tend to view McGrath's *Emma* as subdued to a Hollywood agenda. It is the case of Kristel Thornell, to whom the analysis of Paltrow's encoded femininity in a number of scenes betrays the film's traditional and patriarchal view (21-22). Contradictory views such as this one are not rare however and in the end, all three adaptations have contributed to building a twenty-first century interpretation of *Emma*, as the subsequent analysis of adaptations made for the new millennium will try to demonstrate.

Three adaptations [×] three Emmas

One of the aspects in which the three adaptations described above stand for comparison is that of costume, which, as one of the most remarkable elements of heritage film, also contributes in great measure to the definition of the visual identity of an adaptation. In that aspect the 1972 adaptation is, unsurprisingly, characterised

by period accuracy, displaying a number of clothing items which would be reused in future adaptations by the BBC in the 1980s and 1990s. They are obviously an important part of the visual pleasure the adaptation conveys, with Emma standing out from other characters as the more regal-looking, but costume here is not a conspicuous element, or at least it was not meant to be taken as such. The fact that this is a 1970s television adaptation means that the image is necessarily marked by the effects of the support media: videotaping makes for a “harsh fluorescence”¹⁶⁸ which is particularly striking after the digital and HD revolution.

However, as discussed in the previous chapter, the 1980s were a decade in which the debate around heritage film was particularly fierce, with particular visual elements such as costume (alongside location and *mise-en-scène*) being targeted, particularly by detractors of the genre. Despite these detracting voices, the 1990s prove heritage film’s resilience and films produced during this decade display increasing self-awareness namely by further exploiting those elements used in the discourse against them. Returning to *Emma* it is thus in the 1990s that costume becomes an obvious element of characterisation, a mark of both the visual identity of the adaptations themselves as of the characters. As one particularly enthusiastic fan of *Emma* and blogger, Kali Pappas, put it:

The two [1996 adaptations] represent two different treatments of Regency-era clothing. The designers of each sought to “code” and reflect characters, moods, and situations through costume metaphor – this includes choice of fabric, colors, styles, accessories, and the like.¹⁶⁹

Like the previous BBC adaptation, A&E/Meridian’s production is noted for its attention to period detail and accurateness, with costume designer Jenny Beavan, who won an Emmy for her work on the film, focusing on the specific time period in which the novel was written and published (1814-1816). Beavan had a very clear idea of how this particular Emma would come out on screen: “I had been looking for stylish clothes with clean lines, not heavily laced – unfussy things, but which showed she had money. She would have had a style which she knew suited her.” (qtd. in Birtwistle and Conklin, *The Making of Jane Austen’s Emma* 48) Although the colour-scheme established for her wardrobe includes “green-blues” and “grey-blues”, as well as a

¹⁶⁸ See Kali Pappas’s blog <http://www.strangegirl.com/emma/costume.php>. Accessed 7 May 2019.

¹⁶⁹ Idem.

distinctive “aubergine” pelisse, A&E/Meridian’s Emma is frequently dressed in white gowns, plain or patterned muslin dresses.

On the contrary, the Miramax film was noted for being frequently inaccurate (e.g., not matching clothes with diegetic season, freeing Emma of hats while outside) and displaying an elegance more usual in the real world of (contemporary) fashion: “[The *Telegraph*’s fashion journalist] Hilary Alexander points out that she looks as if she had just ‘stepped off a John Galliano catwalk’ and adds that her dresses exude ‘a modern, sexy allure’” (Parrill 143). In this move, the Miramax production mirrors another, much earlier American adaptation of *Emma*: the 1954 *Kraft Television Theatre* is also referred by Parrill to have shared the impetus of making Regency dress appear more “glamorous” by sharing the “puffed sleeves, a natural waist, and full skirts” of the also American 1940 adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* (112).

In *Emma* the objective seems to be to suggest a general visual impression of the Regency that might correspond to audiences’ fantasy of the past, even if that means sacrificing actual period accuracy. Again it might be useful to return to the bow and arrow scene, as it exemplifies this particular meaningful take on costume. Emma is then frequently seen in this adaptation wearing short-sleeved dresses, combining actual styles of the period between 1805 to 1815 with freer, Regency-inspired creations (such as the dress she wears when she confides Mrs Weston her love for Mr Knightley).¹⁷⁰ The pink dress worn by Emma and her flattering (if arguably ahead-of-its-time) hairstyle give visual support to her depiction as a young, innocent girl, while at the same time dismissing her very conscious, almost Machiavellian, manipulation of Harriet. The fact that it is pink is also obviously identifying Emma with the feminine, especially in the target-shooting scene, as she argues with Mr Knightley on what men usually expect from women and, in a much more 1990s-adequate conscience, condemns the importance given to physical attributes. The use of pink to mark that position is of course somewhat contradictory, not to mention an anachronism in the way it uses colour as gender-defining.¹⁷¹

Interestingly enough, Paltrow herself became associated with pink not long after, all because of the pink dress she wore for the 1999 Academy Awards Ceremony, in which she won the Oscar for Best actress for *Shakespeare in Love* (1998, dir. John Madden). Paltrow was at the time credited with bringing pink back

¹⁷⁰ See Parrill (143-144).

¹⁷¹ See Steele (32-34).

into fashion (Gale and Kaur 78), even if both her choice of dress and her over-emotional speech were then much criticized. As Sarah Gilligan observes, “these images were the self-conscious public performance of a star-celebrity persona: the ‘blonde Gwyneth Paltrow person’[...]” (16). It is meaningful that star-celebrity persona began emerging with Paltrow’s interpretation of Emma. As Parrill states below, the loveliness that this adaptation attributes to its main character is inevitably linked to the choice of its leading actress:

Since Emma is a character who is easy to dislike, having an appealing actress like Paltrow play the role is an advantage. She makes Emma a sympathetic figure, even when she is at her most wrongheaded, and she is easy to forgive when she admits that she has been wrong. McGrath commented on his first look at the actress in *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 [...]” (123)

As Nora Nachumi noticed, the film “banked on its ability to make Paltrow a star” and, coinciding with an explosion of Paltrow-related articles in the media, “[s]o prevalent as this deification that Paltrow’s public persona seriously interferes with our view of the character she portrays.” (135) Such effect is emphasized by costume (and make-up) as “[...] this Emma, the film tells us, *deserves* to be on a pedestal because she truly is a young goddess.” (Nachumi 136)

Thus, one of the most important aspects concerning costume (and the reason for the inclusion of its discussion here) is how it reflects the character of Emma in each adaptation: the regal and superior Emma of the 1972 BBC serial, the innocent and young, but confident Emma of A&E/Meridian’s 1996 film, and the glamorous and captivating Emma of the 1996 Miramax feature film. Not surprisingly, costume remains however an under-studied element in adaptation studies, while the inversely proportional tendency can be found in blogs and other online output run by fans and other assumed amateurs.¹⁷² More importantly, costume in these adaptations powerfully marks a statement in terms of creating and ideal of femininity of which Emma, above all other Austen heroines, seems to embody. The fact that ideal shifts from the cold sophistication of the 1972 “classic serial” adaptation to the virginal innocence (A&E/Meridian) and perfect “to-be-looked-at-ness” (Miramax) of the

¹⁷² Besides Kali Pappas’s blog (<http://www.strangeirl.com/emma/costume.php>), see for instance <http://janitesonthejames.blogspot.com/2008/03/fashionable-emma-woodhouse-costuming-in.html> (also by Pappas) or <http://www.electroephemera.com/cellwrap/austen.html>. Accessed 9 May 2019.

1990s is illustrative of how *Emma* has been able to adapt to changing macro-structural conditions, while at the same time revealing contemporaneity's often conflicting ideological stances. They also visually reinforce gendered-defined roles as although costume designers of all three adaptations were, as usual, women, such choices must be seen as part of male-dominated productions, headed by men as directors, screenwriters, and producers, the only exception being producer Sue Birtwistle for the A&E/Meridian adaptation (DiPaolo 146-147).

Apart from costume, the other element in which screen adaptations usually make use of their visually appealing channels of communication is of course setting. In this aspect, the 1972 adaptation clearly stands out for its predominant use of indoor setting, in a total of fourteen different studio sets according to Parrill (142), with even one outdoor scene (out of a total of four), that of Mr Knightley's proposal, starting outdoors but then being transferred to an indoor set pretending to be outdoors. A characteristic of television productions until the 1980s, the almost exclusive use of indoor setting translates in economy both in terms of time as of resources (Lauritzen 75), but it was progressively abandoned and in the 1990s most adaptations make use of both outdoor shooting and of carefully selected interiors, filmed on location.

Like the 1995 *Pride and Prejudice* before it, A&E/Meridian's *Emma* was filmed on-location and *The Making Of Jane Austen's Emma*, published in 1996 as a tie-in to the film's broadcasting, devotes an entire chapter to production design,¹⁷³ as well as providing a list of all the locations used, in a variety of country houses, villages and counties in England.¹⁷⁴ The focus seems to be in providing period-appropriate location that at the same time fit the specific view of the director, the scriptwriter, and the producers of how the story and characters should come across on screen. Thus the setting, however period accurate or visually appealing, is not used as the central motif on screen.¹⁷⁵ Also, as had happened with the earlier production of *Pride and Prejudice*,¹⁷⁶ this adaptation recreates seasons rigorously, in contrast to what happens in the Miramax film. The latter, a full-scale Hollywood production, was also filmed on location but gave central stage to setting, both in terms of natural

¹⁷³ See Birtwistle and Conklin (*The Making Of Jane Austen's Emma* 27-45).

¹⁷⁴ Idem (157)

¹⁷⁵ An example is the interior of the drawing-room of Trafalgar Park (standing in for Hartfield) which was painted a neutral grey-green instead of the original bright yellow "so that the actors and the text came through, rather than the design itself." (Birtwistle and Conklin, *The Making Of Jane Austen's Emma* 35).

¹⁷⁶ See Birtwistle and Conklin (*The Making Of Pride and Prejudice*).

landscape as well as buildings. In fact, the visual pleasure attached to the film's backgrounds seems to come second only to the delight in gazing at its heroine. In Parrill's summary,

In contrast to the Meridian/A&E film, which succeeds in using landscape effectively, not only to show the season but to provide appropriate backdrops for the action and characters, the director of the Miramax film has selected merely beautiful settings as backdrops for his heroine. [...] I believe that the Meridian/A&E film fulfills our expectation of fields under cultivation, gardens one might expect to find in Surrey, and nothing really wild or spectacular. However, in the Miramax film, we do not see characteristic British landscapes. (144-145)

The point Parrill makes on the absence of "characteristic British landscapes" is particularly striking, given *Emma*'s particular connection to a certain idea of Britishness (or more accurately, Englishness). Lionel Trilling attributed to it a touch of "national feeling" and even claimed that "there appears in *Emma* a tendency to conceive of a specifically English ideal of life" ("Emma and the Legend of Jane Austen" 40). This specificity of the novel also materializes in more concrete moments, such as the much quoted passage in which, while looking at Donwell's estate, Emma's thoughts voice a praise for the domestic landscape: "It was a sweet view—sweet to the eye and the mind. English verdure, English culture, English comfort, seen under a sun bright, without being oppressive." (*E* 391)

Such occurrences, general as well as particular, lead Trilling to add that *Emma* works in part (and despite its modernity in displaying individuality, a trait of the new novel form) as a pastoral idyll (47), an aspect worth coming back to when one is looking into the representation of physical landscape in heritage productions of *Emma*. This seems to add another layer to an already rich and complex network of screen adaptations of *Emma*: even if Emma, the character, does not immediately correspond to the typical heritage film heroine, *Emma*, the novel, offers the perfect visual setting for the heritage genre to develop.

When Andrew Higson affirms that "there are gradations of picturesqueness" in the Austen films and that in the Miramax 1996 *Emma* "the landscapes are glorious" (*Film England* 143), he seems to make a point similar to Trilling, even if addressing a different medium. Higson adds: "we are invited to look at England from afar, and often from the perspective of another culture." (144) Also what he calls "a sense of

cultural distance” (144) indulges in a type of visual pleasure not far from what Laura Mulvey, when considering the human form and the feminine figure in particular, called “scopophilia”, i.e., how “cinema satisfies a primordial wish for pleasurable looking” (17). The Miramax adaptation thus perfectly realises the feature of several 1990s heritage films of presenting, via the filming of grand houses and landscaped grounds in particular, a visual representation of Englishness as a commodity, ready to be sold to an enlarged international market.

One particularly interesting detail when discussing the use of grand houses as key markers in a carefully chosen visual identity relates to the choice of location for Hartfield. Although in each adaptation the house is often a composite made of scenes shot in several different locations (as well as studio-built sets), the house chosen to stand for the exterior views of Hartfield concentrates much of the adapters’ interpretation, as it is meant to reflect the character of its inhabitants, particularly of Emma. Thus, even in the mostly studio-bound production of the 1972 adaptation, Hartfield is represented by an unidentified red brick mansion, which is given particular emphasis as it is used in both the opening and closing shots of the serial, just after/before the shot of the hydrangeas, referred to above. The 1996 A&E/Meridian film uses Trafalgar Park, in Wiltshire, as a stand-in for Hartfield’s exteriors (and some interiors), another red-brick, imposing house. Designer Don Taylor justified these details as of great importance in the final choice for the house:

My first thought on seeing Trafalgar Park was how wonderful the red brick would look against the snow. It was a very exciting image. We’d seen beautiful houses in Costwold stone, but I felt it couldn’t have the same impact as it would against this magnificent red brick. The garden was lovey too, with a wonderful sense of symmetry, which is so important with Jane Austen. It was classical and elegant and stylish. (qtd. Birtwistle and Conklin, *The Making Of Jane Austen’s Emma* 34).

The house used in the 1996 Miramax adaptation is Came House, in Dorset, a mid-eighteenth century palladium country house, the most different from the three Hartfields here analyzed, being made of white Portland stone (limestone). While this difference can relate to the arguably more neutral palladium look that fits with the general visual identity of this adaptation (obviously high-class, not necessarily English-specific in the eyes of the viewer), the objective of getting through the idea of the wealth and elegance of its occupants remains the same.

Another element making for particular comparison is the character of the adaptation as defined by the circularity established by each adaptation's initial and final sequences. Keeping with the novel's own time unity (the action begins in early autumn and ends in the following autumn, with Austen's characteristic strict attention to the calendar),¹⁷⁷ the three adaptations mimic this circularity by establishing visual links between its initial and final sequences. The 1972 adaptation both begins and ends with shots of the same hydrangeas in the garden at Hartfield, the 1996 A&E/Meridian film has scenes of poultry theft both opening and closing it, and the 1996 Miramax film both enters and exists the world of Highbury with images of the small globe described above. Apart from mimicking the novel's unity, this feature also creates the film's own full-circle narrative, operating a balanced narrative closure, also affirming these adaptations, above anything else, as films responding to particular cinematic conventions. Thus, it can be explained how in several occasions Austen's veiled attack on social norms and beliefs via the use of irony is transmuted into strategies that serve particular cinematic conventions, from the comic to the romantic ones, making a particular adaptation work as a film, despite going in the opposite direction of the novel it is adapting.¹⁷⁸

Blurring boundaries: beyond period film adaptations

However, the story of adapting Austen's *Emma* is not restricted to period adaptations, but also includes, in Andrew Higson's terms, "the broader cycle of Anglo-Hollywood romantic comedies with contemporary settings" (*Film England* 140). Even the Miramax film, as a period film, can be found to correspond to Higson's comment, being a hybrid cinematic product that negotiates Emma (character and novel) as well as Austen in the currency of its contemporary Hollywood terms.

Nonetheless, other adaptations do this beyond the limitations imposed by a realistic period representation. One of those adaptations is *Clueless* (1995, dir. Amy Heckerling), which Parrill characterizes as "[t]he most imaginative" (147) of the four adaptations produced in the three decades between 1972 and the publication of her own study, in 2002. Generally considered by critics as "find[ing] fascinating

¹⁷⁷ Jo Modert has found the events of the novel to correspond to the almanac for the years 1814-1815. See also Ellen Moody, "A Calendar for Emma".

¹⁷⁸ See for instance Nachumi's analysis of Emma Thompson's script for *Sense and Sensibility* (1995, dir. Ang Lee) (131-134).

contemporary parallels for Austen's ironic narrative tone" (DiPaolo 141), *Clueless*, which at first was not even presented as an Austen adaptation, has long since been regarded as a very successful case of adapting *Emma*'s themes to a contemporary (1990s) setting, mainly by recasting Emma as Cher, a high-school student moving about the privileged environment of Beverly Hills, USA (Fig. 22). Part of that success is inevitably linked to what Parrill sees as a double filiation of the film, when she claims that "[*Clueless*] certainly owes as much to Hollywood film tradition as it does to Jane Austen's *Emma*." (*Jane Austen on Film and Television* 116)¹⁷⁹

Even as an adaptation acclaimed by both audiences and critics alike, the reception of *Clueless* among the latter has not gathered consensus in terms of how the film treats its departing source: if some see it as "the pop-cultural film that remains most faithful to Austen's spirit of critique" (Nachumi 130), others see it as "less-modern" in comparison to the period adaptations, "present[ing] women of the 1990s as less empowered or enlightened than women in the original novel" (Ferriss 123). The latter claim finds proof in Cher's conservative view on sexual experience and even in her dependence from older male figures to make use of her apparently greater mobility, given that she cannot drive without supervision, for instance. Thus, the sting in Tai's (Harriet's) insult when she accuses Cher of being nothing more than "a virgin without a driver's license".

On a similar claim, Kristel Thornell describes the casting of Alicia Silverstone as Cher as a choice for "'a look' [...] deployed to encode both knowing sexuality and 'girlish' naiveté" (23), an apparent contradiction not far from the representation of Emma in the period adaptations looked at above. She also makes an interesting reference to how the evolution of Cher's wardrobe – one of the features for which the film became famous due to the heroine's fixation with designer clothes – marks her "internal 'make-over'" and "inscribes her internal trajectory within a patriarchal order in which women's sexuality is held in check by its display in acceptably conservative packaging." (Thornell 24)

What most critics seem to agree on however is the successful strategy adopted by *Clueless* to update *Emma*: addition of "racial and sexual diversity to the mix" (Ferriss 123) shifts the main issues of the marriage plot to more contemporary

¹⁷⁹ For more on *Clueless* in comparison to the other 1990s adaptations of *Emma* see Parrill (*Jane Austen on Film and Television* (116-123).

relevant issues.¹⁸⁰ One other element adding to this successful transposition is the ending, as although the marriage option is dismissed by Cher in her characteristic sarcastic tone – “As if! I’m only sixteen, and this is California, not Kentucky!” – the film does not deny its viewers the happy ending typical of rom-coms, with the entire cast in blissful reunion for Cher’s teachers’ wedding. Moreover, the fact that Cher ends up catching the bouquet and then immediately returns with it to Josh signals that the perfect marriage finale is still the ultimate objective, or fantasy, of every schoolgirl. Thornell’s words thus summarize what could also be said of Emma’s faith in the novel: “The finale of *Clueless* subverts and reinstalls the patriarchal courtship plot, hinting simultaneously at Cher’s liberation from and containment within such narrative boundaries.” (24)

The success achieved by *Clueless* has originated a kind of micro-cult within the larger macro-structure of adaptation-fuelled Austenmania. This has also made *Clueless* part of another trend, that of twenty-first century nostalgic revivalism. Thus in 2015, as a way of celebrating the 20th anniversary of the film’s premiere, journalist and *Clueless* fan Jen Chaney published *As If! The Oral History of Clueless As Told by Amy Heckerling, the Cast, and the Crew*. A hybrid object as often happens with this kind of publication, *As If!* consists of multiple short quotes from several interviews, punctuated with behind the scenes information and fan-aimed content, such as “A Glossary of Selected *Clueless* Terms”. The fact that the book was published two decades after the film’s release is, in Chaney’s argument, justified by its on-going appeal to audiences. Echoing Cher’s speech, Chaney argues:

[...] I was struck by how much it exists within the context of its era as well as outside of it. As many Tumblrs, tweets, and online can attest, *Clueless* is one of those movies that really gets nineties nostalgia motors revving. Which makes total sense. But, at the risk of sounding, like, *way* philosophical, one of the more remarkable things about *Clueless* is that it seems to exist almost across time. (xii)

¹⁸⁰ In Ferriss’s interpretation this is also where the film is revealed as more conservative: “In the sexually savvy 1990s, Cher naïveté fully reveals her cluelessness. It also points out the film’s social conservatism, despite its nod to alternative sexual orientation and behaviours. Wordly appearance aside, Cher (like Emma and other respectable nineteenth-century women) remains “hymenally challenged”—a virgin. The fact that she is saving herself for Luke Perry makes her chastity a joke, but does little to diminish the essentially conservative image of relationships presented in the film. Marriage remains the goal, and father (or his substitute) knows best.” (125)

As a longing for a 1990s product, this comes close to what Simon Reynolds calls retromania, our age's different kind of obsession with the past:

Earlier eras had their own obsessions with antiquity [...]. But there has never been a society in human history so obsessed with the cultural artifacts of *its own immediate past*. That is what distinguishes retro from antiquarism or history: the fascination for fashions, fads, sounds and stars that occurred within living memory. Increasingly, that means pop culture that you already experienced the first time around (as a *conscious*, pop-aware person, as opposed to stuff that you lived through unaware as a small child. (xiii-xiv)

Clueless's unfading or renewed appeal even originated its own adaptation – into a stage version in 2018 labelled as a “jukebox musical”, which received mixed reviews –¹⁸¹ as well as a rumoured upcoming remake. Despite its own 1990s nostalgic appeal, it cannot be dismissed that at least part of it is directly linked to the contemporary fixation on Austen, with the film occupying a place of honour for many Austen addicts to whom it lists just as one more adaptation of *Emma*. In fact, *Clueless* works not only because it successfully reworks Austen to its (extended) contemporary audience, but also due to its efficient dealing of the workings of the adaptation process itself, particularly those more relevant in our digital media society. For proof of the latter, see for instance the following remark by one member of the crew:

As music supervisor Karyn Rachtman implied, *Clueless* is steeped in a nondigital version of that kind of [digital media] updating. It samples from pre-existing things—*Emma*'s story structure, slang from the UCLA dictionary, nineties pop culture references, schoolgirl plaid, seventies and eighties pop songs, the iconography from other movies—then reworks them in a way that creates something totally new, different, and original. (Cheney 298)

For the first, Wallace Shawn's (the actor playing Cher's teacher and stand-in for Mr Weston) comments on the reasons for the enduring life of *Clueless* are not far from the reasons often presented to justify the uninterrupted appeal of Austen's works since the Victorian age:

The movie is both a satire and, in a way, sort of a celebration of these characters. And I can't really explain this, but people love it who see it as a satire, and people love it who see it as a celebration. Their actual feelings as

¹⁸¹ See <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/11/theater/clueless-the-musical-review.html> or <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2018/dec/11/clueless-the-musical-review-teen-movie-stage-show-is-a-lazy-retread>. Accessed 28 May 2019.

they watch the movie may be not that different, I don't know. It's a sort of mysterious phenomenon. (qtd in Chaney 300)

Despite the success of *Clueless*, and contrary to what happened to other Austen novels, no additional present-based adaptations of *Emma* were made for the screen. And as the new-millennium brought an expansion of what Higson and other critics have called, with several variations, post-heritage, Austen adaptations also took a different turn. However, as the next chapter will explore, *Emma* has not been central stage in that movement. Even so, as I have tried to demonstrate in this chapter, the history of *Emma*'s adaptations on screen, though not particularly extensive apart from the 1990s outburst, has been rich in generating interpretations of both the novel and its heroine, building a network of connections, which inform all subsequent takes on the work. More importantly they might, as I believe, help set the basis for a rethinking in the area of adaptation studies itself, by promoting a reevaluation of the still constricting conceptual framework imposed on adaptation in general and on Austen adaptations in particular, as described here by Stam:

Through a class-based dichotomy, literature pays indirect, and begrudging, homage to film's popularity, while film pays homage to literature's prestige. Adaptations, in this view, are the inevitably 'dumbed down' versions of their source novels, designed to gratify an audience lacking in what Bourdieu calls 'cultural capital,' an audience which prefers the cotton candy of entertainment to the gourmet delights of literature. The frequent charge against adaptations that they have 'vulgarized' – from the Latin 'vulgus' or 'people' – bears the etymological traces of this prejudice, which is also stereotypically split along gender lines, projecting, on the one hand, a crude, boisterous, male, working-class spectator, and, on the other, a passive, distracted, dreamy, female spectator. ("The Theory and Practice of Adaptation" 7)

Chapter 3.

***Emma* post-2000:**

Adaptations in old and new media

[S]he listened to her and tried to console her with all her heart and understanding—really for the time convinced that Harriet was the superior creature of the two—and that to resemble her would be more for her own welfare and happiness than all that genius or intelligence could do. It was rather too late in the day to set about being simple-minded and ignorant [...]. (*E* 153)

Screen Austen in the 21st century

As the previous chapter demonstrated, the adaptations made in the 1990s were of crucial importance in establishing Jane Austen as a complex icon and signifier. The variety of readings suggested by these adaptations, as well as the multiple interpretations each of these adaptations originated in turn, gave way to diverse and often contradictory evaluations of Austen as a trademark or household name. As Thornell remarks:

Some critics have observed that the spate of film and television adaptations of Austen's novels released in the 1980s and 1990s promoted the writer's status in popular culture as a conservative icon (North), often *containing* the texts' potential subversiveness, and representing a "cultural antifeminist articulation of nostalgia for an unchallenged patriarchal order" (Sonnet 59). Instead of viewing these films as a neutralization of the novel's subversive potential, as liberal-feminist "rewritings," or as deadlocks between contrary tendencies, it seems fruitful to consider them as an overlaying of discourses of submission and agency. (18)

Although Thornell herself moves to analyse two adaptations of *Emma* from a feminist point of view in order to ascertain their "simultaneously conservative and progressive" positions (17), many other studies tend to adopt either one or the other extreme positions. What is interesting, however, is that these (and other) antithetical views of Austen, which existed already among critics of her original literary output but were exacerbated by the many afterlives of the novels, have continued to co-exist, in a balance not easily explained. Thus, it is worth remembering Griggs' word of caution:

Though not the one and only source of an adaptation's identity, the canonical text that an adaptation is in dialogue with nevertheless plays a vital part in that adaptation's 'identity': each adaptation is a new thing in and of itself, but it

evolves from a complex web of adaptive processes related to existing narratives, cultural mores, industrial practices, and to the agenda of those engaging in its construction. (5-6)

The twenty-first century thus brought a new phase to Austen screen adaptations. After the golden age of the 1990s, with the 1995 *Pride and Prejudice* frequently being considered by audiences, practitioners and critics alike as the maximum exponent of the (sub-)genre, Austen screen adaptations faced a challenge – how to bring classical Austen to new viewers and at the same time please a still faithful heritage audience? A decrease in the number of adaptations might be expectable but was not exactly the case.

In that aspect, two factors may have been decisive: on the one hand the rising popularity of nostalgia products. Even if the word and fad initially referred to the much closer period ranging from the 1950's up to the 1980's, it has since then come to signify a general fixation on the past, often presented in a romanticized post-modern way. Austen's Regency rural England can arguably represent going back to a time and place which, being civilized and ordered, is not polluted by modern problems. To go back to this specific time is like returning to the exact moment before everything changed, before the bustle of metropolitan environment came into being. On the other hand, Austen's very particular place in contemporary culture, as a staple of both idealized romantic stories and guaranteed economic success, proves to be the never-ending reason for producing new Austen-related material, ranging from the utmost official products to fan-produced items.

Furthermore, with the new millennium comes the advent of a new paradigm, that of “convergence culture, where old and new media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways.” (Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* 2) Jane Austen as an icon and a signifier gained new layers of meaning, as new adaptations of Austen's novels, and for my purpose here of *Emma* in particular, spread through different (and, in some cases, innovative) media and gained a self-reflexive tone as an integral part of their identity. Their post-modern, self-reflexive and, more often than not, problematizing character has positioned twenty-first century adaptations of *Emma* as rich, multi-layered objects which have yet to receive their due of academic attention. In this final section I intend to look at some of such adaptations of *Emma*, which I find representative of the

tendency described above. Before that, however, I find it useful to briefly consider the change perceived in Austen adaptations in general from the twenty-first century, as a result of both the productive period in the 1990s considered in the last chapter and also of the new production and reception conditions available in the new millennium. Such consideration implies a broader take on Austen, including objects which are not, at least in exclusive or even primordial terms, adaptations of *Emma*.

Although written having in mind the afterlives of Victorian Age, John Kucich and Diane F. Sadoff's words are more than adequate when considering Jane Austen within a contemporary context:

Through consumer culture, moreover, we might trace a curious difference between our own postmodern relation with the Victorians and the moderns' vexed version of their immediate precursors. Whereas, Jameson maintains, the modernists appropriated the Victorian past to criticize cultural commodification, postmodernism fashions commodities that make the process of consumption glamorous and pleasurable. In this formulation, however, the term *postmodern* itself overvalues the (very real) ideological and aesthetic tensions between the contemporary and modern periods. Given the centrality of historical emergence that contemporary culture locates in the nineteenth century (...) aspects of late-century postmodernism could more appropriately be called "post-Victorian," a term that conveys the paradoxes of historical continuity and disruption (...).

Unprecedented in their scale and glamour, the recent high and popular cultural movements to rewrite the nineteenth century seek to create self-awareness in the present by reworking the past. (xiii)

In this sense, some of the most controversial, or merely unusual, Austen adaptations prove this point. Unsurprisingly, however, it is Austen's most well-known (and presumably most-loved) work, *Pride and Prejudice* that takes central stage. Coincidentally *Emma*'s apparent absence from the post-heritage movement materializing in pastiche and parody must be remarked. In this sense, although there have not been specific *Emma* screen adaptations that might be classified as such, a brief consideration of other such products based on other Austen works is relevant for contextualizing all the adaptations I will analyse in the present chapter.

The first of those pastiche adaptations to be referenced must be Seth Grahame-Smith's novel *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2009), which originated its own screen homonymous cinematic (2016, dir. Burr Steers). In the novel the basic storyline (and indeed the text's structure) is that of *Pride and Prejudice*, only the setting has changed into a zombie-invaded Regency England where the high-classes

attempt to restore the order by mastering fighting skills, either the Chinese martial art of Kung Fu (as is the case of the gentry Bennett sisters and their father) or of the Japanese Ninjitsu, preferred by the aristocrat Lady Catherine DeBourgh. Grahame-Smith appropriates a series of clichés that have, over the years, grown to create the zombie (here referred to collectively as “unmentionables”, “dreadfuls” or “stricken”) as a mythological monster of mostly on-screen origins. Most notably, they are described here as physically decrepit creatures determined on devouring the brains of the living, in descriptions that recall the cinematic gore the sub-genre is known for since George Romero’s now classic *Night of the Living Dead* (1968).¹⁸² It is interesting to notice however that Grahame-Smith’s novel stops short of exploring the critical dimension inherent to the zombie precisely since Romero’s influential film. Thus, as the narrative progresses, the zombies become secondary elements in a narrative focused on its warrior heroine, Elizabeth, rewritten as a strong, independent, and at times ruthless young woman. As the attacks of zombies become less frequent, Elizabeth’s worth is proved in her confrontation with the living, such as Lady Catherine, not the (un)dead.

As these zombies return to their more natural cinematic environment however their critical potential is again renewed and, in an ironic twist, the cinematic adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* comes closer to Austen’s novel, at least in its subversive use of fictional tropes. Of particular interest is the way the film adaptation departs from the novel and introduces a critical aspect to the zombie figure and, as is typical of zombie narratives, allows for a questioning of humanity via its treatment of the supposed monster. Its inclusion of an alternative, post-human community, St. Lazarus, inevitably brings into play the questioning of human values and attitudes in face of generalized threat to society as we know it, a defining feature in most zombie-starred narratives. But the film *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* also works its most complex nature by including multiple references to the cinematic Austen, which enrich this interpretation with intertextual relations and contribute to a self-reflexive position inside the canon of Austen adaptation.¹⁸³

¹⁸² See for instance the description of the public ball, at Hertfordshire (Grahame-Smith 14).

¹⁸³ For example, Lady Catherine DeBourgh is transformed into a supporting character like in the 1940s cinematic adaptation, the initial sequence in which a rider dominates the screen references the 1995 BBC miniseries, and the proposal scene between Mr Collins and Elizabeth recreates the same scene in Joe Wright’s film in 2005.

Nevertheless, in both the mash-up novel and its adaptation, the innovative move lies in the fact that the outrageous pairing of Austen and zombies is a metaphor to address Jane Austen as a construct. The redesigning of Austen's heroines, namely Elizabeth and Jane Bennett, as independent women who end up saving their still courageous and attractive but definitely less effective male counterparts also allows for a renewing of Austen's deconstruction of the patriarchal framework, frequently dismissed by traditional adaptations of the novel which focus on romantic fulfilment as the ultimate prize for their female protagonists.

Another example of what Nelson terms "industry made fanwork" (339) – i.e. as a new kind of object, a hybrid between mash-up forms usually associated with fandom and online platforms and industry-driven products – is *Lost in Austen* (2008, dir. Dan Zeff) which, although not an adaptation of *Emma*, is worth mentioning here. As had been the case with the pastiche strategy in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, in which the exercise based upon fan admiration compensates for a certain degree of nonsense, *Lost in Austen* also builds itself on the assumption of a solid fan base to which it simultaneously caters and addresses in a critical way. In Deborah Cartmell's words, it "cunningly lavishes on the adaptation formula while calling attention to the mechanized nature of the genre itself" ("Familiarity versus Contempt" 31).

A Granada/ITV mini-series, *Lost in Austen* is a pastiche of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, in which Amanda Price, a present-day Austen-obsessed girl living in London – Hammersmith to be precise – finds herself swapping places with Elizabeth Bennet. Taking as a (strangely acceptable) starting point the fact that there is a portal between the real twenty-first-century bathroom in Amanda's London house and the fictional early nineteenth-century attic at Longbourn, this adaptation weaves a complex story around what it means to be an Austen fan, by displacing Amanda from where she supposedly belongs to where she has always yearned to be.

Lost in Austen is both a play on the Austen universe and an interesting reflection on contemporary desires, assumptions and values. As Amanda disrupts the storyline of her favourite novel, the audience is led to re-evaluate the significance of Austen-obsession in contemporaneity. As a pastiche, it "permits a closer examination of the formally reflexive aspects of heritage film and the relation between emotion, consciousness and the politics of representation" (Vidal 101). The series becomes an example of "adaptation *qua* adaptation", displaying one of the key features of that sub-type, i.e., the inclusion of "obligatory intertextual references to adaptations, in

particular, appealing to lovers of the genre” (Cartmell, “Familiarity versus Contempt” 25-26). In this case the pastiche reflects as much of Austen’s significance in contemporary fan communities, as her evolving image via the now abundant track-record of screen adaptations. More relevant to this discussion is how *Lost in Austen* both adds to and reflects, openly in this case, the history of adapting Austen to the screen, as Amanda’s obsession with Austen is as much fuelled by her reading of the novels as by watching the screen adaptations. In that sense, *Lost in Austen* corresponds to what Robert Stam described as a film’s reflexivity, in that, “[b]y calling attention to artistic mediation, reflexive texts subvert the assumption that art can be a transparent medium of communication, a window on the world, a mirror promenading down a highway.” (*Literature through Film* 12)

In a way, *Lost in Austen* is a kind of homage to the Austen fan: it is filled with references only the connoisseur of both the novels and the TV and cinematic adaptations will pick up on. These include Amanda’s request for Darcy to emerge from the lake with his wet shirt clinging to his torso, to be recognized by most as the iconic scene from the BBC 1995 adaptation, which originated the Colin Firth’s Darcymania phenomenon (Fig. 23). Others, however, are not so obvious and, besides appealing to the Austen fan, reveal the witty script by Guy Andrews.¹⁸⁴ On the one hand then *Lost in Austen* is a kind of ultimate Jane Austen adaptation, one that retells one of her novels, includes multiple intertextual references to both other novels and adaptations and reflects on what Austen means in contemporaneity. Accordingly, this production does not limit itself to capitalize on Austen’s success, be it directly, by recreating once again her novel, or indirectly, by referring to previous adaptations. Although it bases itself on the Austenmania phenomenon as a means to insure its own commercial success, *Lost in Austen* puts into question that same phenomenon. As Laurie Kaplan argues, the series is intimately connected to the Janeite culture:

Janeites, according to Johnson, focus on “the ideas about culture Austen has been thought to represent” (212), and the satire of *Lost in Austen* is apparent

¹⁸⁴ Amanda’s reprimand to Bingley for not having saved Jane from the marriage to Mr Collins – “It was badly done, Bingley, badly done” – echoes Mr Knightley’s words to Emma regarding her behaviour to poor Miss Bates in the Box Hill episode, repeated in all adaptations. The protagonist’s family name is also significant: it reminds us of Fanny Price, the heroine of Austen’s *Mansfield Park* (1814), who, having been adopted by wealthier relatives, never seems to fit in that reality. In this sense, Amanda’s mother also seems to resonate the Mrs Price from that same novel: she is a woman worn out by life and disenchanted by love who, quite shockingly in both cases, presses her daughter into accepting a distrustful suitor. Amanda’s expulsion from Longbourn with only one pound in her pocket after Jane’s marriage to Mr Collins also mirrors Fanny Price’s expulsion from Mansfield Park when she refuses to marry Mr Crawford.

every time Guy Andrews dismantles those cultural assumptions and iconic motifs. The comedic brilliance of the series lies in the multiple cross-cultural, cross-class, cross-text, cross-media, and cross-linguistic references. (“Completely” 249)

In a way, by completely turning around the story of *Pride and Prejudice*, this series adopts the strategy of “piracy”, a metaphor borrowed by John Wiltshire from Emma Thompson’s script for the film *Sense and Sensibility* (1995) to designate a form of creatively adapting which re-balances the old question of what is lost when turning a novel into a film (3-5). This brings back the idea of the adapter as an agent, his influence sometimes disregarded in comparison to audience expectations and commercial demands. Thus, the most distinctive and innovative aspect of the series lies in how, to make use of Cartmell’s expression, it “self-consciously parodies the adaptation formula” in such a way as to poke at even the most avid Austen fan:

Lost in Austen’s mocking of the classic adaptation seems designed to make avid viewers of the Austen adaptation both uneasy and angry, not because as Troost and Greenfield claim, we are both alarmed and reassured by a feeling of superiority, but because, as viewers of adaptations, we are being subtly belittled for a taste in a genre that has become so predictable and repetitive. (“Familiarity” 32)

The happy ending it proposes, rewarding Amanda with a seemingly perfect love story even when that means abandoning reality, could seem however as a way of yielding to convention. If so, *Lost in Austen* would come closer to other spin-offs and Austen-based fantasies. Yet, its unrealistic tone, starting with the possibility of strange time/place portals and continued with the various unexpected and often hilarious twists to the plot, may suggest a different interpretation of the seemingly too happy ending. The fact that Amanda’s only option to live her perfect love story is by turning herself into a character of that story may be the ultimate irony of this script and thus closer to the tone of the novel it adapts in the first place. Perfect love stories are, in the end, only possible in books after all.

In this vein, other films could be mentioned, such as *Austenland* (2013, dir. Jerusha Hess) or all the Bridget Jones’s films (2001, 2004, 2016), which, like *Pride and Prejudice* and *Zombies*, also started in written format before being themselves adapted for film and, in the case of the latter, sprang their own franchise. What is common to all is their use of *Pride and Prejudice* as a springboard and the

establishment of a complex relationship with the fandom culture of Jane Austen in contemporaneity. Their own importance is such that in fact no consideration of post-modern adaptations of Austen would be complete without a reference to *Bridget Jones's Diary* (dir. Maguire, 2001), whose written origins are on the page of a newspaper: the film is an adaptation from Helen Fielding's novel of the same name, which began as an unattributed column in *The Independent* in 1995. Itself a loose adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, it originated in the Darcymania phenomenon that followed the 1995 BBC adaptation of that novel, with which it shares several links, such as listing Andrew Davies as co-scriptwriter and Colin Firth in the role of the male protagonist (and eligible man) Mark Darcy. More important, however, is how it recycles generic characteristics, both of the heritage/romantic comedy genres in general and of Austen adaptations in particular, in a way that, at least to some, betrays an uncritical repetition of tested formulas for commercial purposes, as in Claire Monk's analysis of the film:

[It] project[s] a vision of the nation so uniformly young, white, wealthy, narcissistic and implicitly conservative, within a *mise-en-scène* cleansed of the urban poor, the homeless and ethnic minorities, that by contrast the 1980s heritage film looks like a paragon of socially inclusive, low-budget liberal filmmaking. Significantly, in its obligatory rural interlude, *Bridget Jones's Diary* embraces the heritage aesthetic, and the well-heeled country house and National Trust village iconography, with a shamelessness unseen in any period heritage film, and entirely without the heritage films' social critique or sense of irony. In such circumstances, the routinisation of the heritage-film idea seems a dangerous diversion from more urgently needed new critical responses and debates. ("Debate Revisited" 195)

The other example, *Austenland*, goes for the same kind of light, romantic comedy approach to the contemporary Austen-obsessed fan, although in this case it implies that the protagonist, Jane Hayes, momentarily opts for abandoning her less-than-perfect reality for what she hopes to be the ultimate Janeite experience: a holiday in Austenland, the Regency-themed resort in England. There she will experience disillusion – the resort comes with different package-deals and hers allows for a Fanny-Price-kind of access – and will make her literally face the ridiculousness of her own obsession as she sees her herself mirrored in the silly behaviour of the other guests. She also has difficulty in coping with the lack of technology and is directly affected by the inconveniences of the period, such as the dullness of the activities

available for the women and the degree of impoliteness she receives due to her “lack of means”.

Nonetheless, *Austenland* also propitiates the true romantic story as the initially disagreeable (but accordingly named) Mr Henry Nobley, one of the actors paid to interact with the female guests, turns out to be her Darcy-like figure. Even if at times the film verges on the same level of silliness of other Austen-inspired objects – the most obvious of all being the final transformation of *Austenland* into a full-scale, overly glossy theme park – it does in fact give central stage to the implications of Austen-obsession.

Arguably then objects such as *Austenland* and *Lost in Austen* could be seen as suffering from the same kind of uncritical approach to heritage generic characteristics that plagued the commercially successful *Bridget Jones's Diary*, namely the iconography linked to the previous (and successful) Austen adaptations which form the basis for these post-modern objects. However just as it happened with archetypal examples of heritage film in the past, such twenty-first century takes on (or at least incorporation of) heritage have also proven to generate insightful critical debate.

Another, more recent, adaptation of a Jane Austen work simultaneously works within and breaks with the Austen adaptations canon while renovating the heritage genre. Whit Stillman's *Love & Friendship* (2016) functions in much the same way as the examples above, even if the strategies of pastiche are less conspicuous in this case. Although not an adaptation of an Austen novel but of the Juvenilia epistolary piece *Lady Susan* (c.1794), *Love & Friendship* revises Austen as heritage-suitable material while at the same time coming closer to Austen's critical perspective. Not unlike the literary text it adapts, Stillman's indie film – it premiered at the 2016 Sundance Film Festival – builds on irony and comedy to fulfil its artistic objective: *Love & Friendship* is both an acute social commentary (with Stillman's known anachronistic tendency leading us to consider our own time as well as Austen's) and a conscious yet critical homage to Austen and to what she has come to signify in our culture since her death two centuries ago. The following excerpt of an interview anticipating the premiere of *Love & Friendship* highlights some of Stillman's characteristics as a director that could be said of Austen as well:

Part of what makes Stillman such a witty satirist and an acute observer of his own rarefied slice of the social world is his faith in affiliation as a fundamental character trait. [...] “When you're a fish in a fishbowl, you're not seeing all

that,” Stillman insisted, when I asked him about his interest in dissecting these kinds of social structures. He wants to be thought of as a portraitist of characters, not of class; he said that he doesn’t “think of anything intellectual” while writing his intensely cerebral screenplays. [...] At their core, his films are about the pull of the group against the temptation to couple off, the search for romance and the struggle to maintain one’s identity once romance is found. (Schwartz)

Although in the case of *Lady Susan* the Austen we get is closer to the eighteenth century openly sarcastic and somewhat experimental form of prose fiction, the lesser known text and also the minor status usually attributed to the novella as a literary genre allows the adapter greater freedom in readdressing the significance of Austen period adaptations for contemporaneity. Stillman had already used Austen to a similar, albeit smoother, effect in his debut film *Metropolitan* (1990). Although not a film on Austen, even on a superficial level the novelist and her work may be seen in the composition of the atmosphere of social rules and young people expectations in Manhattan in the 1980s. On a deeper level, the film may be viewed as a post-modern interpretation of Austen, or even as an adaptation of *Mansfield Park* (constantly referred to by protagonists Tom Townsend and Audrey Rouget), with a few hints at other of Austen’s themes and works, such as *Pride and Prejudice*.¹⁸⁵

His return to Austen, as a now experienced filmmaker, is openly challenging while keeping within the traditional standards of heritage film: unlike *Lost in Austen*, Stillman’s *Love & Friendship* keeps to Austen’s plot and even style and does not break from the artificially constructed yet congruent representation of the past. The postmodern self-reflexive quality of the film lies in its ability to work with the conventions of the heritage film as to make them reflexive of the way Austen is perceived via adaptations of her work. Throughout the film there are constant reminders to the fictional aspect of the adaptation itself, the opening sequence being one of the best examples. In little over three minutes, several of the main characters are presented in an almost theatrical way, the camera allowing the viewer a fast-paced introduction by means of an individual medium shot, an illuminating focus on the character and a brief written description. The device is repeated for the first part of the film every time a new character comes to the scene. Because neither the shot nor the description aspires to objectiveness (as far as that is possible in film anyway), the

¹⁸⁵ See Kubic.

illusion of the fictional experience is fissured if not completely shattered. Not unlike the case of other Austen writings, such as the first chapter of *Emma* (1816) or the famous passage on novel writing in *Northanger Abbey* (1818), the attentive viewer is put on his guard as to what expect from this adaptation. Not that the film denies an immersive, entertaining viewing of what is, essentially, a comedy. But, as all Austen mature novels do, the subtlety of the narrative allows for multiple layers of reading.

Taking as an example the main character, Lady Susan Vernon (played by Kate Beckinsale who thus also returns to an Austen character having played Emma in the 1996 A&E/Meridian adaptation), the film deliberately portrays her in an ambiguous way. Although her devious, self-centred attitudes make her different from all the other Austen heroines, she still does not come out as a plain villain. As Stillman declared in an interview: “It is strange because in a way she becomes more likeable than some of Jane Austen’s virtuous heroines like Emma.” (*Whit Stillman & Kate Beckinsale On ‘Love and Friendship’*) Moreover, the fact that Lady Susan is more than a plain villain is further emphasized by her apparent antagonist in the film, her sister-in-law, Lady Catherine Vernon (Emma Greenwell). Although a representation of the respectable married woman, everything Lady Susan is not, Catherine is as manipulative of her own obliging husband as is Susan, strengthening the film’s apology of the social importance of women behind a more visible (and frequently powerless) male façade. Thus, the film manages to present the perfect love stories with the light comedy that American perspectives on Austen have made common (Stillman is himself an American), while at the same time undermining the limiting circumstances for women of both the time depicted (late eighteenth century) and of contemporaneity, by deconstructing over-romanticized expectations of the viewers. The central stage that Stillman’s adaptation (he both directed and wrote the script) allows his female characters, who overpower and, more importantly, over-reason their male counterparts, is the real driving force of the film.

Love & Friendship is also a double return from Stillman to Austen because he did not stop at the film adaptation. Just like he had done with *The Last Days of Disco* (1998), Stillman published a novelized version of the script, also titled *Love & Friendship*. Indeed, according to Stillman, the project started out as a book, when Hodder & Stoughton (who, since 2002, curiously owns John Murray Press, the successor of Austen’s second publisher) approached Stillman after a post he made on

Twitter.¹⁸⁶ The book has a long title, reminiscent of eighteenth century novels (unlike Austen's shorter and more objective titles), and is supposed to have been written by Rufus Martin-Colonna de Cesari-Rocca, Lady Susan's nephew on a mission to undo the injustice made by the author of *Lady Susan*. The fact that it is supposedly written years after the death of the people concerned and by a nephew echoes the circumstances of James Edward Austen-Leigh's *A Memoir of Jane Austen*, which, despite incongruous and manipulated elements, would become the source of the Austen myth to be developed in the 150 years following its publication, in 1869.

Stillman's text also includes other hints to the Austen universe, namely a dedication to the Prince of Wales, a reference to *Emma*'s dedication to the Prince Regent, which is both referred to and copied almost *ipsis verbis* in the pastiche dedication. However, what is more interesting is how the book's context (and even paratext) inscribes this (re)adaptation among other post-modern retakes on Austen. Even more than with the film, it becomes obvious Stillman's intention to reflect on Austen, whom he addresses directly as "the Authoress", as a global phenomenon in general and even as a challenge in terms of the adaptive process in particular.

As pastiche pieces, *Lost in Austen* and *Love & Friendship* in particular work through a history of both Austen screen adaptations and generic conventions of the heritage film in order to make sense of Austen's significance in contemporaneity. They take the ever-present wish of adapters to offer something new to yet another Austen adaptation and use it as a means of critically positioning their work in the wider reception of the novelist. At a time when Austen seems to be buried under multiple layers of both textual interpretation and retrospective speculation, to have successful adaptations questioning premises in which other successful adaptations were built upon is certainly inspiring. If, in the words of Tom Townsend, one of the main characters in *Metropolitan*, "nearly everything Jane Austen wrote is near ridiculous by today's standards", the eternal question is, why then does she seem to remain so relevant and challenging?

Given such a rich creative environment, it will be interesting to see how Austen's most accomplished novel was adapted. I will now focus my attention on adaptations of *Emma* made in the twenty-first century, from the usual television and film adaptations, to media less frequently analysed in academic context, such as

¹⁸⁶ Whit Stillman & Kate Beckinsale On 'Love and Friendship'.

graphic novels, children's books and adaptations for digital platforms. Despite the variety of formats, and as previously stated, I shall not attempt to classify each of the adaptations analysed under any form of taxonomy, subscribing, on the subject, to Cartmell and Whelehan's position that:

The danger of posing such a model of approach is whether such taxonomies risk privileging the notion of 'closeness to origin' as the key business of adaptation studies; additionally the boundaries between the various classifications are impossible to define and an adaptation can fit into a number of categories at once. (*Screen Adaptation 6*)

All of the adaptations under consideration share a few characteristics however: they are all adaptations of *Emma*, made after 2001, which acknowledge their connection to Austen's novel, even if not all of them recreate the Regency period. They also have their origin in the industry and, although I will be occasionally referring to fan-made productions, neither these objects nor the specificities of fandom interaction with and recreation of *Emma* constitute the core of my study.

A new take on TV period drama? BBC's *Emma* (2009)

After the Austenmania peak, which took over television and cinema during the mid-1990s and led to two adaptations of *Emma* being released in the same year, more than ten years would pass before a new adaptation of *Emma* was made. Again by the BBC, this new 2009 adaptation cast another rising star, Romola Garai (known before for shorter roles in *Atonement*, *Vanity Fair* and *Daniel Deronda*) alongside experienced and well-known actors, like Jonny Lee Miller (as Mr Knightley) and Michael Gambon (as Mr Woodhouse). Consisting of 4 episodes of about an hour each, BBC's new take on *Emma* received mixed reviews, particularly because of the over-expressive acting of Garai in the first episodes, an element I shall explore ahead. In more general terms, the production was BBC's return to *Emma* after thirty-seven years, the 1972 adaptation having, according to Monica Lauritzen, the standing, in the BBC itself, of a high-quality production (7), which might possibly explain the long hiatus. The adaptation definitely aligns itself with the change in recent period adaptation on television in that it aims at a modernized presentation of period productions, particularly noticeable in visual terms. In that particular aspect it joined a group of early twenty-first century titles such as the 2008 *Sense and Sensibility*

(scripted by Andrew Davies), the 2007 *Persuasion*, and even the 2004 *North & South*, all by the BBC, in which the old claim for quality of the adaptation is in part affirmed by a more audacious visual identity.

Nonetheless, the apparent reinvestment in period or costume drama (as the genre is usually named when BBC and other similar productions for television are concerned) seemed to be of short duration. In 2009, the same year it broadcast *Emma*, the BBC signalled the intention to move away from the traditional costume drama piece its fictional production was renowned for, and announced it would change its historical focus, bringing it closer to contemporaneity. In an article suggestively titled “The death of the bonnet: BBC to overhaul costume dramas”, the change was described as “an evolution in the presentation of period dramas, moving away from classic 19th century so-called ‘bonnet’ dramas to looking at other periods of history” (Holmwood). The 2009 adaptation of *Emma* thus stands as one of the last of the so-called “bonnet dramas” while at the same time signalling the upcoming change in the production of televised period drama, as a closer look at the defined moments in the series may show.

The 2009 TV mini-series adaptation of *Emma* starts with a cold-opening or teaser sequence, that is, a sequence that comes before the title sequence and acts as a preamble for Emma’s story. Hence this adaptation opts by presenting, in a flashback narration, the story of young Emma, Frank Weston/Churchill and Jane Fairfax, accentuating the privileged situation of the first, the only one of the three orphans to remain at home instead of being sent to distant family members or friends. The sequence is accompanied by a male voiceover narration, in a tone that, just as had happened with the 1996 Miramax film, is far from neutral and instead seemingly guides the audience in their initial judgment of Emma and her situation (and just as has happened with that adaptation, in which the uncredited narration seemed to be made by the actress playing Mrs Weston, here it sounds as the voice belongs to John Lee Miller, Mr Knightley).

The sequence begins with a medium close-up of a chubby, happy baby Emma, being strolled in the garden by both her parents: an apparently amiable and cheerful mother and a happy but ever over-preoccupied father (Fig. 24). The first scene is shot in the sunlight and the over-saturated colours of the composition – the lusciously green lawn, the contrasting (and elegant) red-brick house – together with the choice of a majority of light-coloured costume for the three characters give the feeling of

blissful perfection. The same mood is suggested by both the narrator – his first sentence being: “Emma Woodhouse was born with the sun shining...” – and the cheerful orchestral music in the soundtrack. That same perfection is abruptly cut short as a close-up of Mrs Woodhouse smiling at her child dissolves into the juxtaposed image of her lifeless face, as she lies in a white shroud inside a coffin. The transition also includes a change to indoor, poorly lit rooms where colour is almost absent and a similar inflexion to more sombre tones in the instrumental soundtrack. As the black lid of the coffin is placed, and the camera continues in a bird’s, or God’s, eye view, the melancholy of the scene is emphasized by the long shadows cast by the coffin and the mourning figures of Mr Woodhouse and his young daughters, who place their hands on their mother’s coffin as a last goodbye (Fig. 25).

The next scenes show Emma, now happy with her new governess Miss Taylor, walking in Highbury in a strategy allowing the audience to witness first the death of Frank’s mother and his departure with his aunt and then Jane Fairfax’s departure with Colonel Campbell. In both cases, the miserable situation of the children and those staying behind (Mr Weston, and Mrs and Miss Bates) contrasts with the cheerful innocence of Emma who seems to be further shielded from the unpleasant circumstances by Miss Taylor, who rushes her along when they see the doctor going into Mr Weston’s house and does not answer when Emma asks where Jane is going. The line from the voiceover narration stresses the same contrast: “And so Jane and Frank were forced to leave Highbury and trust their fortune to strangers... while Emma stayed comfortably at home... with very little to distress or vex her... for many years to come.”

As the cold-opening finishes, this adaptation has already predisposed the audience’s opinion of Emma, signalling her privileged position, while at the same time allowing for a contextualization of Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax’s future relationship. By making clear the similar situation in which both were exiled from Highbury, this adaptation allows for a more understanding acceptance of their behaviour in adulthood.¹⁸⁷ It also signals from the very beginning Emma’s exceptionality, especially as her sister Isabella is absent from the entire sequence apart from the moment when both say goodbye to her mother’s coffin: the adaptation seems

¹⁸⁷ This is particularly true as, in the last episode, a flashback has Frank Churchill remember that exact moment, just before the truth about their secret engagement is revealed.

to suggest that Emma's pre-eminence starts at the age of three, and not after her sister's wedding, as the novel states (*E* 3).

After that send-off conclusion, the title sequence begins to the sound of composer Samuel Sim's simply designated "Emma Main Titles". The music itself is intended to mark a difference for this adaptation, as it deliberately draws away from what director Jim O'Hanlon negatively terms "period classical", being instead: "[...] fresh and contemporary and I guess that's what we were trying to do with this Emma, is make it have one foot in the period and one foot in today and that's what Sam's music felt like, it had one foot in either camp."¹⁸⁸

In visual terms, the title sequence has a stylized design with a dark red background, evocative of theatre curtains, against which two-dimensional beige figures are set as the "camera" dynamically navigates through them (Fig. 26). These figures and the scenes they enact are simultaneously reminiscent of the illustrations that accompanied mid-nineteenth to early twentieth century editions of Austen's novels and, in the way that they seem to be disposed in several levels, evocative of a doll's house scenario, thus working as a hint to Emma's matchmaking endeavours. Apart from these readings, the baroque traces of the design, especially in creating the setting for the more stylized figures, evokes a feminized visual identity that has become representative of Austen herself.

After the title sequence, we are introduced first to a child and then adolescent Emma contemptuous of a tiresome Miss Bates (reading letters from her niece Jane) and impertinent among her equals (Miss Taylor and Mr Knightley). Instead of the snob and self-important Emma we might expect, this one is from the beginning shown as a rather insolent young woman, making faces at Miss Bates (together with Miss Taylor in fact) and saying she intends to learn Chinese as a reaction to Jane excelling in French. Clearly intended to have Emma perceived as possessing a fresher and livelier attitude, it allows a degree of liberty which is arguably an anachronism, patent not only in the way she speaks but also in her relaxed posture.

This adaptation is also the only one among those analysed here to stage the wedding (and even an earlier scene as proof of their growing attachment) of Isabella Woodhouse and John Knightley. Besides serving the purpose of offering the audience an example of Emma's early meddling in the other people's love affairs, it also allows

¹⁸⁸ O'Hanlon in "Emma's music", extra feature to the DVD edition.

her a first triumph over Mr Knightley, whom we see dismissing the subject (“I think there’s nothing in it. You are mistaken, as always”, he says to Emma) only to have that scene followed by the wedding of Isabella and John. The scene in the church dissolves into another, several years later and closer to the time when the novel opens. The parallel composition of both scenes – Emma in the front bench, between her father and Miss Taylor, the same neighbours behind her – suggests the limited social scene and lack of intellectual stimuli which define Emma’s surroundings. Thus we cannot but sympathise with Emma’s wish to entertain herself with matching schemes, as she is next seen pushing a relationship between Miss Taylor and Mr Weston. The choice this adaptation makes in contextualizing the apparently frivolous, or even self-righteous, activity Emma engages in makes for a more empathetic perception of the character. Moreover, the fact that she succeeds twice, and against Mr Knightley’s opinion, also gives credit to what in the novel (and other adaptations) may be perceived as a form of delusion of grandeur from Emma herself.

The Box Hill sequence in this adaptation takes place in the fourth and last episode and, just like the strawberry party before it, the camera rejoices in beautiful, sun-bathed views of English countryside (Fig. 27). Thus, the modern take on Austen’s *Emma* does not imply a complete dismissal of heritage conventions, only their updating, as longer dynamic shots gain prevalence and picturesquely display the visual pleasure of the outdoor setting, for Emma and the audience alike.

As had happened with the cold-opening and the initial sequence, the focus is on displaying Emma’s particular situation so as to make the empathetic movement of the audience easier. Therefore, in the second shot, as both Harriet and Frank Churchill are seen moody and complaining about the heat, Emma’s face is of true delight in being for the first time in her life away from Highbury. This fact helps to downplay the importance of Emma’s later offense to Miss Bates, as almost other every member of the party seems, for several reasons, intent on being sullen and ruining Emma’s long expected outing.

As the party gathers around in a circle, Emma and Frank’s behaviour is scandalous, but whereas Emma seems culpable only of flirting too much, Frank’s hidden motifs to disrupt the group make his behaviour less pardonable. Emma comes out only as an influenceable young woman who, bent on enjoying the rare opportunity to amuse herself away from Hartfield, goes along with Frank’s foolish behaviour. However, she is conscious from the very beginning of the offense she has given Miss

Bates and her decision to leave Frank alone when all the others decide to rise as well shows her repentance as springing from her own conscience, even if she dismisses the importance of the incident when Mr Knightley comes to rebuke her. His reprimand, following close on the novel, is also framed by his behaviour in the previous scene as the camera makes sure we see the jealous looks he gives Emma and Frank's over-intimate behaviour. For that reason this is, from all the other screen adaptations seen so far, the one in which Mr Knightley more evidently loses his usual calm, shouting in rage at Emma, who remains rather calm and rational, despite also crying at the end.

The next scene cuts to Emma's return home, walking alone into Hartfield, as another God's eye view shot evidences here a small figure in a pink dress overpowered by the imposing whiteness of the house's columns (Fig. 28). The audience cannot but feel her pain (facilitated by melancholic musical cues), especially as she is forced to hide her feelings from her anxious father. One of the more interesting moments comes immediately after this scene, as the action jumps to the following morning and to a brief establishing shot of Hartfield at dawn: the picturesque of quality of the composition, helped by the sound of dawn chorus, is evocative of so many other Austen adaptations, from the scene in the influential 1995 *Pride and Prejudice* in which an anxious Mr Darcy rises early to meet Elizabeth Bennett to the R/romantically-instilled initial sequence of Joe Wright's 2005 adaptation of the same novel.

The camera then cuts to one of the more artistically manipulated scenes in this adaptation: not unlike the dawn scene in Wright's film following Elizabeth's reading of Mr Darcy's letter, time is here manipulated by filming an also sleepless heroine, sitting on her bed, as the light of dawn slowly casts a growing golden light on her motionless figure (Fig. 29). Unlike Elizabeth, however, Emma is shown with her back to the camera and while in Wright's scene darker colours and pale light set a moodier ambiance, the brighter contrast offered by the richly decorated room and the expanding golden light is more in tune with the overall brighter identity of this adaptation. The soundtrack, which at this time is dominated by an uncomfortable violin, brings the audience closer to Emma's state of mind.

The scene also raises the bar in terms of more innovative techniques as non-exclusive to cinema as the higher art when compared to television. As the camera comes around to offer a close-up of Emma, she is shown for the first time in a dishevelled state, signalling a sleepless night and again inviting the audience to share

her pain and forgive her faults. Her walk to the Bateses' house is an act of contrition also shared by the audience as the camera either adopts Emma's point of view or shows her in an unusual humbled and fearful expression, seeing in every face she encounters the condemnation she is in fact imposing on herself. As far as adapting to the screen the novel's complex string of conscience of the heroine goes, it seems a remarkably successful strategy. In addition to it, the adaptation employs another one for a similar effect: the scene in which Emma realises Harriet's new romantic interest is Mr Knightley, the quickness of her mind referred to in the novel is mirrored by the introduction of several flashbacks that show her now critically objective analysis of her own past behaviour.

Finally, the proposal scene in this adaptation is particularly interesting for the way it is framed by the traditional picturesque motif, with a twist. Before this scene, Emma is seen walking into the frame, as a sunlit Hartfield is seen in the background, framed by shrubs and trees, with a lake in the middle ground. Her moment of self-recognition takes place in various settings, but always in the park at Hartfield, where her figure is well-framed by the harmonious and elegant landscape. The variations of the heroine's dedicated musical theme suggest the simultaneous and conflicting thoughts and sentiments going through her head. This adaptation voices Emma's flow of conscience by means of voiceover narration – it had happened already on episode two as Emma finally acknowledged she was wrong about Mr Elton's intentions. Just like in that occasion, she ends her inner analysis by voicing, aloud, her troubled conclusion: "Too late... too late. And it is all my own fault."

The proposal scene shares in the same strategy as far as setting is concerned, with Mr Knightley and Emma walking together in the sun-lit (so much so that Jonny Lee Miller keeps frowning), well-kept garden at Hartfield, with the house itself becoming the background, geometrically positioned between them, for the climax (Fig. 30). As for Mr Knightley's speech, it follows close on Austen's text, dismissing, at least as far as words go, more romanticized lines, such as the 2005 Mr Darcy – "You have bewitched body and soul, and I love... I love... I love you and never wish to be parted from this day on".

This adaptation further recalls the last scene of the 2005 *Pride & Prejudice* in Emma's reaction to Mr Knightley's proposal: as she comes closer to him, she gently puts her hands on Mr Knightley's face and places her forehead against his. Unlike other adaptations however, this one does not shy away from a kiss, just as it had not in

a previous scene in which Frank Churchill passionately kisses Jane Fairfax in the middle of Highbury's square. The scene then resumes to another picturesque composition, as the lovers sit in a bench, with Hartfield house and its gardens occupying the middle of the screen. The camera then faces the protagonists instead, growing closer, from an extreme long shot when they are still with their backs to the camera to a medium long shot progressing to medium close-ups, accompanying the also growing intimacy between them. Interestingly enough, just as had happened with the 1996 Miramax film, Mr Knightley is allotted extra screen time to detail his growing attachment for Emma during the course of the action. Similar to that earlier adaptation, his words in particular seem significant:

Maybe I have Frank Churchill to thank for making me first aware of being in love with you. I have a feeling it started the exact moment he returned home. I saw my life here in a different light. Exposed to others and, er, defenceless if they chose to plunder it. I knew after Box Hill. I went to London so I could learn to be indifferent. But I chose the wrong place to try to forget you.

Besides, the need to make it explicit for the audience what is the adapter's interpretation of Mr Knightley's behaviour throughout the novel is in itself a contradictory strategy in terms of adaptation, in the sense that it is at odds with the more subtle techniques used and pointed above. If in other moments the flow of his sentiments was left unsaid, expressed only by facial expression, body language and complemented with carefully inserted soundtrack, how can we explain this spoken confession, which risks becoming repetitive? The balance of the scene comes with Emma's own account on how she discovered her love for him: "After talking to Harriet on a secret matter of her heart, I examined my own heart and there you were. Never, I fear... to be removed."

The next scene breaks with the more romantic mood, by having Emma running into Donwell Abbey and, finding Mr Knightley in his study, tell him while crying that she can never marry him, because she cannot leave her father. After he reassures and calms her down,¹⁸⁹ they both go to tell her father the news in a speechless scene in which again a small detail in which the camera, shooting from a

¹⁸⁹ MrK: My heart is here. And what does it matter where I live, if my heart is in the right place? I will move to Hartfield for as long as necessary.

E: You would do that... for me?

MrK: I might walk back and forth a couple of times a day for my constitution. But... I would do far more without a second thought.

position behind the pair, reveals their holding hands, thus summarizing the conversation and suggesting their shared complicity and friendship as the solid basis for their future relationship as man and wife. The adaptation concludes with the also classical wedding scene, although Harriet and Robert Martin's, and successive two shots of the other happy couples, who sit in the church, their expressions contrasting with that of the sad scene in the church in the beginning of the initial sequence.

The following scene has Frank Churchill apologise to Emma for his behaviour as they exit the church, thus completing his positive reevaluation: the feeling that the future may hold an unpleasant married experience for Jane Fairfax is shunned away by "an air of wish-fulfilment"¹⁹⁰ (confirmed by both the church bells tolling vigorously and lively, and, again, by the bright sunny day).¹⁹¹ As they talk, Jane and Mr Knightley are seen talking to each other thus recreating another recurrent image in adaptations of *Emma*, in which the couples briefly swap places.

The succeeding scene also recreates a familiar scene, very similar to the earlier BBC adaptation, as the majority of the cast reunites in an indoor setting to meet Mrs Weston's new baby and Emma and Jane Fairfax finally talk as friends (also in a thoughtful addition, Mrs Bates is seen happy and talking for the first time). Unlike that earlier adaptation however, this one chooses to finish with a more intimate and sentimental sequence: first a moving scene of Mr Woodhouse saying goodbye as Emma leaves on her honeymoon (no scene of the wedding is seen), followed by John Knightley's comic relief comment to his wife – "Marvellous! So they're off on a mystery honeymoon while I get to protect the chickens" –, itself a nod to the connoisseurs of the novel. The sequence's sentimental/comic relief moment is also a recurrent strategy deployed by this adaptation. The next, and final scene, has the newly married couple travel by carriage only to reveal the marvelled expression of Emma as she sees the seaside for the first time. It signals the start of her new life and it also brings the narrative full circle, if we are reminded of the initial sequence and Mr Woodhouse's mild reprimand to Miss Bates for mentioning the seaside in front of a very young Emma. Also, the fact that Emma and Mr Knightley are seen leaving Hartfield on a carriage offers a happier re-enacting of the moment when, in the

¹⁹⁰ As used by J. P. C. Brown for the A&E/Meridian *Emma* (1996) - see page 149.

¹⁹¹ This is also confirmed by his exchange with Emma:

FC: Look at her, isn't she divine? An angel sent to me on Earth.

E: Then treat her well.

FC: Well, I cannot promise to be forever serious. But I will promise you that.

beginning, Jane and Frank were the ones seen departing in carriages. Finally, in a Romantic-inspired image, the mini-series comes to an end with the camera moving away for the final distant plan, and revealing the couple staring at the sea from the top of a high cliff (Fig. 31).

Despite apparently keeping with the tradition of quality that characterizes the BBC's pieces of Austen, this 2009 mini-series stands out for proposing the first and (up until now) only twenty-first century period adaptation of *Emma*. The balance between the need to adapt the novel to its contemporary audience and the BBC tradition itself was not easy though. As Lauritzen noticed when conducting her own study on the 1972 adaptation of *Emma*, the status of that previous production "was [...] judged, by many people at the BBC, to be very good" (7). A new BBC adaptation of the same novel, even distant in almost four decades, bore necessarily the heavy burden of making justice to that piece (and the BBC tradition), while at the same time renewing its relevance for today's public, a challenge common to many adaptations and reinforced by the particular position of *Emma* in Austen's canon.

Keen on delivering another outlet of a market-proven object, adapters have frequently ignored the nuances making Emma's character different from other Austen heroines. As Brown put it "[m]odern adaptations have curious difficulty realising this impressive, capable, intelligent woman." (223) Nonetheless, the 2009 mini-series seems more focused on suggesting a more complex heroine, and its unusual beginning deploys a strategy closer to that of the also unusual first paragraphs of Austen's novel. The choice, however, raised conflicting opinions among the critics. In a series already relatively compressed – like most twenty-first century adaptations this one reduces the number of episodes, in this case to four – adapters still decided to introduce a long cold opening detailing the history of Emma, Jane and Frank's childhood, finding no correspondent in the novel or other previous adaptations.

Given that the story of Jane and Frank is particularly tragic – both are orphans and are sent away to be raised by distant relatives or friends – and also depicted in melodramatic terms, Emma is presented from the first moment as a privileged girl, whose behaviour in the following scenes, definitely infantilized, seems only to categorise her as spoiled even in the view of the most benevolent spectator. Thus, Laurie Kaplan blamed the over-emphasized infantile character of the heroine as the main reason for the series' significant audience drop from the first to the second episodes:

Infantilized, Emma displays annoying mannerisms that serve only to emphasize the adult Emma's misplaced sense of superiority. [...] Emma is so very unlikable as a young person that it is no wonder the ratings for the series fell dramatically – by more than one million viewers – after the first episode. (“Adapting” 6)¹⁹²

Kaplan also criticizes the series' cold-opening for creating “an extended and irrelevant back story” (3) that ‘obscure[s] the central consciousness of the novel’ and, as side effect, “turn the viewer against Emma” (4). Yet, as Kaplan's analysis also proves, adapting Emma is a complex process, her singularity weighing down on adapters. And even if the opening scene seems determined to set us against Emma, so does the famous introductory line and following paragraphs of the novel, whose function the cold opening and the initial sequence seem to be recreating in the new medium. Even the first sentence of the voiceover narration seems to possess a similar double meaning: by opening with “Emma Woodhouse was born with the sun shining”, it is simultaneously (and not without some degree of contradiction) underlying Emma's singularity and calling our attention to the visual commodification of the adaptation itself.

In fact, almost the entire action of this Emma seems to take place under a radiant sun, thus fixating the overall prettified depiction of the story. Interestingly enough, the image of the DVD cover also shows Emma illuminated by rays of sun, as do most promotion photographs of the adaptation. Moreover, it could also be argued that the cold-opening in this adaptation, itself a strategy meant to break with the most common strategies in television,¹⁹³ seeks to break the fantasy/escapist model that characterizes Austen on screen. If we recall the 1996 Miramax adaptation, that initial sequence was much more straightforward in suggesting (and even capitalizing) on the escapist potential of its take on the story, from the visual to the oral cues present in the title sequence. Viewed in that light, this adaptation's abrupt confrontation with death (we are shown not only the dead face of Emma's mother in her coffin but also the grieving of her husband and small daughters as the coffin is taken away) is in direct contrast to the blissful mood of, for example, the Miramax adaptation, the most well-known screen adaptation of *Emma*.

¹⁹² See also Jonathan Brown's article “Has the costume drama had its day?”.

¹⁹³ See <https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/TheTeaser?from=Main.ColdOpen>. Accessed 17 July 2019.

On that same page, J. P. C Brown is more tolerant on the 2009 *Emma* and offers it as an example to the future of Austen adaptations (and maybe even adaptation in general), one of my primal focus in this thesis:

[It] often seems to be conducting a dialogue with the text that goes via recent critical interpretations of it (e.g., in a prologue sequence that links Jane Fairfax, Frank Churchill and Emma Woodhouse as displaced or traumatized children), even if this does leave it vulnerable to Lisa Hopkins' charge that in unsubtle ways it's dramatizing the subtext rather than the text (Hopkins 2012: 247–8). This is to do implicitly what *Lost in Austen* and *The Jane Austen Book Club* do explicitly: bring Austen and modernity into collision with each other. This impulse to acknowledge and negotiate historical difference may give rise to some awkwardness; but it's more honest and more interesting that a determination to assimilate Austen to the dominant categories of the present, which is in danger of happening in *Becoming Jane*, for instance, where the elusive Jane Austen is rendered 'understandable' in terms of today's most naive assumptions about the relation of art to life and the power of film to render visible the inmost secrets of the subject. Better by far to have adaptations of her novels that are dissonant and teasing and enjoyably awkward. (232-233)

Following that line of thought, it is also important to notice how the visual becomes terrain for a kind of aesthetic manifesto, claiming for television a degree of both artistic conception and technical innovation that in the past was frequently only granted to cinema, as the superior (seventh) art. Thus, this adaptation in particular also tried to present itself in the mode of other twenty-first century Austen/period adaptations, i.e., productions closer to cinematic conventions such as the 2008 *Sense & Sensibility*, also by the BBC. As a result, this adaptation, written by the successful screenwriter of the 2004 *North & South*, Sandy Welch, works in the same way as those other adaptations, the camera revelling on the opportunity to show natural beauty, a task made easier (or not) as *Emma* offers the opportunity for a more prettified vision of the past than the industrial visions of *North & South* or the rougher and poorer ambiances seen in *Sense & Sensibility*.

Another important element in this adaptation is that of casting, as the three top-billed names bring important associations to the adaptations. The choice of Romola Garai is interesting for, although she was not a star then, she had played in 2007 the 18-year-old Briony Tallis, a demanding role which allowed her to showcase an intelligent, but manipulative young woman, forced to acknowledge and repent the

harm she imposed on those close to her, due to her mistakes and poor judgment. Similarities with the role of Emma are not hard to find.

Also significant is the casting of Jonny Lee Miller as Mr Knightley, as it immediately establishes an intertextual link with Patricia Rozema's adaptation of *Mansfield Park* (1999). It "highlight[s] the film's self-reflexivity" (Romney qt Vincendeau 42), confirming one of the most common features in contemporary adaptation of Austen. The intertextuality is also reinforced in particular scenes: in the proposal scene for Rozema's *Mansfield Park*, Miller/Edmund Bertram's declaration to Fanny, "I have loved you all my life", is interestingly reprised in the 2009 adaptation of *Emma*. Furthermore, Michael Gambon as Mr Woodhouse immediately rises the quality status of the adaptation by casting an established actor, with a reputable tradition in theatre (and particularly Shakespearean roles) and classic television pieces, but who is also recognizable by younger audiences for having, since 2004, taken the role of Albus Dumbledore in the Harry Potter film franchise.

Finally, there is the unavoidable aspect of the romantic predicament, fulfilled by the main couple, Emma and Mr Knightley. Despite its assumed intention to present a period Emma with "a foot in today", this adaptation manages to successfully transmit, in a degree of subtlety not found in the over-clichéd Miramax film or the highly-strung previous BBC mini-series, the growing attachment between Emma and Mr Knightley, making their final pairing at the end less problematic to bring on screen. An example of this happens in the final segment of the third episode, with Mr Knightley trying to warn Emma about a possible connection between Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax and feeling instead injured himself due to his misapprehension of Emma's words as a sign of her attachment to Frank: "I can vouch for his indifference to Miss Fairfax, believe me." Even if that particular line came after what can be only interpreted as a clear friend-zoning on Emma's part – "I know you are keen to protect me as an older brother would" – the prochronistic attitude does not jeopardize the scene's internal unity. The complete cluelessness of Emma to Mr Knightley's real motives (despite her accurate accusation that he is not objective and reasonable when the subject is Frank Churchill), along with Jonny Lee Miller's uncomfortable demeanour as he excuses himself from her invitation to dinner and the subtle musical cue that begins at that moment, all work together to build up the final tension with which the second to last episode ends. Just as had happened with other elements, this adaptation never fully denies the cliché that audiences expect, but neither does it

faithfully (or sluggishly) repeat its formula. Reviewing the growing romantic facet of Mr Knightley in screen adaptations, J. P. C. Brown commented:

Austen's meeting of Emma and Mr Knightley is scarcely less subversive of romantic expectations, albeit more subtly so. But recent film and television versions are all tempted to drift back to something more conventionally romantic. Perhaps the most significant exception is the 1972 BBC *Emma*, which, like Austen herself, manages to avoid showing a kiss, and also boasts a conspicuously middle-aged Mr Knightley. It's an effect achieved in part by John Carson being more than double the age of Doran Goodwin (she was 22 when they shot the scene, and he was 45), thus making the age difference greater than Austen stipulates (she is 20 when the novel opens and he 36 or 37). But since the 1990s Mr Knightley has become a more romantic figure and usually a somewhat younger one. Anthony Lane aptly speaks of Jeremy Northam, who plays the scene opposite Gwyneth Paltrow, as being decidedly 'under the hill' (167). In that version, the 1996 ITV version and the 2009 BBC production the actor playing Mr Knightley is only about ten years older than the actress playing Emma (early thirties and early twenties respectively), and in all but the ITV version that difference is downplayed. (219)

The 2009 adaptation also kept a noticeable age difference, even if smaller than in the novel, Garai being 27 years old and Miller 37. Moreover, because Miller would bring on to his Mr Knightley the shadow of his previous role as Edward Bertram, the ghost of the indecisive, less-than-ideal hero intensifies the idea of a compromise strategy: he is a hesitant suitor (and we are witnesses to his growing love and anxiety towards Emma) but even if he still assumes the position of the elder male (as he assumes the voiceover narration for instance), his prevalence is frequently undermined by the adaptation, just as it happens during the initial sequence, determined as it seems to prove him wrong considering Emma's matchmaking abilities or previsions.

In doing so, this adaptation positions Mr Knightley as closer to Emma and, more importantly, closer to modern viewers expectations as possible: more flawed (especially if such flaws come from romantic torment), non-judgemental and less openly patriarchal. One scene, in episode two, is particularly interesting in this light. After their quarrel on Harriet's refusal of Mr Martin's proposal, Emma and Mr Knightley compare each other's better judgment, while holding their baby niece Emma in turns:

Mr Knightley: I was your considerable superior in years when you were the age of little Emma here.

Emma: And I am sure that you were by far my superior in judgement when I was. But surely we have grown closer in judgement as the years have passed?

Mr Knightley: Well, I had the advantage of not being a pretty woman and a spoiled child.

Although Mr Knightley's answer is taken from the novel,¹⁹⁴ it is meaningful that this particular line is selected in detriment of so much speech cut for the need to compress. Additionally, the fact that Mr Knightley's line is itself compressed when compared to the novel, added to Miller's rendition of it, make his remark less sensible and more of a last-resort comment in face of Emma's rational answer. When read carefully, the script, just like the novel, hints at a more subversive interpretation of not only the exchange taking place here, but also the assumed positions of men and women in society. Therefore, although Emma seemingly dismisses Mr Knightley's final remark and does not comment on it, her intellectual superiority appears to be rather rightfully acknowledged in this short conversation and not just a matter of conceited immodesty on Emma's side.

In other moments, the adaptation seems to playfully suggest important elements of the developing romantic relationship between Emma and Mr Knightley. It is the case of episode two when Emma, just after the Westons' Christmas party, realises the mistake she has made with Mr Elton in a candle-lit night scene, and the camera cuts to a bright sunshine day and an establishing shot of Donwell Abbey, followed by a medium shot of Mr Knightley opening the door. His figure is framed on either side by the open doors and above by an interior stone arch door in which the inscription "sed semper amico" can be read (Fig. 32). A Latin inscription meaning literally "but always for/to a friend",¹⁹⁵ the fact that it so neatly frames Mr Knightley just after Emma's first humiliation is a clue to her blindness in terms of love, not only for others but in her own case particularly. The light and carefree mood of this scene, suggested by both the musical and visual clues, is in direct contrast with the previous scene of Emma in her bedroom at night. The detail is also one more example of how this adaptation seems to lightly suggest important nuances to the plot or characters'

¹⁹⁴ "I still have the advantage of you by sixteen years' experience, and by not being a pretty young woman and a spoiled child. Come, my dear Emma, let us be friends, and say no more about it. Tell your aunt, little Emma, that she ought to set you a better example than to be renewing old grievances, and that if she were not wrong before, she is now." (*E* 106)

¹⁹⁵ The inscription was rather common on entryways, part of "invidia claudor pateo sed semper amico", i.e., "closed to envy, but always open to a friend."

personalities, only to be picked up by either the attentive or the returning viewer, in a move reminiscent of the new clues always to be found in the re-reading of Austen's novels.

Despite such creative or unconventional strategies of adapting certain aspects or moments of Austen's *Emma*, it does not necessarily follow that this 2009 adaptation veers away from more conventional depictions of Austen on screen, particularly when it comes to the romantic climax. For instance, even if J. P. C. Brown is not critical of Garai's acting and defends that the actress's expression is "effective, because it nudges her performance into the cognitively reflexive territory" (222), he still finds this trait to disappear as the romantic scene takes over and "that self-reflexive, ironic intelligence falters in the scene with Mr Knightley as Garai's Emma confesses 'I find I do not know what to think' just before she takes the initiative and kisses Mr Knightley." (222)

Thus, the reworking of a remarkably bland moment in the novel into a more romantically charged cinematic scene, "incandescent and triumphant" (Harris 62), is also recreated in this adaptation of *Emma*, where the *mise-en-scène* also allows for a glorious, sun-lit romantic climax. However, whereas this particular moment (and others) may be read as a compromise towards the romantic expectations of the audience, others show, as seen, a different attitude from the adapters, making this adaptation just as contradictory as the adaptations discussed in the beginning of this chapter but also as rich.

More often than not, the 2009 adaptation seems to be crossing not uncharted but actually overly charted territory, building its own path across a multitude of previous adaptations and interpretations, sometimes following on the steps of those that came before, other times threading its own way in bringing *Emma* to yet another different audience. This inevitably leads to a complex object, hard to pin down and made to conform to established conventional rules. In this trait, the 2009 *Emma* signals its postmodern quality.

Relocating *Emma* to India: *Aisha* (2010)

One other adaptation bringing Austen to a contemporary setting and updating the universal themes and characters (that many see as the main reason for the

novelist's enduring appeal) is the 2010 Bollywood film *Aisha* (dir. Rajshree Ojha). Although less known than Gurinder Chadha's *Bride and Prejudice* (2004), *Aisha* follows the same strategy of paralleling Austen's early nineteenth-century marriage rules and contemporary India. Also as *Bride and Prejudice*, it cast a Bollywood superstar in the leading role, Sonam Kapoor, who, coming from a family long-connected to the Indian film industry, is as much Bollywood royalty as possible and thus a seemingly suitable choice for the most up-scale of Austen's heroines. Cashing in Kapoor's family name is so important that Emma Woodhouse actually becomes Aisha Kapoor.

More a Bollywood film than *Bride and Prejudice* (which is mostly filmed in the UK), *Aisha* dismisses the openly "global and multicultural community" (Higson, *Film England* 170) that characterized its antecedent Austen-meets-Indian-film-industry. The go-between the Indian, English and American cultures in which the remaking of *Pride and Prejudice*'s themes made sense in Chadha's *Bride and Prejudice* is not an option here. Just like *Kandukondain Kandukondain* or *I Have Found It* (2008, dir. Rajiv Menon), which re-used the plot of *Sense and Sensibility* in a Tamil-language production, *Aisha* roots *Emma* to India, even if one which is part of the globalised world. Hence the fact that most characters mix Hindi with English, sometimes inserting words, others in entire sentences in what is commonly known as Hinglish, locates this *Emma* in the newer Bollywood strategy of aiming at an international market. Also, as García-Periago notices, as recent Bollywood films "have been targeted at diasporic audiences, Bollywood characters exemplify the perfect combination of modernity and tradition." In addition, even if it does not include the musical sequences for which Indian productions tend to be more well known outside India, *Aisha* is the only of the three mentioned Austen adaptations to be purely Bollywood, with *Kandukondain Kandukondain* being actually Kollywood (the Tamil film industry) and *Bride and Prejudice* a joint international production.

One other distinctive feature of *Aisha* is the fact that it follows closely on previous adaptations of *Emma*, particularly Heckerling's *Clueless*, which the Bollywood film follows closely. Some critics have gone so far as to argue that *Aisha* is in fact an adaptation of that 1990s high-school comedy (Crouch), while others have found a richer mixture of citations, from American to Indian cinema (Kenney; García-Periago). Like *Clueless*, however, *Aisha* is frequently accused of depicting an unreal

privileged way of life, sharing in a fantasy-perfect world for its protagonist, even if the criticism obviously feels much more significant in the case of India.

This adaptation's initial sequence seems to want to signal that context from the very start, while at the same time aiming at a modern, cosmopolitan view of India that may be exportable to other markets. *Aisha* then begins with a driving sequence in which a yellow Volkswagen New Beetle speeds away recklessly through the streets of Delhi, to the sound of the protagonist's theme song "By the Way". The only images of its interior are of the dashboard (with a dancing Hawaiian hula doll) and of well-manicured female hands pressing the horn frenetically (Fig. 33). As the car pulls over an elegant hotel, Aisha comes out in a splendid white sari dress, the camera immediately fixing on a close-up and signalling her out as the protagonist (Fig. 34). The next scene, starting with an establishing shot of an American-styled wedding ceremony, has the bride and groom as well as guests look around in discomfort as the official asks for the wedding rings, until Aisha herself is seen rushing towards the front, over white petals, wedding rings in hand.

Her voiceover narration, which starts with a "So romantic" and continues to explain how the couple met under her auspices, dominates the sequence, making sure the audience shares her point of view. She continues to narrate, introducing the main characters, who first congratulate the couple and afterwards are seen all dancing together, Aisha included, while the song "By the Way" continues to play. The next scene has all guests sitting around circular tables, having lunch and making toasts, just as in any Western wedding, until a heavy tropical rain makes everyone run for cover. Aisha is seen stopping in front of the camera, saying, "I love my life", and then keeps running off camera. Only in the next scene, at night with Aisha already in bed, is Arjun (Mr Knightley) introduced: he is throwing stones at Aisha's window, making her get up and the two exchange playful insults, the scene following however closer on the novel, as Arjun is informed on the wedding which he missed for being away on business matters. The initial sequence thus presents us with a beautiful and independent woman who is not only a matchmaker but a wedding planner as well (or event manager as she later tells Arjun). This idea is confirmed by the following scene, the inauguration of her art work exhibition and further proof of her proactive character, even if most other characters keep referring to her art as drawings, thus raising the question of whether such exhibition would be possible without her father's money.

This adaptation offers no equivalent to the Box-Hill picnic, just as had happened with *Clueless*. For Aisha, as for Cher, a rich young woman with freedom of movement (including her own car and presumably a driving license), there can be no immediate correspondence to the significance the Box Hill trip offers the limited and secluded Emma. By extension, the self-contrition Emma is forced to perform following her offence to Miss Bates is here replaced by the uncomfortable confrontation with Pinky, who has become engaged but has kept it a secret from Aisha, from fear she would not understand her choosing her former suitor Rhandir, a mix of Mr Elton and Mr Collins. In the film's particular context, Pinky's accusations run deeper than Mr Knightley's would have as they hit the core of Aisha's universe, her friends and family. They are later repeated by an angry Shefali (Harriet), who again accuses Aisha for seeing her more like a project than a true friend and for being blinded by class prejudice. Thus Aisha's greatest faults are against her own friends, for being incapable of seeing beyond herself and her own small, frivolous world. Completely (and inexplicably) out of the picture is the issue of class, given the still surviving Indian caste system could offer an interesting comparative environment for Austen's stratified class system. Kenney, for instance, comments on this:

Examining the destructive effects of the caste system and challenging its presuppositions about human nature, these films could have served as models for the inclusion of characters like Miss Bates and Jane Fairfax. Instead, the elimination of Miss Bates and the replacement of Jane by the wealthy and independent Aarti tell volumes: Aisha closes its eyes to Austen's study of the effects of poverty and dependence in the world of her wealthiest heroine, that delicate picture Austen draws of a society that both tries to preserve its members from falling on the social scale and is the instrument by which the fall is confirmed. Aisha's modern, urban setting and the filmmakers' drive to replicate the success of *Clueless* work together to evacuate much of Austen's meaning from the action.

Finally, as for the proposal sequence it is diluted across several scenes, as in fact happens with other plot moments in this over-two-hour adaptation. Firstly, we witness a confrontation between Aisha and Arjun taking place inside an elevator in the hospital in Mumbai after both have visited their newborn niece, followed by a scene inside Arjun's car who, after having turned his back on Aisha on exiting the elevator, is seen inviting her into his car when watching her looking miserable in the rain at the hospital's entrance. This offers an interesting turn to both Austen's plot

sequence and most subsequent adaptations as it is Arjun who is made to repent and give Aisha a second chance and not the other way around, thus depriving Aisha of an active change in behaviour: she is only seen to be (passively) suffering, with neither agency nor the conscious sacrifice shown by Emma when telling Mr Knightley that “as a friend, indeed, you may command me. – I will hear whatever you like.” (E 468) Following the brief scene inside the car, in which Arjun tells a silent Aisha he is returning to Delhi, the next sequence offers several shots of Aisha (and also occasionally of Arjun) lost in her thoughts (and drinking, eating and crying compulsively just like Bridget Jones), in different backgrounds and presumably along several days, accompanied by a suggestively melancholic song as soundtrack.

After what was presumably a deep self-evaluation and consequent better understanding of her own self, Aisha is seen apologising to both Pinky and Saurabh (Mr Martin) in a series of smaller scenes before the proposal scene proper takes place. Her reunion with Arjun happens in her aunt’s house, who has just mentioned Aarti (Jane Fairfax) and Dhruv’s (Frank Churchill) upcoming and unexpected marriage. The confrontation between the couple is again delayed, as Aisha chooses to leave after Arjun mentions Shefali. Only after she has confessed her choice to her father and he encourages her to take action – “Kappoors [...] believe in action! Get up my brave girl and go tell him you love him.” – does Aisha decide to act. After another driving sequence (which mimics the initial sequence, only this time we share the interior of the car with Aisha, as well as her nervousness), Aisha unbelievably confesses her love for Arjun in front of a crowd, on a stage and while holding a microphone, in a scene reminiscent of Hollywood romcoms. Even if the over-sentimental climax is broken by the fact she was in the wrong wedding reception, there is no surprise in that outcome which is just as predictable as her performance on stage.

The proposal scene starts later in the evening in a Romeo-and-Juliet-like scenario, with Aisha coming to her balcony after Arjun has thrown stones at her window, just as he had done in the beginning of the film. As he states his connection to her from below, using the same general romantic banalities (and even words) Aisha had used in her public speech earlier, the fact that his final profession of love is made while slowly climbing a ladder to her also becomes trivially expectable. Even the fact that he is in a black smoking while she is wearing a white silk two-piece pyjama seems a rather too obvious reference to western marriage colour scheme, especially after several characters are seen wearing traditional Indian wedding clothes. The

choice of costume for Aisha and of the night time for this scene, as well as the fact that Arjun kisses her eyes, nose, and hand (but not the mouth, following an Indian cinema rule)¹⁹⁶ directly evokes the final scene of Wright's *Pride & Prejudice*, the one made for the American market but deleted for the British (Fig. 35). The adaptation finishes with the traditional Bollywood final dance, which allows a final pairing of each couple for the camera for the usual vibrant and euphoric ending, to the sound of "Gal Mitthi Mitthi" (Fig. 36).¹⁹⁷ Austen's deeply ironical ending is thus replaced in a final acculturation of *Emma* to the Indian setting. As Kenney remarked, "Indian films often have this drive to erase the ethical differences between characters and to 'restore every body, not greatly in fault themselves, to tolerable comfort' (MP 461)."

As the inaugural Bollywood Austen, *Aisha* proves a rich conflation of intertextual references, taken both from cinema and literature, from Western and Eastern cultures, proposing an interesting, even if at times problematic, reinterpretation of *Emma* which repositions the global contemporary reception of Austen and also Bollywood's twenty-first century identity. The representation of Emma herself is particularly meaningful, given the scope of the present work. In García-Periago's words, Aisha is "a prototypical modern Bollywood character, mixing Eastern with Western values." Adding those features to a character already complex to adapt leads to a contradictory and thought-provoking contemporary reinvention of Austen and her heroine.

The first characteristic *Aisha* evidences about its protagonist is unquestionably her beauty. As Emma's beauty is proclaimed by the novel – in the beginning of the novel she is described as "handsome", an adjective used later on by Mr Knightley as well (*E* 40) –, it is logical that most adaptations choose to exploit that feature. Given *Aisha* is a product of Bollywood, an industry known for its perfect-looking actresses, it is not surprising the camera revels in displaying its female protagonist's beauty. Thus the initial sequence includes several close-ups and medium close-ups of Aisha, a decision also justified if we consider the film as a star-vehicle for Sonam Kapoor, produced by her father and sister and meant to prove her acting qualities.

Perhaps less common for an Austen adaptation is the fact that Sonam Kapoor is always wearing considerable make-up, an element connected to one of the film's

¹⁹⁶ See final notes in Kenney.

¹⁹⁷ A "fusion of Bhangra and South Indian beats", the original song by Amit Trivedi has become a success at weddings in India – see <https://www.radiocity.in/film/photo-gallery-details/11-All-Time-Favourite-Wedding-Songs/1536/-3/4874>. Accessed 19 July 2019.

sponsors, L'Óreal, whose logo and brand name are visible on screen several times over the course of the film. The product placement strategy is anything but subtle and it extends to other western brands, such as Dior as Aisha goes in and out of shops (Fig. 37). It is so conspicuous that Kenney affirms: "Too often, the first half of the movie seems like nothing more than a L'Óreal or Dior commercial, and it is accordingly somewhat dull, a less imaginative *Clueless* with the added influence of *Sex and the City*."

Apart from the uncinematic quality it brings to the films, this strategy also brands Aisha as superficial and vain, even more than her antecedent Cher. She becomes little more than a mannequin for displaying designer clothes or at best another example of the "to-be-looked-at-ness" described by Mulvey. It may be useful to recall that one of Emma's undisputed qualities is her lack of vanity, recognised even by Mr Knightley, as well as an almost absolute absence of comments on or concern for clothes in the novel, except from the part of silly characters, such as Mrs Elton.

Aisha is also from the beginning depicted as arrogant (towards Aarti, for example) and condescending (in relation to Shefali, but also eventually Pinky, or Randhir). As always, it is in the comparison to other female characters that Aisha/Emma is revealed. For instance, if the recently returned to India and successful Aarti "provides a positive image of female empowerment" of the modern India (García-Periago), she also serves as a comparison to Aisha, just as Jane Fairfax's accomplishments were to Emma. However, in the case of Aisha, the failure to meet such high standards seems even greater, aggravated by a script that either undermines her achievements (as her art exhibition) or simply eliminates them: her career as event manager is never mentioned again, not even as she is seen helping her aunt with the envelopes for Drhuv and Aarti's engagement. Furthermore, Aarti also surpasses Aisha in successfully bridging the past and modern traditions, for instance when she sings at the Diwali while Aisha is seen sitting and brooding. At that moment, and at the end of the film by choosing a traditional Indian wedding ceremony (in direct contrast to the one Aisha organized for her aunt), "Aarti appears as the ideal hybrid, post-colonial subject who combines perfectly tradition and cosmopolitanism or Westernization, and she seems a model of what Aisha needs to do." (García-Periago)

The comparison with her best friend Pinky (herself a combination of *Clueless*' Dionne and *Pride and Prejudice*'s Charlotte Lucas), leaves Aisha on the losing side, as Pinky is both more mature – she is critical of Aisha's project of reforming and

marrying off Shefali, she recognizes Randir's qualities beyond his awkward manner – and funnier – the script gives her all the sarcastic lines, Aisha reduced to smiling condescendingly at her witty (and, like Austen, occasionally acerbic) comments.

The importance given to Aisha's male counterpart is also of significance, as in this film the Mr Knightley role is significantly reduced, both in terms of on-screen time and of functionality. As stated above, Arjun is deprived of some of Mr Knightley's bluntest moralistic outburst towards Emma (e.g., during the Box Hill scene) whereas in contrast his own behaviour is, for a good part of the film, questionable as his obvious attentions to Aarti seem to deceive the latter and to contradict his final declaration of love to Aisha ("I love you, only you. And it was always you").

As for the Mr Woodhouse figure, Mr Kapoor has his anxiety over possible illnesses shift to his daughter's high credit card extract. To this he adds a concern for her claim never to marry, in a most important shift marking the acculturation of the adaptation. He also becomes much more of a secondary figure and one who does not even figure among his daughter's main reasons for care, in opposition, for instance to Cher's concern over her father's health and diet. He fills instead the role of the adjuvant, but ultimately unimportant, Bollywood father archetype.

One final element in *Aisha* is worth taking a closer look into: that of the film's closeness to the 1990s American comedy *Clueless*. As one reviewer put it, *Aisha* is "a consciously western production",¹⁹⁸ closer to a globalised conception of Austen, and even cinema, and never is that fact made clearer than in the almost constant referencing to Heckerling's influential film. Already claimed to be "far more *Clueless* than *Emma*" (Chaney 296), *Aisha* does in fact play more on the *Clueless* subtext, both in visual and plot terms, than on Austen's text. It does so in general terms, by displaying the lifestyle of the rich and privileged (swapping Los Angeles for Delhi) and in more concrete terms, by making direct allusions to Heckerling's film or even recreating some of its scenes.

There are almost countless references to *Clueless* and the first happens in the initial sequence as one of the interior shots of the speeding VW Beetle is of the backseat, where a blue, white and black chequered box stands out among the objects being shoved around by Aisha's reckless driving. It evokes Cher's signature outfit, a

¹⁹⁸ See <https://austenauthors.net/austen-does-bollywood/>. Accessed 17 July 2019.

yellow chequered two-piece suit, a capital reference repeated later in the film as Aisha wears a similar suit (albeit with a longer skirt) when visiting Arjun's office. Other references to *Clueless* include: the addition of a sidekick, Pinky (as Dionne), Shafali's makeover sequence (including a snack and trying out Aisha's clothes), Aisha calling Arjun (who is also with his girlfriend) to rescue her after she is left stranded in the middle of nowhere, the use of Aisha's voiceover to introduce the other characters, the sofa fight between Aisha and Arjun for control of the remote (Aisha is not watching a cartoon as Cher, but a romantic film), and Shefali retelling her life-threatening situation (falling over the boat while wearing a life-jacket) to a crowd at lunch.

Aiming at modernity

Probably due to her long-established reputation of being a "difficult" Austen heroine, *Emma* is a most interesting case to analyse the evolution of Austen's screen adaptation. It may even help us to question the concept of "classic" adaptations, and how much of it has survived in the twenty-first century. The challenges posed to the contemporary adapter by *Emma* have led J. P. C. Brown to even conclude that "[m]odern adaptations have curious difficulty realising this impressive, capable, intelligent woman." (223) For Brown, the reason for this difficulty lies mainly in transposing Emma's interiority on screen in way that is both effective in audiovisual terms and believable.¹⁹⁹ However, there may be more to it and Emma's singularity as a character herself (and not just in the way that the novel makes us aware of that singularity) poses its own problems, and the conditions in which adaptations themselves are produced must be added to the equation.

As the two adaptations analysed above exemplify, the assumed objective of directors and producers is to present the audience with modern versions of the novel without being too *unfaithful* to Austen or, more likely, to what an established fan-base of Austen adaptations might expect. In fact, although capitalizing on the guaranteed value of an Austen adaptation, twenty-first century adapters are unanimous in trying to distance themselves from the so-called classic period adaptations, normally associated with both out-dated productions and a very specific (and limited) public.

¹⁹⁹ "The problem is really that film has difficulties with characters showing consciousness of something other than what we see on screen and also other than what they're talking about. The film uses a version of a standard way of communicating interiority, by pushing the camera's subjectivity to the point where it becomes explicit." (J. P. C. Brown 223)

For example, in 1996, Kate Beckinsale referred to her character's modernity: "She doesn't feel stuffy or old-fashioned. Some of it is surprisingly modern." (qtd in Birtwistle and Conklin 19) Likewise, as seen above, director Jim O'Hanlon made a similar claim, when saying their *Emma* was meant to "have one foot in the period and one foot in today."²⁰⁰ Nevertheless, this yearning for a modern feel may sometimes prove disappointing. Actually that which is so openly proclaimed by those involved in these productions does, quite frequently, fall short if one takes the time to analyse them. Other times, it leaves at least enough room for contradictory readings as, for instance, is the case of the opening of the 2009 *Emma* described above.

In comparison with *Pride and Prejudice*, a romantic story enriched by serious social questions like the role of matrimony or the volatility of women's position in society, *Emma* may seem lacking density and plot, and, worst of all (from the adapter's point of view), the romantic pair is not revealed until we are well into the story. In this particular aspect, *Emma* is in fact very different from other Jane Austen novels and this difference may prove as a difficult obstacle to overcome when adapting it to a twenty-first century audience. Thus what is in fact a very condensed, and also complex, plot may turn into a trap when adaptation is concerned. If the modernisation is arguably easier with *Pride and Prejudice*, it might reveal itself a very dangerous business in *Emma*. As pointed out by Laurie Kaplan, concerning the 2009 adaptation:

Trying to be simultaneously "modern" and "completely of the period," however, produces a hybrid adaptation that fails to satisfy. Those gorgeous period trappings of the Heritage film genre—costumes, art objects, antique furniture, carriages, and country houses—create a visually pleasing film, but Garai's "modern" *Emma* remains entrapped by early nineteenth-century codes of manners and propriety.

In fact, as it comes out, this *Emma*'s modernity is at times little more than an energetic character who, quite frequently, breaks with what should be expected from an early nineteenth-century young woman for no particular reason other than giving the idea that period drama is not static. Examples of this are the scenes where *Emma* wanders off all alone or her rather shocking behaviour towards Mr Churchill at Box Hill. This is in part also true of the 1996 Miramax film, where an energetic and playful *Emma* dominates the narrative, making it nothing more than a light romantic

²⁰⁰ See page 188.

comedy – a characteristic openly assumed by that production when in the trailer the film is presented as (or rather reduced to) “Jane Austen’s timeless comedy”. In this way, these recent Emmas become reminiscent of the Lizzie Bennet of the 2005 film, directed by Joe Wright and starring Keira Knightley. In both cases, the so-called modernity – aiming at portraying independent and decided women with whom the (young) audience may relate to – is a wolf in sheep’s clothes as it contributes to a much more traditional (and patriarchal) framework than the one proposed by the nineteenth-century novel.²⁰¹ In fact, to focus on an idea of a light romantic story punctuated by a few comic reliefs is to deny *Emma*’s most profound question of personal growth and maturing.

Not surprisingly, the will to modernize Emma is more evident in the 2010 Bollywood adaptation. According to Kenney, Aisha’s name means “the one who is alive” as well as “she-who-must-be-obeyed”, by evoking the homonymous sorceress queen from H. Rider Haggard’s novel, *She* (1886). Regardless of whether such choices were consciously made, Aisha stands out as the driving force behind the film: “She is the center of the geography of *Aisha*, and though the film roams from shopping malls to camping trips, there is, as in the novel, almost never a time when Aisha is not our focalizer and our main concern.” (Kenney)

Whereas a critic such as Rosa M. García-Periago sees several female characters in *Aisha* embodying “a positive merging of values”, i.e. “[t]he combination of Western and Eastern values fall[ing] within the postcolonial enterprise”, the fact remains that this Aisha is limited by the boundaries imposed by the script. Freed of the geographical and parental limitations that circumscribe Emma, Aisha is nevertheless bound in her liberty to a lifetime ruled by fashion rules and frivolous concerns. Austen has been frequently accused of leaving the great events of her time (the French Revolution, the Napoleonic Wars, the internal crisis of the Regency) outside her fictional (and non-fictional) world, and among those contradicting such stance is Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s opinion that trivialities in Austen signal (not without irony) a most important aspect of those times, that of women’s place in society, one she was obliged to share. To dismiss them is to misread Austen, as Gilbert and Gubar claim:

²⁰¹ See previous work on the subject, Coelho (*Pride and Prejudice em duas Adaptações para Cinema e Televisão*).

[...] Austen's courageous "grace under pressure" is not only a refuge from a dangerous reality, it is also a comment on it [...]. Although she has become a symbol of culture, it *is* shocking how persistently Austen demonstrates her discomfort with her cultural inheritance, specifically her dissatisfaction with the tight place assigned women in patriarchy and her analysis of the economics of sexual exploitation. At the same time, however, she knows from the beginning of her career that there is no other place for her but a tight one, and her parodic strategy is itself a testimony to her struggle with inadequate but inescapable structures. (112)

That is not, however, the case in *Aisha* where the protagonist's major life achievement is being first in style and glamour. Therefore the innovative potential that a relocation of *Emma* in a different spatial, temporal, and cultural framework is left unfulfilled. Favourable critics of Gurinder Chadha's earlier *Bride and Prejudice* have claimed that the film managed to transfer the core of Austen's social issues in contemporaneity by relocating the cultural background of the story. Higson, for example, claimed "it represents a bold attempt to rework Austen's characters, storyline and themes in a contemporary setting" where "Austen's focus on an enclosed, [...] highly specific locale [...] is replaced by a global and multicultural community" (*Film England* 170). Talking of *Aisha*, García-Periago seems to make a similar claim, when stating that: "[a]lthough the Bollywoodization of *Emma* entails a considerable lack of fidelity to Austen, the text acquires a new dimension and layers in India and contributes to the global understanding of Jane Austen."

However, whereas Lalita Bakshi (*Bride and Prejudice*'s Elizabeth Bennet character) openly questions the status quo by questioning William Darcy's prejudices concerning India, *Aisha* makes no equivalent standpoint. Instead, the film opts for the superficiality of both cultures, promoting no real interchange. That option is represented in the first sequence of *Aisha*, as the mass-produced Hula doll seen on the dashboard of *Aisha*'s car symbolises that same compromise. The same goes to the many intertextual references made to *Clueless*. Even with García-Periago's well-sustained claim that *Aisha* "is more indebted to Indian culture and Bollywood conventions," the centrality given to other idealized and western-inspired moments on this Bollywood film put into question where its identity lies. The sequence on the beach camp (which loosely re-enacts the Weston's Christmas party), particularly the scene when the cast is gathered at night around a bound fire, roasting marshmallow and listening to a singer playing a guitar (and smoking cannabis, apparently) is much

of a cinematic cliché, both in the context of an a Hollywood-inspired film and an Austen adaptation, to be taken seriously. The same goes for Aisha's and ultimately Arjun's final declarations of love for each other. As one film critic put it, "[i]t seems that the filmmakers here, as often is the case with repackaged Austen goods, have chosen to focus on the 'handsome, clever, and rich' components of their protagonist, and of the material more generally." (Crouch)

It might appear easy to find an explanation for the adaptation choices mentioned above. A modern take on a classic novel is, more often than not, motivated by an economic purpose: to create what Madeleine Dobie calls "*crossover movies*" (251). Dobie particularly applies the term to Austen adaptations and to a gender-defined (feminine) expected audience. Higson defined the concept of *crossover film* as an object halfway between the mainstream and the art-house film, "driven by both the commercialism and the market imperative of the mainstream studio film and the cultural imperative and artistic values of the specialized film." (*English Heritage*, 91) Although absent from Higson's discussion of the term (but not of Dobie's), the discussion of television products as well as cinematic ones makes sense, particularly in more recent times, as we tend toward the blurring of boundaries between television miniseries and films, with a possible preponderance of the first over the second.

Despite the fact that television and film remain two different media, recent years have shown a strong evolution of the first, especially in terms of reputation. As actors, directors, and producers easily switch from the big screen to the small one, both aesthetic and technical features once exclusive to cinema become part of television productions as well. For this reason, what now seems to be a shared vision of the past is evident in all these twenty-first century adaptations, regardless of the medium in question. In a way, this shared vision may help us to overcome the sometimes incapacitating and endless debate on theoretical aspects of medium translation and direct us to other, more interesting, subjects.

The growing proximity between television and film production also evinces that core elements when discussing Austen adaptation may be changing. One of such elements is that of the heritage aesthetic, closely connected to the late twentieth century adaptations of nineteenth-century novels and usually a label against which twenty-first century adapters of Austen openly react. Thus avoiding the "chocolate-box territory" has been a commonly repeated objective of more recent adapters. Here the producers of the 2005 *Pride & Prejudice*, Tim Bevan and Eric Fellner, declare:

We [Bevan and Fellner] met with him [Joe Wright], and his vision of how to make the film and tell the classic Austen story was in tune with ours. For all of us there was no point in reinventing the story, as it is such a worldwide favourite. But we wanted to present the story as it was written, casting actors at the ages Jane Austen indicated, and giving them a depiction which avoided the ‘chocolate box’ presentations that television veers towards. Joe is a true romantic, yet he also shoots the story in a modern way and without subverting it. (*Pride & Prejudice: Production Notes* 4)

The declaration, while similar to others made by twenty-first century adapters of Austen, is far from new, with John Glenister, the director of BBC’s 1972 adaptation of *Emma* having made a similar claim when establishing the *mise-en-scène* of that production (Lauritzen 112).

Of all the adaptations here chosen as case studies, the 2009 BBC adaptation *Emma* is the only twenty-first century adaptation to fit the category of heritage film and for that reason the one presenting the more immediate ground for discussion of this issue. As such, it is only natural to return more closely to some of the issues discussed in the previous chapter. In his famous 1993 article, and concerning the heritage industry of which the heritage film is a part of, Andrew Higson stated that:

The heritage industry may transform the past into a series of commodities for the leisure and entertainment market, but in most cases the commodity on offer is an image, a spectacle, something to be gazed at. History, the past, becomes, in Fredric Jameson’s phrase, “a vast collection of images” designed to delight the modern-day tourist-historian (Jameson, 66; see also Urry, caps. 5 and 6). In this version of history, a critical perspective is displaced by decoration and display, a fascination with surfaces, “an obsessive accumulation of comfortably archival detail” (Wright, 252) in which a fascination with style displaces the material dimensions of historical context. The past is reproduced as flat, depthless pastiche, where the reference point is not the past itself, but other images, other texts. (“Re-presenting” 112)²⁰²

The issue at stake here is also to what degree, a decade and half later, that statement can still apply to the 2009 adaptation of *Emma*. In an age of globalized mass consumption, his claim seems to strike an even clearer note. However, from another point of view, Higson’s statement, now and then, betrays a reductionist view of a heritage film adaptation to offer, via the unquestionable visual spectacle that defines it

²⁰² See also Fredric Jameson, “Post-modernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism” (1984); John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze* (1964); Patrick Wright, *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain* (1985).

as a genre, critical interpretative paths to the attentive viewer. That being a characteristic of any film, there is no plausible reason to believe the heritage genre an exception. Of course the greater possibility for lavish productions that the view of the past makes possible (as for instance is also the case with the epic or fantasy genres) may seem to obfuscate the inattentive viewer, but it also opens up the interpretative options.

Still in the quotation above, Higson's apparently narrowing take on heritage's critical potential is counterbalanced by the possibilities suggested at its very end. Although most probably not the critic's intention, the reference "not the past itself, but other images, other texts" raises the issue of intertextuality. Later in the text Higson refers to intertextuality as a movement inside the cycle, as in using the same actors in similar roles, but as proof of the genre's constricted approach, part of its iconographic trademark (115).

In the case of the 2009 *Emma*, it is that iconographic trademark that is visible. Notwithstanding the already quoted intention of the adapters, namely director Jim O'Hanlon, to present a modern *Emma*, traditional elements are present from its start, namely in the title sequence described above. The same visual identity is kept in the DVD elements, where the title menus also recycle the use of images of the page and the book (usual in the 1980s and 1990s literary adaptations), by having translucent captions of the adaptation flip over as pages of a book. The same goes to the insertion of several glyphs, reminiscent of scroll (or book) ornaments, both in the title sequence and the DVD menus. Although a detail, they make evidence of "painterly compositions" as "a distinctive (and almost clichéd) marker of the heritage film" (Vidal 114).

The most obvious recovery of clichés established by a number of previous productions though is obviously the choice of spectacular houses and other constructed sets. In particular the use of Squerryes Court, in Kent, as Hartfield, proves this point: both the cold-opening and the proposal scene elevate the house almost to the importance of a character, and the many scenes taking place in its formally styled gardens offer an alternative to the more typically English natural style, without compromising that identity. If we take J. P. C. Brown's note on the importance of the inclusion or exclusion of views of the house as relevant in particular scenes for each adaptation of *Emma* (221), then the 2009 *Emma* is perhaps surprisingly the one

which, freer in technical terms from the proximity to the house, most relishes in displaying it.

Much in the same line Thornell considers “[t]he shifting of the location of novel’s scenes from interiors to exteriors and the invention of outdoor scenes involving women have been considered liberal feminist rewritings of the original texts.” (25) They tend, however, more often than not, to the subtle reinforcement of more traditional worldviews, as the heroine’s perceived liberty may in fact be more restricted (Fraiman) and the screen time allotted for moments of outdoor visual pleasure replaces moments of introspection and reflexion, crucial in a novel (and character) like *Emma*. If to this we add a romantically infused use of photography, with the constant insertion of sun-lit outdoor scenes and a composition frequently based in bright contrasting colours, then the 2009 *Emma* visually inscribes itself in the heritage and romantic tradition despite its claims for modernity.

On the opposite side, *Aisha*, being neither a period film nor set in England, poses a whole new range of questions regarding this matter. As Theresa Kenney questioned:

If Emma ceases to be the queen of English verdure and becomes the empress of a cosmopolitan Indian scene, can we say that this Bollywood Emma is still in any way Austen’s Emma?

If Juliet McMaster is right about the novel’s offering us the geography of Emma’s mind, then what is irretrievably lost with the English landscape and the small roads of Highbury, the sense of London being several hours’ ride away, is precisely the most important thing about Emma herself, her mind, a word that Austen often uses to indicate even the larger concept of soul (cf. Ryle 17-18).

With *Aisha*, although the heritage element is neither directly present nor reworked as happens with the 2009 *Emma*, the associations to it remain. Thus, the delight in looking at beautiful, and often inexistent country houses (composed of several bits of different locations and built-in studio sets) is replaced by an equally unreal look at the over-privileged lifestyle of the very rich.

In this strategy, just as is common in heritage productions, the houses play an important part, from Aisha’s imposing and beautifully decorated house to the glimpses of her aunt’s mansion. To this the adaptation adds another glamorous and exclusive locale, that of the high-fashion shopping centre, where Aisha and her friends are seen shopping all by themselves. However, the new environment is not

without subverting, probably unwantedly, readings and the modernizing intention takes yet another twist: in aiming at the familiarly contemporary the adaptation focuses on the superficial rather than on the undercurrent issues of *Emma*. When an adaptation such as *Aisha* also opts to openly make of another previous adaptation (*Clueless*) its blueprint, the range of second possible readings rises exponentially. Although considering other adaptations, Jocelyn Harris affirmed that

[s]uch modernizing moments appeal to familiar stereotypes. If conscious, they bridge Jane Austen's world and ours. If unconscious, they are ridiculously anachronistic. Ideally, intertextuality engenders metatextual commentary, because the context imported by an allusion prompts further reflections. But allusion shorn of context is mere echo, and may even mislead the viewer. Whenever directors elide boundaries between one film and another like this, their allusions confuse rather than clarify the matter. (50)

I find Harris's comment noteworthy even if the distinction she establishes between conscious and unconscious interventions when adapting Austen is not to me as clear-cut as she presents it. In fact, many of such modernizing takes, whether conscious or not, do both: they "bridge Jane Austen's world and ours" even at the expense of being anachronistic. Furthermore, the fact that not all intertextual references are perceived by the audience – in fact, some may not even be intentionally created by the adapters – does not carry the negative implication suggested by Harris. On the contrary, Austen's contemporary identity is now made of such diverse added layers of interpretation and part of the reason why her works remain relevant.

Nonetheless, the heritage motif and its most immediate realisation in the visual representation of setting, composition and mise-en-scène is not the only form through which adaptations such as the 2009 *Emma* and *Aisha* explore their potential for visual pleasure. Reaching for the audience's knowledge, in historical terms or even concerning other adaptations, "the heritage film has become highly reflexive of its use of narrative and aesthetic elements that engage the spectator in a 'knowing' mode of address." (Vidal 109)

Another feature of twenty-first century adaptations of Austen seems to be the unashamed assumption of the exploration of such elements, a conscious and defying response to the long-held criticism, particularly during the 1980s and 1990s, against the so-called "bonnet and breeches" adaptations for focusing too much on that visual pleasure. In that way, the 2009 BBC production of *Emma* seems unconcerned with

possible criticism on the exploitation of visual pleasure, much in the tradition of heritage productions, even if updated for its contemporary audience. When re-evaluating the historical hindrances traditionally attached to heritage critique, Claire Monk pointed out “the fixation upon the ‘fetishisation of period details’, combined with the othering of the audience, shaped a critique which seemed to treat visual pleasure itself as politically suspect.” (*Heritage Film Audiences* 21) Such a formulation invites considerations on the scopophilic nature of pleasure in cinema, as defined by Mulvey, and Monk explores them in relation to heritage film, namely how it presupposes a feminine audience (21).

This production, as others of about the same time, seems to relish on the said visual pleasure, particularly the one connected to a feminized perspective. In that sense one particular element, that of costume, deserves special attention. Emma’s clothes are obviously the central point, so much so that several costume items from this production, the majority of which belonging to Emma, have featured in an exhibition at the Jane Austen’s House Museum, in Chawton, on occasion of the 200th anniversary of the publication of *Emma*, in 2015 (Fig. 38).²⁰³ Keeping with the visual identity of the adaptation, most of Emma’s costumes in this BBC production are of brightly coloured, ranging from the pinks and red, to the greens, yellows and whites. What is noticeable also is the mere quantity of the costume items for Emma, especially in comparison with previous television adaptations of the novel. Thus, while both the 1996 A&E/Meridian film and the 1972 BBC mini-series opted for a more limited and defined (in terms of both colours and textures) wardrobe for Emma, the 2009 adaptation seems to go for the excess, with Emma hardly ever repeating a item of clothes.

Yet, in the 2009 *Emma* the strategy is not limited to displaying beautiful period (or at least period-reminiscent) women clothes. In fact, a very important part of it involves men’s clothes as well. As Esther Sonnet claimed, “a general feature of contemporary film adaptations of Austen novels is a visual eroticisation of the male body, effected largely through the cut and styling of costume” (qtd in Thornell 22). Although that tendency started with the 1990s Darcymania around Colin Firth in a

²⁰³ With the suggestive title of “200 years of Emma: Emma Imagined” it was presented as follows: “Over the years, Emma has provided inspiration for various illustrated editions and dramatic adaptations. In Emma Imagined you will find some of the ways in which Emma and the people of Highbury have been imagined by artists, costume designers and film-makers. Many of these depictions are as vivid as the original text. All are testament to Jane Austen’s enduring popularity.”

wet shirt (or chemise) in the famous lake scene of Andrew Davies's script, twenty-first century adaptations have prolifically explored that idea. Examples include the brooding Byronic figure of Mathew McFadyen in *Pride & Prejudice* (2005), and the dashing Rupert Penry-Jones as Captain Wentworth in *Persuasion* (2007, dir. Adrian Shergold), all frequent protagonists of Internet memes, that new millennium feature of visual. Part of "an effort to render the films' visual surface more seductive, better 'eye candy' for their largely female audiences" (Thornell 22), male costume choices are as crucial as women's. They are also not limited to the hero: in Emma's first and fortuitous encounter with Frank Churchill (neither of them knows who the other is), his dashing figure as a mysterious, handsomely dressed gentleman is only improved by the fact he is riding an almost as impressive black stallion.

In *Aisha*, visual pleasure through the display of costume is even more evident as it allies western high-fashion to exquisite traditional Indian dresses. In this sense, costume itself becomes the driving force of many of the scenes in *Aisha*. In Kenney's words:

Bollywood has caught the heritage film disease of featuring everlarger houses and absurdly improbable wardrobes, parties, and transport, and the result is a glitter-fest completely alien to the restrained and tasteful habit of wealth and comfort that make up the Hartfield and Donwell Abbey of the novel. [...] The medium of film might demand visual indications of wealth and status, but surrendering the quaint and traditional Ford's for the glossy spaces of a shopping mall makes *Aisha* something Austen's Emma is not: a heroine of surfaces and mirrors.

More than the issue of fidelity to the novel or its heroine, what seems to be at stake in *Aisha* is how shallower and inevitably minor do these choices turn the heroine into. Especially when these seem to be unashamed give-ins to a culture of visual pleasure, without the consciously ridiculousness of *Clueless*' Cher choosing out her outfit for the day using a software that allows her a preview of the ensemble as if she were a digital paper-doll.

As seen by the discussion on heritage film in the previous section, an exaggerated attention to period detail, in particular costume, has been pointed out as one of the elements injuring the genre. In fact, in 1981 Lauritzen, when analysing the 1972 adaptation, stated that:

There is in fact an obvious danger in the convincing naturalism of *Emma* and other similar serials in that they will create a sense of such intimate

identification with characters that the effect will be the same as that of the main bulk of the products of the commercial entertainment industry: a passivisation and a blunting of perceptions with regard to real life and its problems.

If the application of naturalism and historical accuracy really has such an effect on a contemporary television audience, we must establish that this is still another way in which the *Emma* serial is subtly unfaithful to the original, simply by being too faithful. (116)

Even if Lauritzen's comment is still much connected to the fidelity criterion (113, 116), which is not surprising for an early 1980s study, the core of her argument is still as reasonable now as it was at the time. It also applies to *Aisha*, if we see that film as (at least in part) an adaptation of *Clueless*.

On the other hand, a conscious disregard for such accuracy may betray other (un)conscious readings of the novel and even contradictory elements in the adaptation itself. Thus, for example, Joe Wright's *Pride and Prejudice* liberates Elizabeth from the well-known Regency attire (like the *Gone-With-the-Wind*-style dresses of the 1940 film before it) simply because they were less flattering, thus bringing into the discussion Mulvey's notion of "look-at-ness" mentioned before. Likewise, the film adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* opts for a pseudo-Victorian look, much indebted to visual representations of steampunk fiction, thus raising the doubt: is the spectator meant to question the apparent contradiction in the way these women are dressed and the way they act, is it supposed to be a symbol of the revisionist female empowerment, or is it simply an eye-treat, a remnant of heritage film tropes?

In conclusion, taking into consideration the two twenty-first century screen adaptations of *Emma* mentioned above, it is clear that, even if both include elements that update *Emma*, none has the self-reflexive tone that has worked for new millennium adaptations of other Austen's novels and which this chapter began with. *Emma*'s apparent absence from what some critics name the post-heritage movement (Vidal 100), materializing in pastiche and parody, may however be symptomatic of the novel's exceptionality, inside and outside of Austen's canon, a stance defended, as already seen, by several critics throughout the reception history of this novel. Ultimately, it could even be seen as a consequence of this novel's particular history of adaptations during the defining period of the 1990s, as *Clueless* can be arguably presented as one of the great influencers of this trend. Thus, it is reasonable to say that while *Clueless* paved the way for the new turn Austen adaptation in general was about

to take in the first decade of the new millennium, it made it at the same time harder for provocative, self-reflexive, post-modern adaptations of that same particular novel to happen. In one recent and extensive study of Austen adaptations, Marc DiPaolo claimed that “[m]any of the individual adaptations have elements of radical academic readings built into their fabric [...] but none of them provide a thoughtfully subversive reading of Emma.” (DiPaolo 148)

On a less common sphere of Austen adaptations, *Aisha* held, in theory at least, the possibility to rework both *Emma* and *Clueless* in an effective way, by readdressing the themes raised in Austen’s novel and its more contemporary afterlives in terms of the Indian cultural context, while at the same time re-questioning how the issues introduced by Heckerling’s film might make sense in that context, a decade and a half later. However, by choosing to focus on the superficial, it is the BBC’s 2009 *Emma* which surprisingly brings the more interesting interpretation of the novel, by repositioning the expectations of the heritage motif in relation to a modernized look. In that sense, I agree with J.P.C. Brown’s statement that:

Though less successful overall, one might make a related case at least about the intentions of the 2009 BBC production, which often seems to be conducting a dialogue with the text that goes via recent critical interpretations of it (e.g., in a prologue sequence that links Jane Fairfax, Frank Churchill and Emma Woodhouse as displaced or traumatized children), even if this does leave it vulnerable to Lisa Hopkins’ charge that in unsubtle ways it’s dramatizing the subtext rather than the text (Hopkins 2012: 247–8). This is to do implicitly what *Lost in Austen* and *The Jane Austen Book Club* do explicitly: bring Austen and modernity into collision with each other. (232-233)

Therefore, the 2009 *Emma* positions itself in the complex panorama of today’s adaptations of Austen, simultaneously conservative and innovative, a stance more difficult to claim for *Aisha*. On that hybrid identity, Thornell quotes Imelda Whelehan: “in the confused, but ultimately conservative messages they convey, spectators presumably seek both endorsement and challenge to women’s domestic and economic roles” (149). She adds herself that “[w]hile patriarchal authority is reinforced in *Emma* and *Clueless*, the films’ accommodation of elements that trouble such authority validates uneasiness, indicating turbulence within the representation of ‘femininity’” (31). The turbulence Thornell refers to is also originated in our own complex contemporary reception of Austen, and as the dawn of the new digital paradigm transitions to full daylight, it is bound to grow even more convoluted.

When old media and new media collide

As referred in chapter two, Henry Jenkins' work on convergence media and its related concepts of transmedia storytelling and participatory culture have shaped the theorization of the new digital paradigm, particularly in terms of content dissemination and media structure. Although his position on how adaptations fit into this model has not been neither consistent nor a major concern,²⁰⁴ much of his ongoing work has further pushed the field of new media towards new conceptualizations, as it continues to change and evolve, making it unavoidable when considering new media forms of adaptation.

The volatility of the field and its forming theorization is one of the difficulties in taking as an object of study an adaptation produced under such circumstances. To ignore it, however, is to fail to recognize its importance for the discussion in the field of adaptation studies. Michael Ryan Moore, calling attention to the ways this new media theorization may contribute to the rethinking in Adaptation Studies, claimed that “[a]daptations allow media producers to meet consumers’ dual demands for personalized and novel media” (183), thus placing adaptation in the centre of that debate. The same goes for the future of Austen’s reception, as she gains yet another new life in a variety of new formats and social media functions and becomes “*thoroughly embedded* in the lives of readers more than ever” (Caddy 49, my emphasis).

As Jenkins himself recognised, however, in his influential 2006 book *Convergence Media: Where Old and New Media Collide*, the rise of the latter (new media) is not necessarily made at the expense of the former (old media), as the previous digital revolution paradigm proclaimed. On the contrary, in Jenkins view, “the emerging convergence paradigm assumes that old and new media will interact in ever more complex ways.” (6) Or, as Jessica Pressman noted, “[...] *new media* announces its relativity. It only has meaning in relation to “old media,” and, of course, what is old is always also historically specific. The terms involved are not stable and true but qualitative and changing.” (in Ryan et al. 365)

²⁰⁴ See, for instance, Jenkins, “Adaptation, Extension, Transmedia”.

Thus, the most recognisable form of Austen adaptation, that of screen adaptation (both film and television), has not been supplanted by new media formats, not only because those are still being successfully produced, but also because a part of their identity lives on the newer formats. Recalling Hutcheon's "biological/cultural homology", it might not be surprising to find some of the characteristics of these "traditional" forms of adaptation surviving in newer forms of reinterpreting and communicating Austen. Furthermore, it is through adaptive inheritance, the continuous addition of layers of meaning, that each new adaptation of Austen (and of *Emma* in particular) gains relevance in its own context and in relation to others in the adaptive network.

If, however, there is a degree of familiarity in certain aspects of these new media adaptations, other features are truly innovative, such as the possibility to (re)tell a story using a multi-platform approach *and* disseminate it immediately to a wide audience. That is the basic principle of transmedia storytelling, defined by Jenkins as:

[T]he art of world making... to fully experience any fictional world, consumers must assume the role of hunters and gatherers, chasing down bits of the story across media channels, comparing notes with each other via online discussion groups, and collaborating to ensure that everyone who invests time and effort will come away with a richer entertainment experience. (*Convergence Media* 21)²⁰⁵

Although it is now clear that many of the key features of new media (particularly interaction and community or fan bases) have not appeared with the advent of the digital paradigm and do in fact predate the so-called Web 2.0,²⁰⁶ it is also beyond any doubt that the scale at which these now occur corresponds to a new, game-changing phenomenon. Such as other possible examples from J. R. R. Tolkien to *Star Trek*, Austen fan communities can be traced much further back than the creation and democratisation of the World Wide Web – the activities of the Janeites in the early twentieth century mentioned in the first chapter are proof of it.

Nonetheless, the reach and impact of such activities, on the one hand, and the monetisation of such community dynamics by commercial entities on the other, are features of the Web 2.0, fuelled by user-generated content and the growth of social

²⁰⁵ For further discussion on transmedia storytelling, including how it differs from adaptation in the blog post and video, see Jenkins, "Transmedia 202: Further Reflections".

²⁰⁶ See Brough (in Ryan et al. 382-387).

media. These features have changed the way existent communities organize themselves and, although I will not focus my attention on the content generated by such communities, a valuable source of fan-based adaptations of Austen's works via what Kylie Mirmohamadi calls "the digital networks of Janeites", their existence is fundamental to understanding the creation of a product such as *Emma Approved*, even if Janeites were not its target audience.

In ways that we still have not been able to fully explain or predict, the Internet has changed our perception of the world, but also our relationship with cultural outputs. In a text from 2003, and keeping in mind that in such matters change takes place at a much higher speed, Kate Bowles commented:

The Internet in particular has shifted its weight from being primarily a medium of communication to being an exponentially expanding networked archive of data. It's the global superstore of the information age, but as governments, moral lobbyists, and commercial entrepreneurs are discovering, the Internet is wholly dependent on *use*, and apparently independent of the normal rules of cultural, industrial, and economic *production*. Economic, political, and social theories fall short of describing its range; in terms of cultural and media studies, it is neither unequivocally mass culture nor popular culture. Networked communication has no done way with real political and social power, but it has transformed the way in which these can be talked about; theories which depended narratively on category discriminations between producers and consumers, artists and audiences, buyers and sellers, governments and the governed, find themselves in a kind of epistemological crisis. Has everything changed? Or has the Internet revealed the ways in which the whole gamut of interpretive positions – developed throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries for explaining the way things are – were less adequate to the task than we thought? (15)

Although Bowles' statement did not anticipate major shifts in online communication made possible by social networks, her claim on how the Internet brought a major shift of paradigm, which we have not completely reasoned through, remains adequate. Of course that in the time between Bowles's text and now, much has continued to be written in the attempt to make sense of these activities and thus pin down, at least momentarily, in theoretical and descriptive terms, how the 2.0 Web is changing the way we deal with digital products.

Finally, and on a different note, it might still be necessary to call attention to the pertinence of adaptations made available in, and even developed exclusively for, the Internet, as most of such objects are still looked upon with suspicion by the

academia. It is crucial to break some conceptual barriers and theoretical prejudices for, as Aden Evens, author of *Logic of Digital*, affirms: “[d]igital culture includes the nagging worries that its associated technologies are rotting our brains, narrowing our thinking, and separating us from ourselves and from each other.” (3)

The pervasiveness of such attitudes in some areas of the academia, even if only in a neglecting choice of objects of study, represents a double jeopardy nonetheless: on the one hand, they risk alienating academic studies from the off-campus reality, while on the other they hamper much needed reflection, especially from the area of the Humanities, on the deep socially-changing phenomena taking place in contemporaneity. The inclusion of an object such as *Emma Approved* in this thesis, although a modest contribution, springs from such preoccupations.

The brave new world of online platforms: *Emma Approved* (2013-2014)

Following on the success of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (2012-2013), the first web series to win an Emmy Award, this video blog, or vlog,²⁰⁷ subtitled *Love, Fashion, Lifestyle, Emma*, is, according to its Facebook page, “A lifestyle brand and documentary of life coach and matchmaker Emma Woodhouse” (Fig. 39). Blurring the boundaries between reality and fiction, it presents us a successful young woman running “the matchmaking and lifestyle division of the developing Highbury Partners Lifestyle Group” whose principal objective is, in her own words, “make your life better”. A Californian girl, presumably spoiled by her father (who exists in name only), she shares the same interests as several billion adolescents across the globe: photography, writing, dancing, fashion, travel, music, art and going to parties. Consisting of seventy-two short videos (4-8 minutes), posted twice a week on a devoted channel on YouTube, complemented with fashion tips and looks, this new format brings *Emma* up to contemporaneity in an unprecedented way, closer than ever to her audience, as the adaptation also includes interfaces with Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and, for the more recent second season (2018-), an interactive mobile-game, in the “Moments” platform.

The innovation of *Emma Approved*, however, does not lie in its transmedia storytelling strategy alone. As Jenkins affirmed, “[c]onvergence does not occur

²⁰⁷ In 2009, *Merriam-Webster* announced “vlog” as one of the new words to be included in its dictionary – see Pilkington.

through media appliances, however sophisticated they may become”, but “within the brains of individual consumers and through their social interactions with others” (*Convergence Culture* 3). Thus meaning in *Emma Approved* is not limited to the one the adaptation contains in itself, but extrapolates to other media, as a result of the adapters multi-platform content output meant to increase the audience’s participation, turning it into a more audacious transmedia narrative than its precursor *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. As Russo remarks:

Emma Approved builds on the format of the earlier series by fully capitalising on and monetising the world-building dimension of transmedia storytelling with platforms such as Emma’s fashion blog, Harriet’s music club, and through Q. and A. sessions in which the “characters” responded to fan questions over social media. There was a strong emphasis on social community building, with viewers encouraged to interact with the characters over social media or through the online music club “created” by Harriet Smith, in which users were encouraged to upload original music or perform cover songs of Harriet’s compositions. As Allegra Tepper writes, Pemberley Digital “[c]apitaliz[es] on the distinct storytelling opportunities presented by some dozen social platforms – and using some platforms in imaginative ways that transcend their proposed purposes...this web series does not simply tell a story; it builds a world”. (515)

Perhaps more importantly though, *Emma Approved*’s innovation resides in the content created by the audience itself, which, contrary to what happened with the other adaptations seen here, are allowed a direct participation. As part of the new paradigm, the change is not only in the production of content, but also in the forms of its reception (Jenkins, *Convergence Culture* 16). Thus, the audience of *Emma Approved* discusses the events of each episode, but also interacts with the fictional characters in social media (expanding the adaptation’s space), comments on Emma’s outfits, and pretends to be part of the fictional environment via the mobile game. The series includes a second YouTube channel posting supplementary stand-alone or groups of videos which complement the main story, as well as Q&A videos in which questions from the fans are answered by the actors in character. The aggregating element of this adaptation, nevertheless, are the short videos posted on YouTube and adapting, quite closely, the story of Austen’s novel.

The first episode, “I Am Emma Woodhouse”,²⁰⁸ starts with Emma (Joanna Sotomura) reading from a tablet what seems like a critic’s review of herself: the strategy not only recreates the third person narrative to present Emma (although here it is done by Emma herself and the opening sentence reformulated to “Emma Woodhouse, beautiful, clever, and brilliant.”), but it also evokes the use of voiceover narration, used by most adaptations of *Emma*, as a plot device to introduce the story (Fig. 40). In what could be considered the vlog version of a cold opening, Emma presents herself as being part of the Matchmaking Lifestyle Division of the developing Highbury Partners Lifestyle Group, a complicated entrepreneurial stance she confidently summarizes into “I make your life better, and I never fail.”

In a sequence lasting slightly over one minute she presents her latest success, the matching of Ryan Weston (CEO of a cupcake franchise, or “cupcake mogul” as Emma puts it) and Annie Taylor (personal chef and power homemaker). Emma talks directly to camera, in the style used by most video bloggers, while the background is a carefully decorated, albeit ambiguous, space: although the profusion of frames and quirky objects on a shelf suggest a personal space (many bloggers record their videos in their own houses), the balanced composition and the absence of personal objects are characteristic of a staged environment. Only then does the “Emma Approved” logo (accompanied by the signature sound) occupy the screen, immediately followed by Emma’s more detailed account of her role in bringing the couple together, until she is interrupted by Alex Knightley’s (Brent Bailey) arrival. That allows not only for his presentation (significantly the only other person apart from Emma to feature in the first video), but also to explain in fictionally acceptable terms the dynamics of the adaptation’s format: Emma is preparing a documentary so that is the reason why everyone consciously faces the camera. Apart from that function, it also contributes to Emma’s characterisation as she explains she is “documenting my greatness for when I receive my future lifetime achievement award in lifestyle excellence.”

The 4:23-minute episode ends with two phone calls opening up lines for the upcoming episodes: one from Alex insisting that Emma should hire an assistant (to be Harriet Smith) and one from Annie Taylor, who tells Emma she is thinking of calling off the wedding. The episode ends on that cliff-hanger, and a full screen display of Pemberley Digital’s products suggesting merchandise, related content available on the

²⁰⁸ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aeeXkf8LZ_8&list=PL_ePOdU-b3xcKOsj8aU2Tnztt6N9mEmur

other channels of the series, related series as well as links for the next video and for subscribing the channel.

As this adaptation makes an effort to follow close on the novel's plot, there is, surprisingly given what happened with the other contemporary adaptations of *Emma*, a "Boxx Hill" episode.²⁰⁹ It refers however not to a trip to the famous Surrey landmark, but to the inauguration of a celebrity restaurant named Boxx, in the Hills. In this web version of the episode, the offense Emma gives is heightened as she offends not only Maddy (Miss) Bates (here Emma's accountant) – teaming up with Frank Churchill to publicly criticize the latter's homemade food preserves – but also Annie Weston – as she misses most of the baby shower she had organized for her best friend by concentrating her attention almost exclusively on the Boxx opening. To be precise, the main events of the Box Hill episode (as it happens in the novel) are spread over multiple episodes, and Emma's offense to Maddy is never put on camera. What the audience gets is, given the show's established premise, a pre- and after-narrative, in which diverse characters are seen interacting with Emma before and after the fact. Apart from being an ingenious strategy of respecting the vlog framework, it also contributes to building-up the pressure on Emma. Thus the baby shower itself in fact corresponds to the strawberry picking party (Ep. 62 – "Baby Bump"),²¹⁰ but in this case the principal action is offered by Annie's disappointment and her subsequent accusations.

In "Baby Bump" Emma realises for the first time her failings, but she soon dismisses them as she allows herself to be influenced by Frank in the next episode, "Mood Swings".²¹¹ Thus, instead of fully acknowledging her wrongdoing, she lets herself be convinced by Frank's claim that it was not her fault. Moreover, that same episode shows Frank and Emma mocking Maddy's preserves, as well as Frank suggesting Emma should not include them in the Boxx gift bags. Alex's tell-off of Emma happens in the following episode, "Boxx Hill",²¹² after the opening of Boxx took place. It is by Alex that the audience knows Emma has publicly criticized Maddy's preserves at that event. The interesting nuance is that although Maddy's behaviour at the event might have embarrassed Emma, it came as result of Emma's

²⁰⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xNF1w3-kT6c> .

²¹⁰ https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=4&v=HOilzHPWpCE.

²¹¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=REP-0BdMH64.

²¹² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xNF1w3-kT6c&list=PL_ePOdU-b3xdXOZwmLkotVRHffG4diWuB&index=64.

own coaching advices, so the twenty-first century adaptation adds an extra layer of responsibility to Emma's wrongdoings.

As the oft repeated line by Mr Knightley is introduced – EW: “It is over, it is done!” / AK: “Yeah, badly done, Emma.” –, the rising tension of the last episodes reaches its peak and Emma's fault is finally acknowledged, by herself and the audience. Whereas the thoughtless answer Emma gives Miss Bates at the Box Hill scene in the 2009 adaptation seems a matter of ill-timed pressure release, here Emma's attitudes seem a result of her spinning out of control, inebriated by her own perceived success and self-importance. As Alex leaves the frame (and apparently the company) and is followed by Emma, begging and crying, the scene may have a bit too much of the soap opera drama quality, but it is still one of the most effective transpositions of Emma's character arc. For the first time in the series, the set is left vacant, until Emma comes back, crying, a few seconds later.

This group of episodes corresponds to one of the most interesting moments of the adaptation process at stake in *Emma Approved*. More effectively than with other adaptations, *Emma Approved* manages to have Emma dismissing her own conscience as she accepts Frank's excuse for her behaviour and allows her ego to be satisfied as he affirms hers is the only name “on the company letterhead”. Her ego-centrism is at its height, so the audience knows disaster is sure to follow.

The episodes following “Box Hill” show Emma on the road to reformation, but not without passing through a first stage of depression and self-commiseration. Episode 65, “Big Girls Don't Cry”,²¹³ features Emma playing at Bridget Jones, as she (apparently) abandons her style-conscious image for the first time and appears in front of the camera in her pyjamas, her hair tied in a bun, and eating ice-cream from a bowl, while listening to melancholic music. Differently from other Emmas, her greatest regret is the loss of a partner, Alex, “someone to share in the worry and the planning and who sees things I don't.” A more proactive Harriet consoles the beaten-down Emma, identifying Emma herself as their new client. Harriet's assessment of Emma as a potential client – “She meant well but let the prospect of fame get in the way of the people she really loves” – not only repeats the modernized version of Emma's offenses – she let her friends down, instead of not abiding to society's

²¹³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMjukrT4xMo>.

expectations concerning her place in it –, but it also proves Emma’s improvement of Harriet was a success.

The next two episodes, “All Apologies” (Ep. 66)²¹⁴ and “Secret Lovers” (Ep. 67)²¹⁵ have Emma apologising to Maddy, Annie, and Jane (although the latter by third party). When the second of these episodes ends with Emma suddenly remembering how the news of Frank and Jane’s relationship (in the meantime ended) might affect Harriet, the two have the necessary confrontation in the suggestively titled episode “The Boy is Mine” (Ep. 68),²¹⁶ although until the end of that episode Emma never admits on camera that she is in fact in love with Alex. Her confession to the camera and to herself only happens at the end of episode 69, “Strange Days”,²¹⁷ at the exact moment Alex returns and, standing at the door, turns back without her noticing him.

The proposal happens only in the following episode, “At Last”,²¹⁸ as Alex comes back and offers Emma flowers: “flowers are romantic”, she says, realising the meaning of the gesture, as she expected him to reveal his love for Harriet instead (Fig. 41). The scene, which significantly takes place in Alex’s office, not Emma’s, includes the mandatory Knightley line “Maybe if I loved you less I could talk about it more”, to which Alex adds: “You know me, you know that I am difficult and grumpy and set in my ways, but if you’ll let me I will spend every day trying to make you happy.” The adaptation does not dwell on the aftermath of his declaration, as Emma, after Alex asks her to say something, jumps to kiss him. It is noticeable that a renewal of Emma’s act of contrition concerning her past behaviour is absent from this scene, having been explored in the previous episodes: here there is no room for the chastising of Emma, only for the romantic climax.

The series however does not end here and the finale takes another two episodes that dramatize the mending of several relationships: Frank and Alex, Harriet and Martin, as well as possible return for Frank and Jane.²¹⁹ The final episode, “After

²¹⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZbV3F5aGpmg>.

²¹⁵ https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2&v=vx_cOuvo3Dk.

²¹⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y-yiKduuM4>.

²¹⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ht5wK5QG7fM>.

²¹⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ksLaDBNsMic>.

²¹⁹ Frank and Jane also featured in a parallel short series of nine videos, documenting what happened in Jane Fairfax’s office while she worked at Emma Approved and allowing the audience to see what Emma does not. The open ending to their relationship already suggested a return of the series – https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=PL_ePOdU-b3xc6ROXDf7AKAwKZnz5F_KHG&time_continue=12&v=D5_znubniAU.

All²²⁰ has the most blissful mood of all, as it restores harmony by having Harriet and Martin back together after a romantic surprise prepared by Harriet and Emma. It finishes, however, in Emma's office, with Emma and Alex romantically kissing in front of the camera. Being a multi-platform adaptation, the final video is not the final act as there is a final blog post, titled "Life Advice: How To Say Goodbye",²²¹ in which Emma, in the role of life coacher, offers her own example on how to deal with the challenges life poses. Unlike the novel, which ends in ironical terms including Emma's future behaviour, *Emma Approved* offers proof of a fully reformed Emma, who has learned from her mistakes and can finally rise as an example to others. Even if in tone the post does sound a bit like a self-help guide, in terms of the narrative it brings perfect closure to an adaptation that, although innovative in its presentation of the story, did not aim at maintaining the ironical identity of Austen's novel.

The first comment on this web-series is that this twenty-first century Emma is thus updated into an active young woman. From the beginning her flaws are obvious: she is egocentric and oblivious to her own privileged (and often misguided) perspective. Even more than her novel counterpart, she is determined to help those around her, taking active steps to make her clients' and friends' lives better. More importantly, she is a fashion guru, and as each episode includes at least one detailed outfit (complete with links to where to buy the items), mostly of Emma herself, her expertise on that area becomes, in terms of quantity alone, her principal distinctive trait.

In its focus on fashion, Russo sees in *Emma Approved* a clear "dependence on *Clueless*", which, and the same could be said of *Aisha*, "suggests that the filmmakers assume audience familiarity with *Clueless*, rather than *Emma* itself." (514) More than any previous adaptation, *Emma Approved* takes the link between Emma and fashion to a whole different level, turning it into a strategy for liking Emma Woodhouse: she becomes a fashion mentor, embodying the consumer-driven fantasy of the new social media icon. As Russo puts it, "[t]he fantasy of becoming an Austen heroine is thus manifested in the ability to purchase Emma Woodhouse's wardrobe." (517) It is the ultimate form of empathy towards a heroine repeatedly described as less easy to like.

As this strategy undoubtedly recasts Emma in a light more attuned to contemporary audiences' tastes and, more important, life experiences, other traits of

²²⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XBdd23Y6YZk>.

²²¹ See <http://www.emmaapproved.com/2014/08/life-advice-how-to-say-goodbye/>.

the novel's heroine are left out. Thus, although the social critique tends to be softened in adaptations of Austen's novels, in the case of *Emma Approved* it is completely dismissed. Just as Aisha, this Emma's self-reformation does not extend beyond admitting she has occasionally (but unintentionally) failed her friends and must therefore apologize (repeatedly) for that reason. Her privileged viewpoint is far from visibly put into question by Emma and her project of reforming Harriet to her own image is presented as an unquestioned success. For that, in Russo's words, it "inadvertently affirms the show's glossy vision of this small and insular privileged world, in which self-confidence is tied to one's clothes and all the social signifiers of status." (521) That does not mean, however, that the show loses its relevance, on the contrary, as Russo points out: "Emma Approved, perhaps inadvertently, reveals the pervasive nature of twenty-first century conspicuous consumption, as well as the way in which money and class still structure and undergird social relationships." (521)

Hence, even if apparently superficial, by openly making the commercial aspect an integral part of the adaptation, *Emma Approved* is not only reinstating an element frequently derogated by the still prevalent notion that art and money do not mix, but, perhaps more importantly (even if done inadvertently) reinstating the importance of money, a particularly thought-provoking line of analysis as recent work in the field struggles to recognize Austen as a conscious businesswoman, invested in managing her career as a professional writer.²²²

The centrality of money as a defining force in society, a structuring element in Austen's novels, is also patent in Emma's relationship with Alex Knightley, presented from the beginning as her business partner. Their relationship is, in this twenty-first century business environment, much more balanced, even if Knightley is granted the more rational and "male" part of the business – he is head of the finance department and, in Emma's words, responsible for the "boring stuff" – whereas Emma accumulates the more feminine roles of lifestyle coach, event planner, and matchmaker. Nonetheless, their balanced position in the company reinforces Emma's independence and agency, and even if Alex accuses her of founding the company with her father's money and leaving the boring aspects to him, the core of business is still generated by Emma, not Alex, hence also the name of the company (and of the

²²² See Sutherland, "Jane Austen's Dealings With John Murray And His Firm".

adaptation). Her power position is undeniable and probably unprecedented in adaptations of this novel.

Therefore, Emma's pro-active position in the business world coexists with a more obvious reinforcement of feminine stereotypes, not unlike many postmodern objects appropriating Austen. In one valuable perspective, this adaptive strategy takes the desire for modernity one step further than the more traditional forms of adaptation, sacrificing even more of what makes Emma a complex character. The self-important girl created by Austen who is forced to grow wiser and kinder by understanding her place in the world is here transformed into an active, but undeniably shallow girl, concerned with little more than fashion and apparently perfect love stories. This both summarizes and takes to the extreme the over simplification of Austen plots, turning, intentionally or not, to traditional if not retrograde interpretations presented as a desire for modernity. It also reflects the commodification of feminism, a phenomenon Belén Vidal sees as a consequence of the gender turn in post-heritage film, visible in twenty-first century films such as *The Duchess* (dir. Dibb, 2008), *Marie Antoinette* (dir. S. Coppola, 2006) and *The Young Victoria* (dir. Vallée, 2009).²²³

Linked to such broader cultural movements is a phenomenon in which the format of *Emma Approved*, and the recasting of its heroine, is based upon: the rise of the social media influencers. Any quick search online is bound to produce a multitude of real blogs/vlogs built on premises very similar to the fictional *Emma Approved*. One example, the “Trendy Ambitious Blonde” (<https://trendyambitiousblonde.com>), displays a motto/description that could feature on the Pemberley Digital's fictional product: “Fashion, Beauty + Lifestyle Blog Empowering Women”. Moreover, her “About” page includes a description worthy of any Cher Horowitz devotee (“This trendy ambitious blonde redefines the meaning of the word shopaholic! The word is truly an understatement, well at least for me.”), written in pink and accompanied by a professional photograph and product advertising very similar to the ones made by the digital Emma Woodhouse.²²⁴ Emma also adopts the position of the digital guru, offering advice on all aspects that the lifestyle name permits – fashion, love, friendship, and general life counsel – mixed in with product placement and brand

²²³ See Vidal (104-110).

²²⁴ See <https://trendyambitiousblonde.com/about/>. Accessed 29 July 2019.

endorsement, much in line with non-fictional projects such as Gwyneth Paltrow's (former-Emma) Goop (<https://goop.com>).

Besides how the focus on fashion in *Emma Approved* fits in more generalized trends of digital content, clothes in this adaptation also have, as is the case with any other *Emma* adaptations, their own intrinsic meaning and are part of the reinterpretation that *Emma Approved* offers of Austen's novel. As seen above, in general terms, they actively contribute to the strategy, common in all *Emma* adaptations, of making Emma a more likeable and empathetic character. They also bear other, more specific readings and the choice of colour is particularly meaningful: the fact that pink dominates both the introductory episode and the one including the proposal cannot be casual. On the one hand, pink fits with today's appropriation of Austen in contemporary popular culture as a secure source of successful romantic, female-oriented objects. On the other, it honours a visual tradition of portraying Emma wearing pink (of which Gwyneth Paltrow is the most memorable representative), as if adaptations in various media and formats have decided to signal Emma's undisputed femininity against those who have long repeated claims that she is otherwise.²²⁵

Emma Approved apparently did not resist the tendency to introduce Emma's character dressed in pink: the first episode, "I am Emma Woodhouse", features an Emma dressed in a bright pink blazer over a white blouse. As part of the "multi-platform" base of the series, the YouTube video includes a link to a blog post detailing the fashion choices (complete with links to the sites selling the items),²²⁶ without breaking the fictional illusion (Fig. 42). Moreover, the fact that the same outfit appears in a later post, "E is for Emma", again associates Emma's identity with that particular choice of clothes and colour. Emma wears pink in several other videos, including the proposal scene. In fact, the blog post associated to that video has Emma state, as a way to justify her choice of the "sweet, pink halter dress with its [*sic*] romantically draping skirt": "I just wanted to give myself a boost, and pink has always been my favorite color."²²⁷ The display of pink also signifies the implied

²²⁵ A short selection of such objects include: Anchor's *The Annotated Emma* (2012, edited by David M. Shapard), Penguin Threads's *Emma* (2012, cover art by Jillian Tamaki), Harper Collins Perennial Classics *Emma* (2011), or the Brazilian translation edited by Editora Nova Fronteira (2017). It is also a trend on fan-made products, as for instance this representation of Emma by artist Arbeta, in <https://www.deviantart.com/arbetta/art/Emma-Woodhouse-436908697>. Accessed 24 July 2019.

²²⁶ See <http://www.emmaapproved.com/2013/10/e-is-for-emma/>. Accessed 24 July 2019.

²²⁷ See <http://www.emmaapproved.com/2014/08/step-6-admit-when-wrong/>. Accessed 24 July 2019.

feminine audience, which the series does implicitly, as Russo remarks, by focusing exclusively on the outfits of the female characters, namely Emma and Harriet, with the ones from the male characters being absent from the accompanying blog fashion, or “looks”, postings (Russo 517).²²⁸

While the vlog structure provides an interesting basis for the updating proposed by this adaptation, it is not without its flaws. As Russo remarks:

While transforming Austen’s Emma into a lifestyle coach is an inspired choice, given that it gives Emma’s tendency to micromanage the lives of others some kind of narrative legitimacy, it is sometimes hard to explain why Emma continues to have personal discussions sitting in front of a camera, especially given that this is supposed to be a business-oriented project, to the point where Emma’s filming becomes at issue for some of the other characters, particularly Jane Fairfax. (514)

However, even if such incongruities can be disruptive if considered in terms of narrative cohesion – Russo even reports complaints from fans on that subject (516) –, they are less so if we allow the logic of web-diffusion to supplant the literary one: a well-accepted rule of today’s social media scene is the degree of staging involved in the posting and sharing “real” experiences. Hence the stagier the experience the closer the fictional vlog comes to real-life ones.

Additionally, in a format that mimics real life exposure via social media, the degree of fakeness involved becomes an insightful and troubling experience to the attentive viewer (just as arguably the attentive reader would find in Austen’s novel). Just like countless “real” vlogs, where experiences on display on screen are in fact carefully built scenarios, *Emma Approved* does not completely hide its fabricated elements. An example are editing cuts: from the series first episode there are visible cuts (sometimes changes in camera angle) on the seeming continuous time-run of each episode, even when we dismiss the obvious intertitle bearing the series’ logo (and equivalent to its title sequence), which interrupts every video after a short introduction, repeating the formula used in the first episode.

One other element linked to the vlog format brings an interesting reading: ironically, and in contrast to the novel, it is the audience’s extremely limited physical movement that enables the strongest dramatic moments as the camera, and we with it,

²²⁸ It also does so explicitly, with Pemberley Digital writer Margaret Dunlap assuming that objective in an interview – see “Fan Appreciation no.2” in Malcolm (53).

are unable to follow the characters in key moments of the action. It is the case with the Boxx episode and the subsequent discussion between Alex and Emma, when the camera stays static as they both abandon the set. The uncomfortable silence and apparent abandonment of the audience, although just as incongruous as the examples stated above, contributes in fact to a deepening in the possible readings suggested by this adaptation, including the similarity to some of the strategies used by Austen herself to dislodge the too comfortable reader.

Besides its very obvious roots in today's social media scene, *Emma Approved* still shares several links to Austen, either in direct or indirect ways:

Even as *Emma Approved's* characters update their Facebook pages and read from iPads and generally demonstrate that their relations to technology are up to speed, the visual style of this series transports viewers backwards in time, to the stationary cameras and indoor sound-stages of the early television serials. This lack of variation in the setting and in the framing of the image – for long stretches we see the same office and wall and doorway behind Emma's back day in and day out – does shift the spotlight onto the heroine's ever changing, ever eye-catching wardrobe. But another effect is that it brings this adaptation closer in spirit than others to Austen's own economy of means. (Lynch, "Screen versions" 194)

The proximity to Austen is also achieved by intertextuality with previous adaptations, which can at times be objectively perceived. An example are the photographs of other characters that pop up on the corner of the screen as Emma's talks about them: an element frequently used in the heavily edited videos of the blogosphere, but also reminiscent of previous contemporary adaptations of *Emma* such as the initial sequences of *Clueless* and *Aisha*.

Nevertheless, although *Emma Approved* follows closely on *Emma's* plot and borrows from previous adaptations of the novel, it never makes a direct reference to Austen, just like *Clueless* or *Aisha* before it. The Austen franchise has become independent of the claim of authorship. Even if such fact could be explained by the claim to "authenticity" of the vlog format, the fact that the adapters felt no need to insert even the faintest references to Austen – via objects, such as books, as countless adaptations have done before – signals a shift in terms of consuming Austen. In its crystallized form of pre-conceived characteristics, the Austen construct has become truly independent of Jane Austen, the author, and gained a life of its own which is, itself, as contradictory as the reception of Austen has been since the nineteenth

century. As Russo concludes on what she calls “the absent presence of Jane Austen” in *Emma Approved*:

Austen’s uncanny presence and absence is striking, and points to anxieties about the very process of adaptation on which the project depends. [...] *Emma Approved* manifests these contradictory desires: while affirming Austen’s capacity to beguile young women, Austen’s authorial absence speaks to an anxiety about Austen’s relevance to appeal to these very same consumers. (518)

A few final remarks concerning this adaptation must go to the series renewal, launched in September 2018. Celebrating the fifth anniversary of the series, new episodes were launched under the title *Emma Approved Revival*. Known for its innovative take on transmedia storytelling, this time the series also featured a Patreon feature, as an immersive experience allowing “[f]ans who become Patrons [to] influence decisions affecting the show, have access to exclusive behind-the-scenes content, and even vote for future characters/clients.”²²⁹

If the first installment of *Emma Approved* was an example of how fiction-based web series could successfully exploit a more general commercial feature by linking into each video and blog post specific brands and accessories used by the characters, the new season sought to further innovate by associating direct pay-for-access features into the series. Via Patreon – a crowdfunding membership platform in which fans (or patrons) directly sponsor content from their chosen artists –, fans could, for a fix per-month pay (ranging from 5 to 100 dollars) access specific features on the series platform, from special content, to merchandising and even participation in the fictional company’s decisions, as a shareholder.

Connected to this new platform was an app, a mobile game in “Moments”,²³⁰ which, based on the principle of a simplified emergent story in an interactive narrative,²³¹ placed the user as the new intern at Emma Approved and thus able to interact with several characters of the series, in the form of NPCs (Non Player

²²⁹ Published by Pemberley Digital on September 20, 2018 – <http://www.pemberleydigital.com/emma-approved-returns/>. Accessed 24 July 2019.

²³⁰ Apart from this mobile game, Emma features as a character or an example in other role-playing games based on Austen’s books, such as *Ever Jane* (<https://everjane.com>), which allow users to create an avatar and live through social experiences in a virtual Regency setting. Although the subject of Jane Austen and videogames is deserving of attention, particularly in the ways the past is remade via dress-up and online interaction features, the inexistence of a videogame focused exclusively (or even mainly) on *Emma* dictated the omission of that line of investigation from the present study.

²³¹ See Ryan (in Ryan et al. 292-298)

Characters).²³² The series still maintained the short video as its principal medium of content production, but instead of the vlog format (of which Emma was the centripetal force), *Emma Approved Revival* follows the model of the documentary (or is it a mockumentary?), by presuming an entire team was now following the characters' every movement.

With a total of eight videos being posted on YouTube, it focused on Emma and her team helping a new costumer, Mr Collins (a cross-series character from the *Lizzie Bennet Diaries*) finding a new job, as an effort for Emma and her business regain balance after the failed engagement of Anne Elliot and Freddie Wentworth. The cross-novel references, although already existing in the original series in the character of Caroline Lee (a mixture of Mrs Alton and Caroline Bingley and also a character of the *Lizzie Bennet Diaries*) were thus enhanced, a strategy not uncommon in Austen adaptations and particularly popular among the fan community. In Scott Caddy's view, this "highlights the expansive nature of Janeism and fandom within and across the works of Austen." (48)

Still, some of the features proposed by this adaptation were not successful: the mobile game users met with several technical problems and the announced second season of the YouTube channel had its Patreon features cancelled early on the show. It is unclear whether such issues resulted from low user participation or were a consequence of a misguided attempt to expand into unthreaded territory of the otherwise successful formula practised by Pemberley Digital. The lack of financial support in the Patreon platform was however the reason presented, in an e-mail sent to Patrons at the end of November 2018, to justify the pause in the membership status. It remains unclear whether the series will continue in any format, but *Emma Approved* is a successful example of what Jenkins calls "a top-down corporate-driven process" as opposite to the "grassroots convergence" (18) that defines many fan-produced objects, such as fanfiction. It is still, notwithstanding, dependent on a "bottom-up participatory culture" (243) in order to exist.

²³² For a definition see "NPC (Nonplayer Character)", by Ragnhild Tronstad (in Ryan et al. 363-364).

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Just as discussed in the case of screen adaptations in the previous chapter, *Emma* has not inspired the parodies or pastiche adaptations that have reworked other Austen novels, producing titles such as the bestseller mash-up²³³ novel *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2009, Seth Grahame-Smith), referred to above. The success of this title originated its own homonymous film adaptation, as well as a prequel and a sequel (both by Steve Hockensmith), a comic book, and a mobile game. It also gave way to *Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters* (2009, Ben H. Winters). The success of the *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* franchise thus made evident the commercial importance of a new type of phenomenon in adaptation, which, despite its apparent traditional format, “participate[s] in a general culture of appropriation inspired in part by digital media.” (Johnson in Ryan et al. 327) Above all, Grahame-Smith’s novel proved Austen’s adaptive nature to contemporaneity at the same time it reflected her cash-value potential. In Camilla Nelson’s words:²³⁴

It effortlessly blends regency comedy of manners and twentieth-century soap with elements appropriated from digital fan cultures and the genre of monster tales that for critics such as Franco Moretti have traditionally signalled the presence of popular anxieties over the processes of commodification under capitalism. (338)

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, the critical relevance of an object such as *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* is also in that it meant bridging the worlds of commercial media producers and fan-produced content, by means of shared practices that, ever more so, question the boundaries of production vs. reception. In what has above been termed “industry made fanwork” (Nelson 339), *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* encapsulates many of the characteristics present, for instance, in fan fiction. And although there are no comparable objects adapting *Emma*, the novel has had a prolific afterlife via fan rewrites. Thus returning to the book format implies an

²³³ “[A] cultural production that combines preexisting materials into something new.” – for a more detailed description and the importance of mash-up in the age of the digital network see the complete entry by Robertson (in Ryan et al. 326-327).

²³⁴ For more see Camilla Nelson’s full analysis of the multiple platform objects (book-trailers, sequels, videogames, reviews, etc.) generated by Grahame-Smith’s novel, in “Jane Austen... Now with Ultraviolent Zombie Mayhem”. See also Eckart Voigts-Virchow’s “Pride and Promiscuity and Zombies, or: Miss Austen Mashed Up in the Affinity Spaces of Participatory Cultures“ (in Nicklas and Lindner 34-56), for a look into the same work via considerations on cross-media adaptations made possible by the 1990s Austenmania, and posterior mash-up strategies framed by convergence culture.

unavoidable reference to this world of fan fiction, itself an old form of reception of Austen – her first fan fiction, *Old Friends and New Fancies: An Imaginary Sequel to the Novels of Jane Austen*, by Sybil Brinton, dates back to 1913 – given a gigantic increase with the advent of Internet.

One of the more recent examples in that (long) list is Karen M. Cox's *I Could Write a Book* (2017). Seemingly borrowing its title from a 1940s show tune and subtitled *A Modern Variation of Jane Austen's "Emma"*, Cox's book relocates *Emma* to Kentucky, USA, in the 1970s, casting its heroine as a college undergraduate who returns home to attend to her father, after he suffered a stroke. This is not Cox's first incursion into Austen and her previous titles include: *1932* (2010, a *Pride and Prejudice* retelling, set in the aftermath of the Great Depression), *Find Wonder in All Things* (2012, a contemporary retelling of *Persuasion*), and *Undeceived: Pride and Prejudice in the Spy Game* (2016, set in the Cold War).

Although *I Could Write a Book* is, as the author admitted, a different project, there are some similarities to her previous work, namely that "it's neither Regency nor modern – it's another one of my 'alternate era' adaptations".²³⁵ Although many of the above mentioned titles by Cox are set in Kentucky, her home state, in the case of *I Could Write a Book* the choice makes for an interesting intertextual reading, as the words of Cher (*Clueless*) must spring to mind: "As If! I'm only sixteen, and this is California, not Kentucky!" Openly presented as JAFF (Jane Austen Fan Fiction), however, the analysis of *I Could Write a Book* falls outside the scope of the present work. And although I do not find useful to reduce all of these writing to what Bowles calls "the hamster-wheel of posthumous productivity, publication (if not quality) guaranteed" (16), my focus is on industry-stemmed adaptations. On the matter of fan fiction, other scholars have been making important contributions (Malcolm 2015; Sales 2018).

The closest to a commercially produced pastiche adaptation of *Emma* is its inclusion in Sebastian Faulks's *Pistache* (2006), a collection of short parodies in the style of several well-known authors. Resulting from Radio 4's literary quiz "The Write Stuff" (1998-2004), *Emma* features in two texts: "Jane Austen steps out with an American Psycho" (5-6) and "Jane Austen braves a contemporary 'dance'" (7-8), in which her character is first antithetically paired with a psychopath and secondly seen

²³⁵ See <https://justjane1813.com/2017/08/20/i-could-write-a-book-by-karen-m-cox-cover-reveal-giveaway/>. Accessed 30 July 2019.

attending a drug-fuelled rave with heroines from other Austen's novels.²³⁶ It may be important to remark that the only other authors to receive the honour of having two texts in Faulks' book are Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy.

Likewise *Emma* also features, briefly, in P. D. James's *Death Comes to Pemberley* (2011), a sequel to (and pastiche of) *Pride and Prejudice* written as a murder mystery in which Emma is mentioned at the end as being the means of providing a solution for Wickham's natural child, born to a servant of the Darcys' estate. The link is made possible by an imagined family connection between Mrs Reynolds, Pemberley's housekeeper, and Mrs Goddard, the keeper of the boarding school in Highbury. Mrs (Emma) Knightley, described as "a friend of Mrs Martin [who] has always taken a keen interest in her children" (296), comes up with the idea of sending the child to Harriet and Robert Martin so that, in their inability to have more children, he can be a playmate to their only son (and three daughters). Emma also assures Mrs Reynolds that she will watch over the child, thus simultaneously proving her continuing generosity and inability to stop intervening in other people's lives, just as Austen's novel originally anticipated.

Interestingly, this is omitted from the BBC's adaptation of the novel (2013, dir. Daniel Percival), as the child is kept at home under the protection of Mr Darcy himself, in a solution meant to please the contemporary audience but unlikely to happen at the time. Nonetheless, in the novel the inclusion of Emma's name seems more a homage of James to a possible favourite than any logical, intentional form of adaptation of *Emma*. In fact, given that *Death Comes to Pemberley* is foremost a sequel to *Pride and Prejudice*, all the references to other Austen novels – such as *Persuasion*, as Wickham is reported to having been briefly employed by Sir Walter Elliot (187) – are alien to the unity of the novel's fictional world, coming close to a practice mostly used in fan fiction.

Despite the apparent inexistence of pastiche adaptations in the line of *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* and the like, *Emma* has originated a few twenty-first century adaptations which share in the postmodern character of post-2001 pastiche takes on Austen. As such, and adopting the stance of taking these adaptations in a more positive, critically-infused way than the usual dismissive attitude with which

²³⁶ Faulks also dedicated a chapter to Emma in his *Faulks on Fiction: A Story of the Novel in 28 Characters* (2011): "Nonsensical Girl" (207-218) is his first subject in the section titled "Snobs". As a character analysis, it is not suited for inclusion above.

such formats are (rarely) dealt with, I will briefly analyse the 2014 rewriting *Emma*, by Alexander McCall Smith, and the 2012 Marvel graphic novel, by Nancy Butler and Janet K. Lee. I will finish with two adaptations of *Emma* made for a younger audience: *Jane Austen's Emma* by Cozy Classics (2013) and *Little Miss Austen's Emma* (2015).

Rewriting Austen: *Emma* (The Austen Project, 2014)

Alexander McCall Smith's rewriting of *Emma* was part of a larger editorial project, "The Austen Project",²³⁷ initiated by Harper Collins which intended to re-write all six novels by Jane Austen, by assigning each one to a well-known yet critically acclaimed contemporary writer (Fig. 43). The first of these, *Sense and Sensibility* (2013), was written by Joanna Trollope, a writer known for rural domestic fiction; the second, *Northanger Abbey* (2014), by crime novelist Val McDermid, the third, *Emma*, by detective fiction writer Alexander McCall Smith, and the fourth and last (to date), *Eligible (Pride and Prejudice)* by Curtis Sittenfield, known for writing "novels of manners featuring smart female protagonists who struggle to navigate the fault lines of gender identity, courtship and social class" (Alter 2016).

As the brief description may reveal, each novel was matched to a contemporary writer according to its perceived identity in terms of contemporary literary (sub)genres. Meant to be "modern retellings", the project failed its initial plan and seems to have been abandoned just before the publication of Sittenfield's title. The critical response to at least the first three instalments was far from enthusiastic²³⁸ and the reported poor sales seem to have stalled the project: the blog/site is no longer available, the authors for the remaining two novels have not been announced and the last instalment has relinquished the homonymous title that all the others before shared with their respective Jane Austen novel.

Not surprisingly, given the reception of the project itself, McCall Smith's retelling of *Emma* was far from consensual and one of the project's instalments which

²³⁷ Not to be confused with *The Jane Austen Project* (2017, Flynn), referred to in the first chapter.

²³⁸ See Yaffe, "The Austen Fiasco".

raised more critical voices.²³⁹ Apart from the daunting risk the project implied from the start – it is no easy task to rewrite an author who is, at the same, as popular and canonical as Jane Austen – taking on a rewriting of Austen’s most challenging heroine was arguably the most uncertain enterprise of the whole venture. The subtle and ironical way in which Austen presents her heroine in the first pages of the novel are proof of her mastery in novel writing. Such mastery has, as we have seen, proved difficult to replicate, being it in screen period adaptations or contemporary recreations. Alexander McCall Smith seems to have struggled with the same difficulties and, as others before them, the choices he made in presenting Emma as a heroine to a new audience inevitably shaped his entire reinterpretation of *Emma*.

In one aspect, however, McCall Smith diverged from other previous adapters: whereas they had dedicated a significant but still brief contextualisation of Emma’s backstory as a strategy to smooth over Emma’s presumably less likeable character, McCall Smith chooses to spend more than one third of his novel giving an account of what happened during those twenty-one years and even before. If the BBC’s 2009 adaptation of *Emma* raised strong criticism concerning the long cold-opening depicting the story of Emma, Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill, a much longer deployment of the same strategy did not bode well. And while the BBC cold-opening included some ironical/comical remarks worthy of an homage to Austen, the much longer introduction to this *Emma* disruptively sets the reader off the novel’s central narrative.

The backstory includes Mr. Woodhouse’s early life, a detailed account of Miss Taylor’s arrival at and subsequent life as governess in Hartfield including the housekeeper’s, Mrs Firhill, doubts regarding her methods, Isabella’s relationship and eventual marriage to John Knightley, and Mr. Weston’s guilt over surrendering baby Frank to his late wife’s relatives. The first sentence is then: “Emma Woodhouse’s father was brought into this world, blinking and confused, on one of those final nail-biting days of the Cuban Missile Crisis.” (1) The first insight to McCall Smith’s own reinterpretation of Emma comes only on p. 24, among such extended backstory in which, were it not for the keeping of Austen’s title, one might question if Emma was really the heroine of this story. In a couple of paragraphs, in which a small event of

²³⁹ See for instance an account in <https://headfullofbooks.blogspot.com/2018/04/the-austen-project-modern-retellings-of.html>. Accessed July 30 2019.

Emma's childhood is narrated through the consciousness of Mrs Firhill, the housekeeper, Emma is first introduced:

Emma was a *controller* [...].

Unseen by Emma, Mrs Firhill watched for a few minutes while Emma addressed her dolls and tidy their rooms.

'You're going to have to stay in your room until further notice,' she scolded one, a small boy doll clad in a Breton sailor's blue-and-white jersey. 'And you', she said to another one, a thin doll with arms out of which the stuffing had begun to leak, '*you* are never going to find a husband unless you do as I say.'

Mrs Firhill drew in her breath. It would have been very easy to laugh at this tiny display of directing behaviour, but she felt somehow that it was not a laughing matter. What she was witnessing was a perfect revelation of a character trait: Emma must want to control people if this was the way she treated her dolls. *Bossy little madam*, thought Mrs Firhill. But then she added — to herself, of course — *without a mother*. And that, she realised, changed things. (Smith 24-25)

McCall Smith thus reduces Austen's subtle hint at Emma's failures, to which we as readers are meant to eventually identify, even if unconsciously, to almost sociopathic tendencies displayed by Emma from youth and disregarded by those closer to her due to the unfortunate fact that she is motherless. Furthermore, as the novel then recedes again from Emma – in the following chapter we are taken to the disagreement between Miss Taylor e Mr Woodhouse concerning the girl's school, followed by the account of the household's evolution during the next fifteen years or so – the reader is again estranged from its heroine. Thus, besides moments when Emma's future character seems to be shown as justification for future actions (as quoted above), she is rather absent from the first part of the novel which is really focused on Mr Woodhouse. She becomes more prominent in chapter 5: "She was certain; she knew what lay ahead of her: she would continue to be pretty, clever, and rich. That did not include getting married: pretty, clever, and rich people did not have to bother with such things." (61-62)

The sentence above comes as the flow of Emma's conscience in a discussion with Miss Taylor on the prospect of marriage. In comparison to Austen's novel, McCall Smith merges *Emma's* presentation with the discussion on marriage she has later on with Harriet. By simultaneously making the portrayal of Emma as "pretty, clever, and rich" a product of her own judgement and having her assert her convictions to a wiser, instead of an impressible, interlocutor, our own perception of

Emma's character cannot be other than of a snob, self-righteous young woman. Moreover his rewriting of Austen's famous opening however lacks the double reading of the first literary text, replacing the irony meant to keep the reader on his guard with a univocal reading which, paired with the distance imposed by the novel so far between reader and heroine, can only compromise the former's empathy towards the latter. And while *Emma*'s famous (rewritten) introductory sentence comes on page 61, the novel only definitely focuses on Emma from page 109 onwards. By then, however, a good part of its readers may be unable to relate to her and they will be even more unlikely to partake in her personal evolution.

As most adaptations of Emma, McCall Smith's *Emma* keeps the Box Hill episode, refitted into a picnic, "[b]ecause a picnic is what one has in fine weather", as Emma explains a less enthusiastic Mr Woodhouse. The picnic takes place "on land owned by George Knightley" (289) with the same characters as in Austen's novel. However, the chapter begins to reveal the less agreeable side of Emma even before it takes place, as it seems bound to portray her as far more prejudiced, if not unintelligent, and at times even cruel woman. In the advent of the picnic, even Mr Woodhouse commands her to be quiet, after she has said that were Miss Bates to die of pneumonia caused by possible rain during the picnic (Mr Woodhouse's concern, obviously), it would be natural since "we can't live forever" (289). Her father's reproach inevitably makes the reader side with him: "No, I shall not hear any more of your cruel views. Enough! Your problem, Emma, is that you can't see it from the point of view of those who are old and frightened and unable to speak because of what happened at Lloyd's." (289) If even Mr Woodhouse voices Emma's failures so incisively, the reader must be meant to follow them as well.

The picnic itself works as a bubble in which the worse side of Emma is on display. She is more than once cruel in thoughts to Harriet, revealing her friendship to her as insincere: "Harriet said such stupid things [...]. She was not sure that she could face an entire afternoon of Harriet's company [...]" (290-291); "Harriet had said something about that [...] but she had ignored it because it was only something that Harriet said." (292) And Harriet is not the only recipient of such thoughts:

They sat down. Emma made sure that she had Frank Churchill on one side of her an Isabella on the other. If Frank chose to flirt with her again – as there was every chance he would do – then she would have the satisfaction of having her older sister witness her receiving the attentions of such a handsome young man.

Isabella has always tended to condescend to her slightly, and it would do her good, *thought Emma*, to see that men like Frank thought her worth flirting with.” (291, my emphasis)

Emma can be frequently on the wrong and inflict pain on others, but in no other adaptation is she so manipulative and insincere: the novel works hard to prove her a sociopath, as announced earlier in the doll’s house incident. Even if Emma’s calculated plans fail miserably, as she manages to unintentionally put Frank in an uncomfortable situation who argues with her, the backflip cannot make us by then feel any empathy towards her. The excerpt above is also proof that McCall Smith does not trust his readers with understanding subtler narrative techniques, as he finds necessary to make clear we are witness to Emma’s thoughts (see emphasis above).

On the contrary, the actual offense Emma gives Miss Bates seems downplayed and even too subtle to make Miss Bates’s realisation of it believable:

‘My brother appear to be asleep,’ said George.
‘And Mrs Goddard too,’ said Miss Bates. ‘It must be the heat.’
‘Or the company,’ muttered Emma. (298)

Even more striking is Emma’s reaction, with which the chapter closes:

Emma said nothing. It had occurred to her that something very significant had happened, although she was not sure exactly what that was. She felt ashamed. At her own picnic she had been humiliated by Frank and now she had, in turn, insulted poor Miss Bates. Nothing good could come of this occasion now, she thought, nothing good at all.

She looked about her. There was no sign of Frank, or of Jane. And where were her father and Mrs Goddard? *At this rate*, she thought, *I shall be left here by myself, surrounded by the detritus of the picnic, covered in shame.* (299)

Not only is she apparently stripped of her discerning mind at the beginning of the second sentence, as it seems to clash with the end of it. Her acute perception is also absent in the second paragraph (as she fails to recognize the two existing couples), replaced by the obvious tendency for narcissistic behaviour.

For all the long introductory part, this *Emma* seems to run out of space at some point and so events near the end are precipitated. The proposal scene is thus rendered with such apparent lack of sentimentality as to possibly raise a remark even from Austen herself:

George came to see Emma. They walked in the garden and he said to her, 'I've never been very good at expressing my feelings; other people are so much better at that. But I want you to know that I've been in love with you Emma, for a long time. I just have. Not a day, not a single day has gone past but that I've thought about you.'

His words swam about her, and she stood quite still, as if stopped by an invisible wall. It took her a while to respond, but then she said, 'I'm glad you've told me, because I've always been fond of you.'

'Just fond?'

She smiled. 'Seriously fond.'

He looked away, and she noticed. She reached out to him and began to say something, but it made no sense. He said to her, 'I was hoping you'd say something else.'

No more than a second or two passed. It was like leaping off a building. 'But I want to say it,' she whispered. 'I'm in love with you too. Yes, I'm in love too.'
(359)

It is not that the proposal, which happens four pages from the end of the book, is short, hasty, and lacks the (added) sentimentality common in most rewritings of Austen, mostly JAAF. The greatest problem seems that it is still working too hard to make Emma a non-believable, non-empathetic character and that, in terms of the book's own economy, does not make sense. After witnessing a brief flow of Emma's conscience of what means to be in love, the scene resumes:

It seemed as if he could sense what was happening within her, for he said nothing, as if awed by a moment that would only be defiled if he were to speak. But he embraced her with tenderness, and simply held her for a while before they drew apart and looked at each other as if they were two people who had just witnessed something miraculous. He then said, 'I do wish you'd come to Donwell and redecorate it.'

She thought for a moment that this was an odd thing to say at a time like this, but then it seemed right to her; it seemed just perfect. It was the best thing he could possibly have said. And she replied. 'Yes, I will.' (359-360)

By then, not even the most romantic embrace makes for a climax and although George Knightley's proposal for redecorating Donwell is followed by another, a trip to Italy, no sense of completion comes out of this adaptation. Even the final section – detailing the pairing up of Mr Woodhouse and Mrs Goddard, the marriage of Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax, and the odd hypothesis (suggested by Mr Woodhouse)

that Miss Bates has in fact fooled her creditors at Lloyd's –, makes for the feeling of disappointment at this adaptation.

“The Austen Project's” Emma, the character, is oversimplified and the novel, as a whole, seems to be trying hard not to be taken seriously. McCall Smith's adaptation seems determined to make Emma, its heroine, as dislikeable character as possible. As risky as a strategy that is on its own, it also seems to misunderstand, and take up as banner, the reported evaluation made by Austen of Emma being a character no one would very much like. As one reader/online reviewer put it, Smith's retelling “[has] a certain flat fidelity to the original that made it fall short of its potential.”²⁴⁰

Maybe as a proof against those who see this Austen novel as proto-detective fiction,²⁴¹ McCall-Smith was not the best choice for this already risky undertaking. He fails to acknowledge the importance of Austen's initial paragraphs/chapters and, in doing so, not only does he damage the integrity of his own work, but more interestingly he inevitably raises the question of how different could Austen's fourth published novel be if she had chosen to introduce her heroine differently. As far as this particular rewriting is concerned, it seems too readily to fall into the category of light reading any Austen fan is expected to enjoy or consume. However, the fallacy of such preposition is exposed by the commercial failure of this book and, presumably, of the entire “Austen Project” by now. Austen's greatest talent, even 200 years after her death, seems to have been the ability to foreseen and allow a multitude of readers and readings, something McCall Smith's *Emma* has not.

Austenizing comics: *Jane Austen's Emma* (Nancy Butler and Janet Lee, 2012)

Back on the page, but not in the traditional (fiction) format, Marvel Comics published in 2011 the graphic novel *Jane Austen's Emma*, as part of a series including *Pride and Prejudice* (Nancy Butler and Hugo Petrus, 2009), *Sense and Sensibility* (Nancy Butler and Sonny Liew, 2010), and *Northanger Abbey* (Nancy Butler, Janet Lee and Julian Totino Tedesco, 2012). All were presented in a serialized format of five independent issues, later reedited as a single paperback or hardback volume.

²⁴⁰ See <https://bookriot.com/2016/07/11/buy-borrow-bypass-the-austen-project/>. Accessed July 30 2019.

²⁴¹ One of them is P. D. James – see James, *Talking About Detective Fiction*.

Written by Nancy Butler and illustrated by Janet Lee, *Emma* shares in the same objectives of Marvel's previous adaptations of Austen. The inaugural adaptation, of the unavoidable *Pride and Prejudice*, includes an introduction by Nancy Butler, explaining how the project was born:

Whenever Ralph [Macchio, Marvel editor] and I chatted, I would always bring up something I'd noticed at the comics stores – girls stayed outside. There didn't seem to be anything to lure them inside and a lot of posters of impossibly buxom she-heroes to keep them outside. [...] So when Marvel started up their Marvel Illustrated line, adapting classic books to a graphic novel format, I asked Ralph when they were going to do something female friendly. [...] He asked me to suggest some titles that might appeal to girls and women. As the author of 12 Signet Regency romances (which are set in Jane Austen's time period), I immediately thought of *Pride and Prejudice*. I assured him that a book that had lasted two centuries, that was still studied in high school and college, and that had given rise to numerous movies and TV productions and countless websites had to have a huge fan base. He was convinced.

Austen then comes into Marvel again with the stamp of marketable femininity. While Marvel's risk seems to have been compensated as the series moved to include four adaptations based on Austen, the way it appealed to the expected feminine audience is interesting to analyse. In addition to the intrinsic value of Jane Austen's name, marketing objects such as these implied a careful balance between what a composite visual identity of Austen (to which the myriad of television and film adaptations are the main contributors) with Marvel's own brand identity. That may explain the notable differences within the series concerning the visual identity of the graphic novels for, as Janine Barchas observes, "each modern illustrator inflects Austen's brand with his own hallmark aesthetic." (121)

Although such difference is obviously attached to a change in the illustrators (but not in the writer), it also corresponds to a notable progressive feminization of the design. Thus, if *Pride and Prejudice*, the first in the series, still bears great resemblance to other Marvel titles such as *X-Men* (which Butler refers in her introduction), the next titles are definitely different, not only in terms of trace but also in colour, as more realistic depiction of characters in predominantly dark or bland background give way to more infantilized characters and brighter, more conspicuous settings (Fig. 44). In Barchas's summary:

In the hands of Spanish illustrator Hugo Petrus, *Pride and Prejudice* oozes sensuality in a velvety palette of browns and dark greens. Sonny Liew's artwork

brings out the social satire and humor of *Sense and Sensibility*, with bobbleheaded characters whose rosy cheeks suggest either strong drink or innocence. The pale sherbet colors and doe-eyed figures of Janet K. Lee raise the sugar content of *Emma*, making it perhaps too saccharine, “too light & bright & sparkling,” to quote Austen’s letter to Cassandra describing *Pride and Prejudice*. While Lee, with the help of color artist Nick Filardi, significantly adjusts her approach to suit *Northanger Abbey* — using heavier outlines, more iconic features, and darker colors — her perky style cannot conjure up the Gothic of Catherine’s visions. (121)

The Marvel take on Austen is not the only in this universe and others have recently ventured in similar enterprises, such as Classical Comics graphic novel adaptations of classic novels for educational purposes. These include titles as *Jane Eyre* (2009), *Romeo and Juliet* (2009) or *Frankenstein* (2009), but none based on Austen.²⁴² Austen is, however, present in other similar formats, such as Japanese Reiko Mochizuki’s Manga adaptations, Campfire Comics adaptations by the Indian publishers Kalyani Navyug Media, Amber Benson’s series adaptation of *Clueless*, and even Kate Beaton’s comic strips featuring Jane Austen herself.

Marvel’s *Emma* is itself an interesting case of a twenty-first century adaptation of Austen as is the series’ general premises, for “with high production values and one-hundred-and-ten large, color pages each, [Marvel’s graphic Austens] are far more comprehensive than any predecessor.” (Barchas 121) This *Emma* begins by keeping Austen’s words, quoting abundantly from the first paragraphs (including the first sentence) in the captions. Although Butler, following the example of other successful Austen adapters, keeps close to Austen’s words, she omits the irony, namely Austen’s subtle caution that Emma only “seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence” (*E* 3).

Unlike other adaptations, though, the omission does not aim at distancing us from Emma, rather it highlights the heroine’s qualities alone, the “saccharine” part of her, to re-use Barchas reading. As the first page resumes the novel’s initial situation – Emma as mistress of Hartfield, the wedding of Miss Taylor to Mr Weston –, the graphic depiction is not limited to revealing the beauty, fairytale-quality filter with which the story is about to be represented. It also bears a striking resemblance to the 2009 BBC adaptation, in the composition of scenes (Emma with her gardening gloves

²⁴² Janine Barchas actually traces the tendency to the 1940s – see Barchas (121).

and scissor picking flowers from the garden, next to a cone-shaped box), Emma's wardrobe (the red pelisse), the exterior and interior of Hartfield (the white columns, the high-ceiling, brightly-coloured rooms), and the choice of particular narrative scenes (Emma, alone in the driveway, waving the Westons' carriage goodbye) (Fig. 45).

The Box Hill episode is similar to previous visual representations, namely the 1996 Miramax film and again the 2009 BBC miniseries (though minus the breach of etiquette in Emma and Frank's behaviour). Even with all that must be completed by the reader in the gutters,²⁴³ the adaptation makes an obvious effort, in text and image, to convey how Emma's high expectations for the day were thwarted by others' bad humour and selfish reasons. As with the BBC miniseries, that offers context to her insult to Miss Bates, here emphasized by a close-up panel of the latter in tears, with Mr Knightley's reproaching looks in the background. Nonetheless, the format's naturally intercut narrative (as opposed to the usual continuous flow of a novel or a film) lays on the reader the responsibility of judging Emma's reaction, as the storyboard does not clearly give evidence of Emma's growing disappointment with the daytrip. Thus, that her response to Miss Bates is exaggerated and cruel may be the most obvious interpretation, a reading further emphasized in the following pages as Emma is represented either smiling or clearly oblivious of the tension around her. There is no indication that she ever feels repentance, until *after* she is censured by Mr Knightley and even then, only in the last strip is she seen crying: as he speaks she looks like a child evading her guilt, first blushing and then looking away with an annoyed expression on her face.

The graphic novels gives considerable more attention (and space) to the proposal scene, starting by having the pair meet in the garden and then start a dialogue, split between the last two panels in the page, with Emma and Mr Knightley occupying one each, in what it seems a direct influence from the cinematic shot-reverse-shot technique. While the dialogue follows close on Austen's, including the final caption: "Emma was speechless for once in her life and yet answered just what she ought. As a lady always does."

Nonetheless, Austen's ironical remark which undermines the romantic climax in the novel is here used introduce a full-page image of Mr Knightley and Emma

²⁴³ The separating blank spaces between panels, in which "the reader has to guess the missing elements in order to reconstruct the flow of the story." (Saraceni 9)

kissing (with Mr Knightley gently holding Emma's head), their figures framed by a garland of flowers and ornaments (Fig. 46). As in the opening panels, the romantic wins over, despite the presence of Austen's words. The graphic novel does not end here, however, and features three additional pages, two are used to solving the issues of Mr Woodhouse, and Jane Fairfax and Mr Churchill, with the last one reserved for Harriet and Mr Martin's reconciliation and Emma and Mr Knightley's wedding taking up the whole right side of the page, with Emma in a romantic red wedding dress.

A further note on the use of colour is also necessary: on the individual covers for each of its five issues, for instance, Emma is frequently dressed in pink or in the forefront of a somewhat pinkish background, whereas the covers for *Pride and Prejudice* are more colour-diverse (with a predominance of an earthly palette) and those for *Northanger Abbey* much darker. Emma's femininity is also emphasized by the inclusion of flowers, featuring prominently in all of those covers. Inside, the graphic novel comes close, in visual identity, to the *Northanger Abbey* graphic novel, also by artist Janet K. Lee. Its bright, contrasting colours and the merry faces of the characters are mostly responsible for the overall candied representation, but in that aspect the Marvel adaptation seems to be following the same set of rules of the BBC 2009 miniseries. While Barchas complained of the "candyland-style Emma" which originates "a generic loss of individuation among Austen's characters" (122), the Marvel graphic novel interpretation of *Emma* seems to belong to the vein of Austen adaptations which unashamedly correspond to a pleasing, wish-fulfilling form of Austen, as demanded by a firm set of fans and audience and, whether that fits with the "original" novelist or not, is beyond the point.

On a different perspective, and despite many imprecisions (Mr Cole keeps a shop, Augusta Hawkins has ten thousand pounds a year instead of a fortune of twenty thousand pounds), Marvel's Emma makes an effort to stay close to Austen, both to the visual identity created by the many previous adaptations for television and cinema and to the "canon".²⁴⁴ Accordingly, it presents an Emma reinstated (when compared to some other visual Emmas) with her acute critical perspective, as graphic novel's use of speech bubbles, though direct and often simplifying, offer access to the quickness of mind that so singles Emma out from the rest of Austen's heroines. It is

²⁴⁴ The word "canon" is here used as in the context of fandom, where it signifies Austen's original works as opposed to its multiple afterlives in multiple media. The word is used by Nancy Butler in the introduction to *Pride and Prejudice*: "The first thing I did was to go back to the canon; I reread *Pride and Prejudice* for the umpteenth time [...]."

the case, for instance, in Emma's evaluation of Mr Elton's behaviour during the portrait scene – "I wish he would save his raptures for Harriet's face, and not my drawings"; "The man is almost too gallant to be in love. [...] He does sigh and languish more than I could endure... but he will suit Harriet exactly" –, showing her not oblivious but deliberately acting against her own better judgement (as happens with her literary counterpart).

Occasionally, "Austen's wit translates well into Marvel's playful graphics" (Barchas 122-123), as is the case with the strawberry picking scene, in which Mrs Elton's nonsensical ramblings about the strawberries are translated into one half-a-page panel in which her figure appears three times: the visual incongruity makes for the ridiculousness of her speech (Fig. 47). Making use of its unique language, the graphic novel also manages to successfully pair up Emma and Mr Knightley, placing them as equals in rational terms and paving the way for their final pairing, as for instance in the panel where both hold their baby niece Emma – in an harmonious pyramid composition that recalls a possible future family portrait (even if in anachronistic visual terms) – and just before Mr Knightley's final departure to London – particularly in the window-shaped panel overlapping the one in which Mr Knightley holds and kissed Emma's hand. Just like the 2009 BBC *Emma*, the Marvel graphic novel seems to cater first and foremost for the desires of its intended audience.

Austen for children: *Jane Austen's Emma* (Cozy Classics, 2013) and *Emma* (Little Miss Austen, 2015)

Another interesting take is the one proposed by children's books, particularly those targeted at a very young age. *Jane Austen's Emma* by Cozy Classics (2013) and Little Miss Austen's *Emma* (2015), are both meant for children learning their first words and both pair one word with one image adapting a particular moment or character from the novel.

Jane Austen's Emma by Cozy Classics (2013) is adapted by Jack and Holman Wang as part of a board book series which also includes titles such as *Pride and Prejudice*, *Jane Eyre*, *Moby Dick*, *Les Misérables*, among others. The series' premise – "abridging well-loved stories into just 12 words and 12 needle-felted illustrations" – applies to all published titles, meant to "serve as true word primers for toddlers,

storytelling vehicles for older kids, and ironic and humorous coffee-table pieces for adults”²⁴⁵ It also meant to stay as close as possible to the texts, and given the limitations imposed by its premise, denying any additions or changes and relying on the titles’ “pre-branded” potential.²⁴⁶

The first pair of page/illustration then showcases the word “lady” over a blue background on the left page and, on the right one, an illustration of a felt Emma, dressed in pink and painting a canvas, while standing on the first page of Austen’s text (Fig. 48). The readable first sentences of the novel (a feature in every Cozy Classics title) allows for a claim to the authority of the literary text, a principle claimed by the adapters.²⁴⁷ The first interesting aspect is that it maintains the image of Emma as the blue-eyed blond-girl in a pink dress: one might think they really meant to represent Gwyneth Paltrow playing Emma.

The Box Hill picnic is also present, actually corresponding to two pairs of word/illustration. In the first, the word “laugh” pairs with an illustration of a sad Miss Bates in the foreground, while Frank Churchill and Emma are seen in the background, laughing at her and slightly blurred. The second has the word “angry” and a likewise Mr Knightley towering over Emma, whom we can only see from behind.

After the association of “sorry” and an illustration of a repentant Emma standing next to a more relaxed Mr Knightley, the last two pages feature the word “happy” with Mr Knightley and Emma holding hands in the foreground and Mr Martin and Harriet in the background. Among the novel’s main characters, the adaptation omits any representation of: Mr Woodhouse, the Westons, Jane Fairfax, and Mrs Elton. However simplified, the adaptation manages to keep the main driving forces of the plot while hinting at the characters attitudes and feelings, helped by the written one-word cues. It is also noticeable that, in the case of *Emma*, these chosen words (and accompanying illustrations) tend to focus on actions and attitudes, most either reproachable or laudable, thus adding an additional pedagogical layer to the book (apart from the first knowledge of the classics).

Little Miss Austen’s *Emma* (2015), adapted by Jennifer Adams and with art by Alison Oliver, is published by BabyLit and also part of a series, which includes *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Sense and Sensibility*, but also *Jane Eyre*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and

²⁴⁵ See <http://www.mycozyclassics.com/>. Accessed 1 August 2019.

²⁴⁶ See how that implied going against publishers here: <http://www.mycozyclassics.com/2018/03/12/almost-ruined/>. Accessed 1 August 2019.

²⁴⁷ Idem.

Alice in Wonderland. Following a format similar to that of Cozy Classics, this *Emma* is presented as an “emotions primer”, thus giving emphasis to conveying emotions. Each pair of pages features a simple SOV sentence of the type “X [person] is Y [feeling]”, starting with “Emma is excited” over a bright yellow background and an accompanying illustration of a yellow Emma in a blue dress dancing (Fig. 49). There is no logical plot here, although the last pair is of “Mr Knightley is loved” over a pink background and of a smiling (and pink) Mr Knightley smelling a flower. In between those, the adaptation features the majority of the main characters paired with a defining feeling, including the strange “Mr Woodhouse is bored” and “Miss Bates is scared” (of spiders apparently as she is portrayed looking at one). Although this adaptation seems more limiting, at least in the age-span to which it might appeal, there is an interesting use of colour to define each character. Also noticeable is the use of pink to again define Emma, this time in the cover, where her face is inside a heart-shaped frame.

The choice of Emma to represent feelings is also meaningful, especially as it is not a staple in the sub-series dedicated to Austen, with *Pride and Prejudice* focusing on numbers (1-10) and *Sense and Sensibility* on opposites. If we take that as an interpretation of each novel’s driving theme, then *Emma* seems to be taken as the most obviously sentimental, a reading probably more based on *Emma*’s afterlives than on the novel itself.

The most striking difference between the two, apart from the visual contrast between felt figures and brightly-contrasted illustrations, is the fact that while in the first there is a visible effort to keep with the plot’s basic structure, the second one uses elements from it only as examples for feelings. Thus, although there is no actual plot in the Cozy Classics book, the use of words and the careful selection of scenes presuppose a narrative, either to be told by those who know the story (e.g., a parent to a child) or reimagined (e.g., by a child). In the case of Cozy Classics, the book also serves as an eye-treat and so it has found another audience in Janeites, gaining a collector’s value not different from Austen quotes tea-towels or cookie-cutters in the shape of Austen’s silhouette.

On the one hand, these books are just the most recent example in a long tradition of adapting literary texts to children, shaping the adaptive strategy to the proposed objectives of the finished product and its audience. On the other hand, objects such as these also remind us adaptations, as other film and television

productions, are reflections of our contemporary times, in particular in terms of market expansion and consumer habits. When looking at these different yet in some aspects so similar versions of Emma, one cannot but wonder: where are we heading in terms of shared expectations?

Conclusion

In 2017, to coincide with the 200th anniversary of her death, the Bank of England launched a new ten-pound note featuring Jane Austen, who thus became the only woman, apart from the Queen, to be represented in the current circulation.²⁴⁸ The distinction, however, was rapidly met with criticism concerning the shape of the representation itself. Apart from the repetition of the often-derided Lizars portrait, the note's design includes an illustration of a young woman writing at her desk, an image, in the background, of her brother's magnificent estate, Godmersham Park (where Austen never lived), and the inclusion of a quotation, from Caroline Bingley (*P&P*), which, being out of context, truncates the irony with which it is supposed to be acknowledged. For these reasons several critics, among them Helen Kelly, have criticized this particular representation:

The biggest problem, though, it seems to me, is that for most people that's Jane Austen. That's what they recognise – pretty young women, big houses, *Pride and Prejudice* – demure dramas in drawing rooms. Seeing it on a banknote half a dozen times a week is only going to embed it further. (11)

Thus, although the representation of Austen always poses a problem, one has to ask whether another illusive figure such as Shakespeare would have been represented in similar terms nowadays. In fact, in the past, both Shakespeare and Dickens, the only two writers besides Austen to have been featured in the Bank of England's notes, were assigned more accurate representations.²⁴⁹

In this sense, it is interesting to take notice of one other of those objects reappropriating Jane Austen, the writer but also, or perhaps more significantly, the pop culture icon that transgresses the borders of literature. As part of its Vintage Minis collection ("Great minds. Big ideas. Little books."),²⁵⁰ Vintage Classics published in 2018 *Marriage*, a selection of excerpts taken from Austen's novels. The collection is presented with the following description:

²⁴⁸ See <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/banknotes/polymer-10-pound-note>. Accessed 22 October 2019.

²⁴⁹ See <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/banknotes/withdrawn-banknotes>. Accessed 22 October 2019.

²⁵⁰ See (vintageminis.co.uk). Accessed 22 October 2019.

The Vintage Minis bring you some of the world's greatest writers *on the experiences that make us human*. These *stylish, entertaining little books* explore the whole spectrum of life – from birth to death, and everything in between. Which means there's something here for everyone, whatever your story. (Austen, *Marriage* 102, my emphases)

The most important thing to retain here seems to be that the titles in this collection have modest pretensions (as the “stylish, entertaining little books” they are), despite focusing on “the experiences that make us human”, easily identifiable by each volume's title. Even if the apparent contradiction might not surprise us, the selection of texts might. In the case of *Marriage*, the excerpts selected are taken from *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, which means *Emma* is absent from the book. Although the aggregating theme and the choice of Austen as an example of it could originate ample debate – other titles in the collection (will) include *Power* (2020), by William Shakespeare, *Independence* (2020), by Charlotte Brontë, and *Freedom* (2018), by Margaret Atwood – what I find quite surprising is the absence of *Emma*, together with *Mansfield Park*, from the pool of novels feeding the selection in *Marriage*. The two most difficult Austen heroines are excluded from Austen's (apparent) thematic core, a choice particularly surprising when Emma is the only matchmaker to feature in all of the novels. Furthermore, the conservationist view that presides the pairing of author and theme in the case of this particular issue betrays a crystallised view of Austen that, far from evolving, seems to have deepened since the early years of twentieth-century Janeism.²⁵¹

Both these objects – the ten-pound banknote and Vintage Minis' *Marriage* –, different as they are and none of them an adaptation, illustrate how complex the issue of studying Jane Austen has become. As this thesis has tried to prove however, the endeavour gives fruit, even at the risk of raising more (intriguing) problems.

From British classic television serials to Hollywood-infused takes and hybrid, post-modern revisions, the history of adapting *Emma* to the screen alone is diverse, even if not as prolific as other of Austen's novels. Taking into consideration, as I have done, other types of adaptation that challenge the novel-to-film model can only add to

²⁵¹ Particularly striking if we consider, at the end of the book, the suggestive interrogation “What follows Marriage” and the announcement of four other titles of the same collection (in order): *Friendship* (by Rose Tremain), *Love* (by Jeanette Winterson), *Babies* (by Anne Enright) and *Drinking* (by John Clever).

the complexity of the enterprise undertaken here. I am thus perfectly aware of the fact that the choice of types of adaptation that are less usual as case studies in academic works like this thesis may imply additional issues, raising questions, for instance, concerning the use of a similar methodology to analyse objects belonging to different media and addressing different audiences.

On the other side of the argument, and although several voices working in adaptation have called for bolder approaches, most studies still either focus their analysis on the usual television or cinema adaptation (frequently from a novel or other written form) or imply that model in their theoretical propositions. Concurrently, such a traditionalist position also seems to condone any approach beyond limits already too stretched out. Discourse in and around the epistemological debate in the area of adaptation studies has repeatedly identified in the past the problems with such a position, and recurrent calls for a change in perspective seem to be as old as the establishment of the field of study. An entity in *media res*, born not to, but *in* maturity via other more or less established disciplines or disciplinary areas, such as literary and film studies, adaptation has from its foundation struggled with its own definition as an independent, interdisciplinary field of studies.²⁵²

In that expanded environment, different and troubling forms of adaptation open interesting paths, even if at times their premises may raise a few highbrows, as shown in the following example:

[T]he assault on canonical prejudice that *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* initially envisaged was an assault on a hierarchical cultural formation that the media industry had already redrawn. Moreover, this redrawing should not be understood as a collapse in traditional regimes of cultural values, but as part of an ongoing process of cultural negotiation. Regimes of value are a product of social relations and arrangements of knowledge, as John Frow has influentially argued, but in a market driven economy the production of cultural objects will also be governed by a shifting and sometimes anomalous perception about what will appeal to the greatest segment of the market possible. (Nelson 341-342)

If the problem lies instead in the fact that most (if not all) of the objects I analysed are too committed to commercial principles, then I would argue not only with the fact that Austen's novels were inscribed and conformed to the commercial principles of the publishing industry of the early nineteenth-century, but also that any elitist position

²⁵² Although not the framework chosen for this study, work on adaptation studies and the notions of interdisciplinarity and intermediality has also been developed and may inform further research – see work by Elleström.

dismissing adaptations on the grounds of their popularity would have to dismiss Austen's texts in the first place.²⁵³ Just like Looser proposed, the “things [that] have been dismissed as cultural detritus” (11) bring a different and enriching perspective into Austen, whose works, it must be remembered, have never quite fallen out of the popular favour. Austen was always marketable, succeeding as an author even when her novels were built on ironical deconstruction of their own genre. Recent work has proved that she was market-conscious and probably only her premature death (and posthumous reworking by her own family) prevented her from becoming a fully assumed professional woman writer, a proposition which should also inform further research on the adaptation of her works.

Austen's popularity in contemporaneity, from which stems the on-going creation of adaptations based on her works, is also what makes her such an unique case study in a time when digital platforms, global social interaction, and newly awakened social movements such as #MeToo force us to rethink the ways in which we interact with each other and make sense of our world. Such a broader view must, in the present, also include changing perspectives when it comes to evaluating the relevance of all adaptations, despite their format or media, when considering the significance of an author such as Jane Austen. In Sanders' words

[...] [W]e need, perhaps, to enact a paradigm shift away from the idea of authorial originality as a definer of value to a more collaborative and societal understanding of the production of art and meaning. In the digital era of networked communities and open sourcing this need becomes even more pronounced. (192)

Likewise, only then will we concretize her claim that “[w]e need, then, to restore to adaptation and appropriation a genuinely celebratory comprehension of their capacity for creativity, commentary and critique.” (Sanders 211) Adaptation studies will thus be able to fulfil its potential as an academic field with the power to impact on society. More than once, Thomas Leitch has argued for the potentiality of

²⁵³ A similarly out-of-the-box experience led to the organization of an exhibition (University of Lisbon School of Arts and Humanities, 20 March - 10 April, 2019) and to the publication of a catalogue which comprised several contributions, from students and professionals in different areas, on the contemporary reinterpretation of Austen and *Emma*, taking as a common departure point the first three chapters of the novel – see Sousa et al..

adaptations studies in literacy.²⁵⁴ This media/world literacy is even more needed in an era of “fake news” and manipulated content:

If adaptation studies can make a decisive contribution to students’ “ability to critically read and write with and across varied symbol systems” (Huber et al. 6; cf. Semali and Paillotet 6), it will have succeeded where literary studies has increasingly failed.” (“Crossroads” 76)

In that sense, the fact that adaptation studies as a field of study or knowledge has been resistant to final definitions may not be a downside after all. In 2010, closing a decade of intense debate on adaptation’s boundaries, Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan claimed adaptation studies to be “an area that just refuses to be pinned down” (*Screen Adaptation* 1). That feature might be a sign of the field’s greater reach, as the following words of Timothy Corrigan imply:

[M]odernity itself might be considered the gateway to the emerging centrality of adaptation as a cultural and epistemological perspective. As both a break from and a continuation of modernism, postmodernism continues and expands this central relationship, underlining and foregrounding adaptation as a principal form of contemporary representation and knowledge. (27)

With no other author is that feature more obvious than with Jane Austen, especially in terms of a contemporary culture which is simultaneously collaborative and creative, as well as eminently popular. Looking at the adaptations under analysis here, there seems to a tendency in twenty-first century adaptations of Austen to put into question the way she has been interpreted during the last two centuries, while at the same time incorporating elements of this same composite image, drawn from past reconstructions and continually added layers of meaning. In that contradiction perhaps lays the continued relevance of Austen’s work and the key to question our reality, given adaptation’s “cultural and epistemological perspective” (Leitch, *Handbook* 27). Among the many and varied outputs carrying the name of, or even the slightest allusion to, Jane Austen, she has become a powerful signifier, a vortex of meaning, ever changing and ever relevant.

For instance, if we review the adaptations analysed in the last chapter, we find that in fact Emma is married at the end of only two (out of seven) adaptations, the ones coincidentally both defining themselves as period adaptations, but diverging

²⁵⁴ See Leitch (“Crossroads”), and Leitch in Welsh and Lev.

greatly in terms of form and status: the BBC television adaptation and the Marvel graphic novel. Notwithstanding, all of them stress the romantic climax of the proposal scene, frequently with close similarities between them. Thus, twenty-first century adaptations of *Emma* reveal themselves as complex objects, unyielding to the simplistic evaluation Austen adaptations seem condemned to receive from critics. Not unlike postmodernity-infused objects such as *Lost in Austen* or *Love and Friendship*, they challenge prevailing superficial interpretations.

Therefore, each of these new millennium adaptations, even the apparently simple children's books, attach an increasing amount of meaning to the relations inside the adaptation network of *Emma* and of Austen as well. In this sense it is in the hidden aspects that adaptations of *Emma* reveal themselves and in their uses of Austen (to borrow Gillian Dow and Clare Hanson's expression) they are testimony to our evolving, often contradictory image of Austen and her work. And although the "superiority" of Austen's *Emma* in artistic terms might still be claimed by most, according to Sarah Cardwell, that does not (or should not) imply derision for the subsequent/alternative versions:

The notion of the 'meta-text' could be employed to examples of the same 'work': it is perfectly feasible to defend Shakespeare's *King Lear* or Austen's *Emma* as superior within this framework, should one wish to. Rather than claiming false chronological primacy, or cultural validity based on the status of the 'authors' of these texts, one could argue that Shakespeare and Austen have created the best examples of *King Lear* and *Emma* yet. One must also admit that at some point in the future, someone working in the same or another medium might surpass their achievements. (*Adaptation Revisited* 27-28)

Similarly, as Cardwell concludes, that is also beside the point when discussing adaptations:

It is not the postmodern nature of texts that determines whether or not they are 'good' or 'bad'; whether they permit considered, critical responses or encourage a 'loss of affect'; or whether they enforce, blur or destroy the line between 'reality' and 'simulation'. It is the way in which the texts themselves manipulate the often competing discourses within which they are sited, and through which they are constituted, that determines their value. (*Adaptation Revisited* 207)

Aware of the contemporary significance of digital humanities, this study also intended, on the one hand, to contribute to rethinking the place of literature and its subsidiaries in the digital age. On the other hand, it sought to describe and understand

the cultural and social significance of these adaptations, primary objects of consumer engagement in an intended participatory culture. The proliferation and success of several adaptations based on Austen's novels and life events, as well as the continuous reworking of ideas, namely those of human relations and money, allow for an evaluation of our present time as a remaking of the past, and for a reflection on today's anxieties and beliefs. I also reflected on the new media possibilities and opportunities, namely their impact on society's and academia's intrinsic duty to contribute to the critical thinking of these phenomena, even those directly connected to popular culture manifestations, such as fan culture, here rightly upheld by Jenkins:

Just as studying fan culture helped us to understand the innovations that occur on the fringes of the media industry, we may also want to look at the structures of fan cultures as showing us new ways of thinking about citizenship and collaboration. The political effects of these fan communities come not simply through the production and circulation of new ideas (the critical reading of favorite texts) but also through access to new social structures (collective intelligence) and new models of cultural production (participatory culture).

Have I gone too far? Am I granting too much power here to these consumption communities? Perhaps. But keep in mind that I am not really trying to predict the future. I want to avoid the kind of grand claims about the withering away of mass media institutions that make the rhetoric of the digital revolution seem silly a decade later. Rather, I am trying to point toward the democratic potentials found in some contemporary cultural trends. (*Convergence Culture* 246-7)

Although the objectives set in this thesis and its own limited extension have prevented further inquiry into this specific field, I believe there is much work to develop in that area still. More generally, work in new media, however in vogue now, is far from exhausted as the new online platforms are shown to change everyday the way we connect to the world and make sense of ourselves. In that domain, there is still much food for thought and as human relationships and our societies' rules are put to the test, the role of academia is ever more important. Further engagement with society is then needed and in that the specific field of adaptation studies is particularly well positioned.

Thus, the present work has also opened the door for future research in the field, not only concerning what lies ahead, but also in the ever more important task of not forgetting what was left behind. In McLuhan's words, "[w]e look at the present through a rear-view mirror. We march backwards into the future." (75) And as Jessica

Pressman said, it is crucial to investigate into “how new media inspire new ways of thinking about older media” (366). In extensive terms, it is essential to think about the present in a constant re-evaluation of the past and in that Jane Austen will, I believe, prove the ever-fruitful example. Meanwhile, the trend goes on as strong as ever: a new film adaptation of *Emma* is scheduled to premiere in 2020 and its first teaser trailer seems to suggest an irreverent take on period adaptation in the line of Stillman’s *Love & Friendship*.²⁵⁵

The depth and geniality of Austen’s texts are beyond discussion, but my intention was never (and it could never be) to put the adaptations up to a comparison. As tempting as that might be, and while asserting that text and adaptation may gain new senses when considered together, they remain two utterly distinct realities. Going back to Brownstein’s expression, if Austen is an author “‘written’ by the ongoing [...] cultural discourse” (*Why* 243), then the study of adaptations, more than anything, reveals Austen’s genius and at the same time reveals ourselves as products of the same society and the object of self-representation, thus renewing the function of the novels in the first place.

²⁵⁵ See info on the film at https://www.imdb.com/title/tt9214832/?ref_=nm_film_dr_1 and the first teaser trailer at <https://twitter.com/emmamovie/status/1197530135257333763>. Accessed 22 November 2019.

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Sense and Sensibility. Dir. Rodney Bennett. Screenplay by Alexander Baron. Perf.: Irene Richard, Tracey Childs, Annie Lenon. British Broadcasting Corporation, 1981.

Shakespeare in Love. Dir. John Madden. Written by Marc Norman, Tom Stoppard. Perf.: Gwyneth Paltrow, Joseph Fiennes, Geoffrey Rush. Universal Pictures, Miramax, The Bedford Falls Company, 1998.

Sixty Years a Queen. Dir. Bert Haldane. Written by Harry Engholm, G. B. Samuelson, Arthur Shirley. Perf.: Blanche Forsythe, Mrs. Henry Lytton, Fred Paul. Barker, 1913.

Vanity Fair. Dir. Mira Nair. Screenplay by Matthew Faulk, Mark Street. Perf.: Reese Witherspoon, Romola Garai, James Purefoy. Focus Features, Tempesta Films, Granada Film Productions, 2004.

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Young Victoria (The). Dir. Jean-Marc Vallée. Written by Julian Fellowes. Perf.: Emily Blunt, Rupert Friend, Paul Bettany. GK Films, 2009.

Annex - Figures

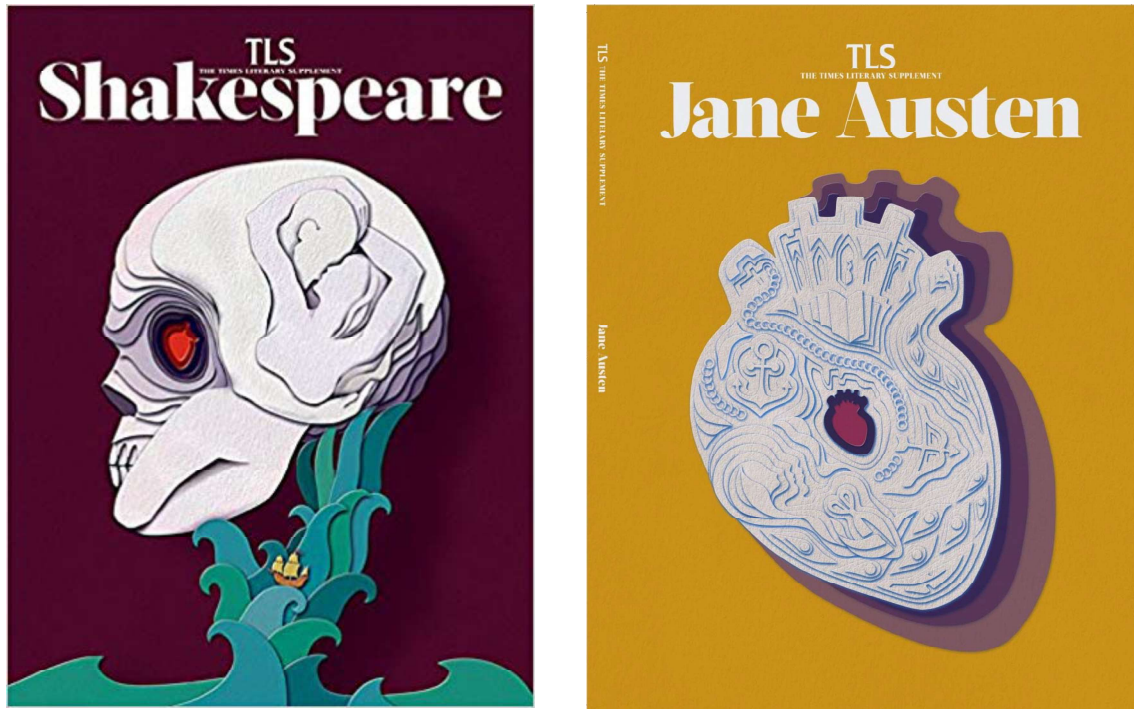


Fig. 1 – Cover images for *TLS: Shakespeare* (2016) and *TLS: Austen* (2017).



i

Basildon Park >

Basildon Park took a central role in the 2005 production of *Pride and Prejudice*, which starred Keira Knightley as Lizzie and Matthew MacFadyen as Mr Darcy. The 18th-century Palladian mansion played Mr Bingley's house, Netherfield, a suitably grand residence for a 'young man of four or five thousand a year'.

Find Mr Darcy at
Basildon Park

Fig. 2 – Partial screenshot of the webpage “Bringing Jane Austen to life” at the National Trust’s website (nationaltrust.org.uk).



"God, how I hate the Laura Ashley school of film making."

This cartoon was done about twenty years ago. To be honest, the joke wasn't mine but was coined by my sound editor, Lenny Green, to describe the narcoleptic Merchant Ivory films. It has continued to twist the knickers of the self-important Ivory ever since – which is why it's included once more here.

Fig. 3 – The “Laura Ashley School of filmmaking”, cartoon by Alan Parker (Parker 93).



Fig.4 – View of Hartfield in the opening sequence, *Emma* (1972).



Fig. 5 – Emma, Mr Knightley and Mr Woodhouse, *Emma* (1972).



Fig. 6 – Proposal scene, *Emma* (1972).



Fig. 7 – Final sequence, *Emma* (1972).



Fig. 8 – Dora Godwin as Emma, *Emma* (1972), DVD cover.



Fig. 9 – Emma (and Miss Weston) and Mr Woodhouse in the initial sequence, *Emma* (1996, A&E/Meridian).



Fig. 10 – Mr Knightley arrives at Hartfield in the initial sequence, *Emma* (1996, A&E/Meridian).



Fig. 11 – The servants preparing the picnic at Box Hill, *Emma* (1996, A&E/Meridian).



Fig. 12 – Proposal scene, *Emma* (1996, A&E/Meridian).



Fig. 13 – The harvest supper, *Emma* (1996, A&E/Meridian).

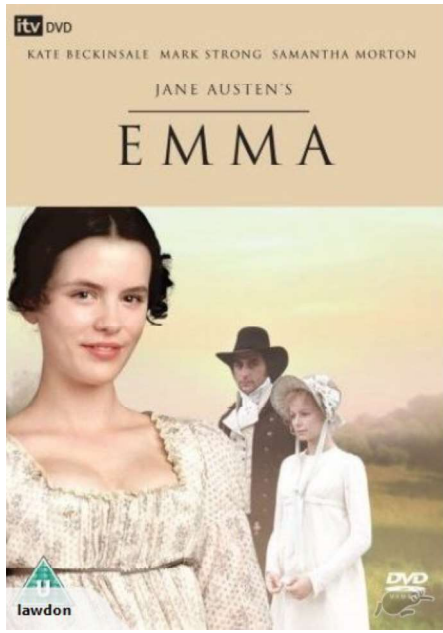


Fig. 14 – Kate Beckinsale as Emma, *Emma* (1996, A&E/Meridian), DVD cover.



Fig. 15 – Gwyneth Paltrow as Emma, *Emma* (1996, Miramax).
Publicity images used in the UK (left) and the USA (right).



Fig. 16 – The spinning globe and Emma, initial sequence, *Emma* (1996, Miramax).



Fig. 17 – Emma, Mr Knightley and Mr Woodhouse, *Emma* (1996, Miramax).



Fig. 18 – Strawberry picking/picnic scene, *Emma* (1996, Miramax).



Fig. 19 – Emma exiting the Bateses' cottage, *Emma* (1996, Miramax).



Fig. 20 – Proposal sequence, *Emma* (1996, Miramax).



Fig. 21 – The shooting scene in *Emma* (1996, Miramax) (left) and *Pride and Prejudice* (1940) (right).



Fig. 22 – Alicia Silverstone as Cher, *Clueless* (1996), wearing her trademark yellow outfit.



Fig. 23 – The “wet-shirt scene”, in *Pride and Prejudice* (1996) and *Lost in Austen* (2008).



Fig. 24 – Baby Emma in the cold-opening, *Emma* (2009).



Fig. 25 – God’s eye-view shot of Mrs Woodhouse’s coffin in cold-opening, *Emma* (2009).

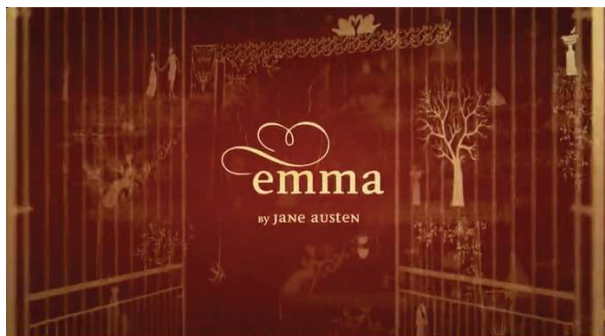


Fig. 26 – Title sequence, *Emma* (2009).



Fig. 27 – Box Hill episode, *Emma* (2009).



Fig. 28 – Emma returns from Box Hill, *Emma* (2009).



Fig. 29 – Emma, the morning after Box Hill, *Emma* (2009).



Fig. 30 – Proposal scene, *Emma* (2009).



Fig. 31 – Final shot, *Emma* (2009).



Fig. 32 – Mr Knightley standing at the entrance of his estate, Donwell Abbey, *Emma* (2009).



Fig. 33 – Interior of Aisha's car in the opening sequence, *Aisha* (2010).



Fig. 34 – Sonam Kapur as Aisha, *Aisha* (2010).



Fig. 35 – Proposal scene, *Aisha* (2010).



Fig. 36 – Final dancing sequence, *Aisha* (2010).



Fig. 37 – Aisha shopping with Pinky and Shefali, *Aisha* (2010).



Fig. 38 – Dress from *Emma* (2009) featured at the exhibition “200 years of *Emma*: Emma Imagined” (Jane Austen’s House Museum, Chawton, 2015)



Fig. 39 – Facebook page for *Emma Approved* (2013-2014).



Fig. 40 – Joanna Sotomura as Emma Woodhouse, “I Am Emma Woodhouse”, episode 1, *Emma Approved* (2013-2014).



Fig. 41 – Emma and Mr Knightley (Brent Bailey), “At Last”, episode 70, *Emma Approved* (2013-2014).



Fig. 42 – “I am Emma Woodhouse”, fashion look for episode 1, *Emma Approved* (2013-2014) (<http://www.emmaapproved.com/2013/10/e-is-for-emma/>)

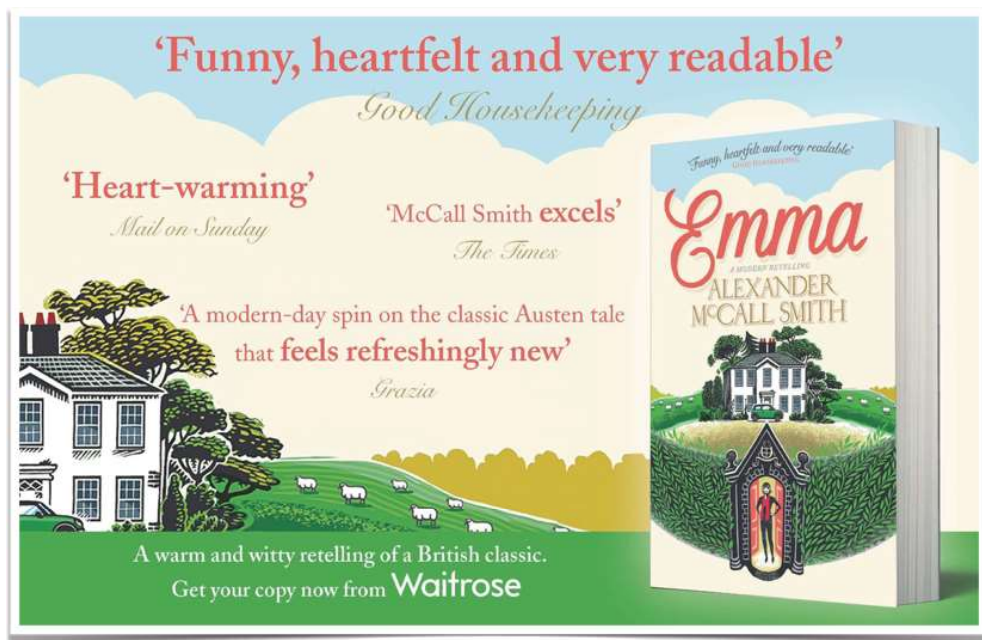


Fig. 43 – Publicity feature for *Emma* (2014), by Alexander McCall Smith (<https://www.facebook.com/austenproject/>).

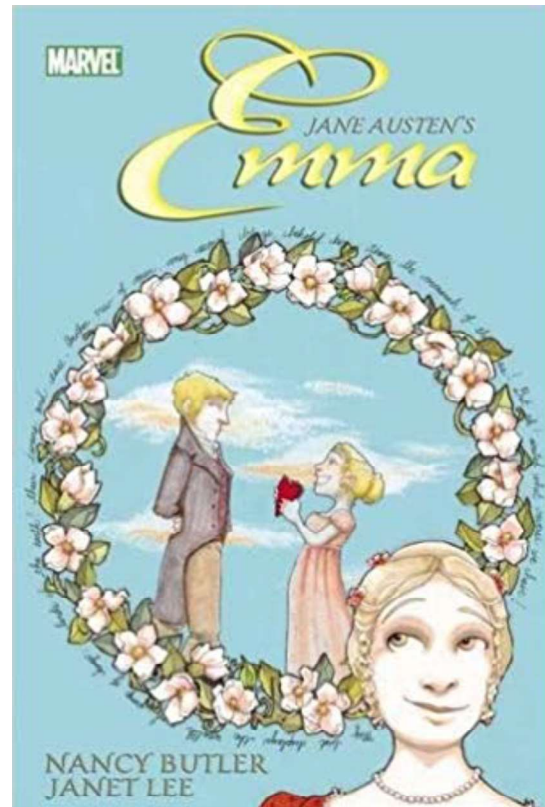


Fig. 44 – Covers for the complete Marvel graphic novels of *Pride and Prejudice* (2009), by Nancy Butler and Hugo Petrus, and *Emma* (2012), by Nancy Butler and Janet K. Lee.

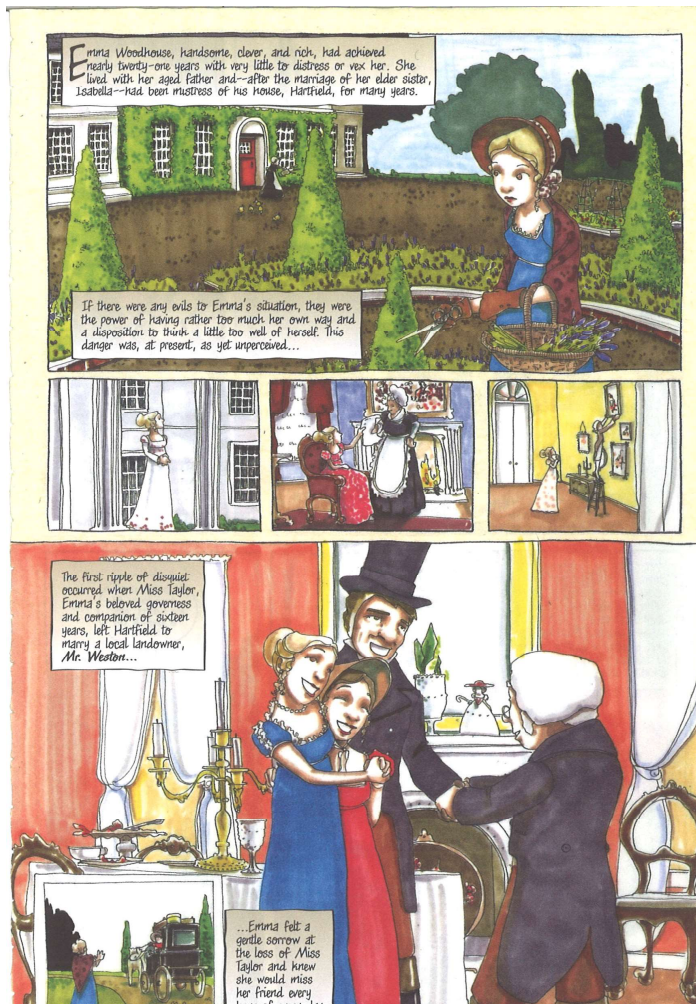


Fig. 45 – First page of *Emma* (2012), by Nancy Butler and Janet K. Lee.



Fig. 46 – The romantic climax, *Emma* (2012), by Nancy Butler and Janet K. Lee.



Fig. 47 – The strawberry picking, *Emma* (2012), by Nancy Butler and Janet K. Lee.

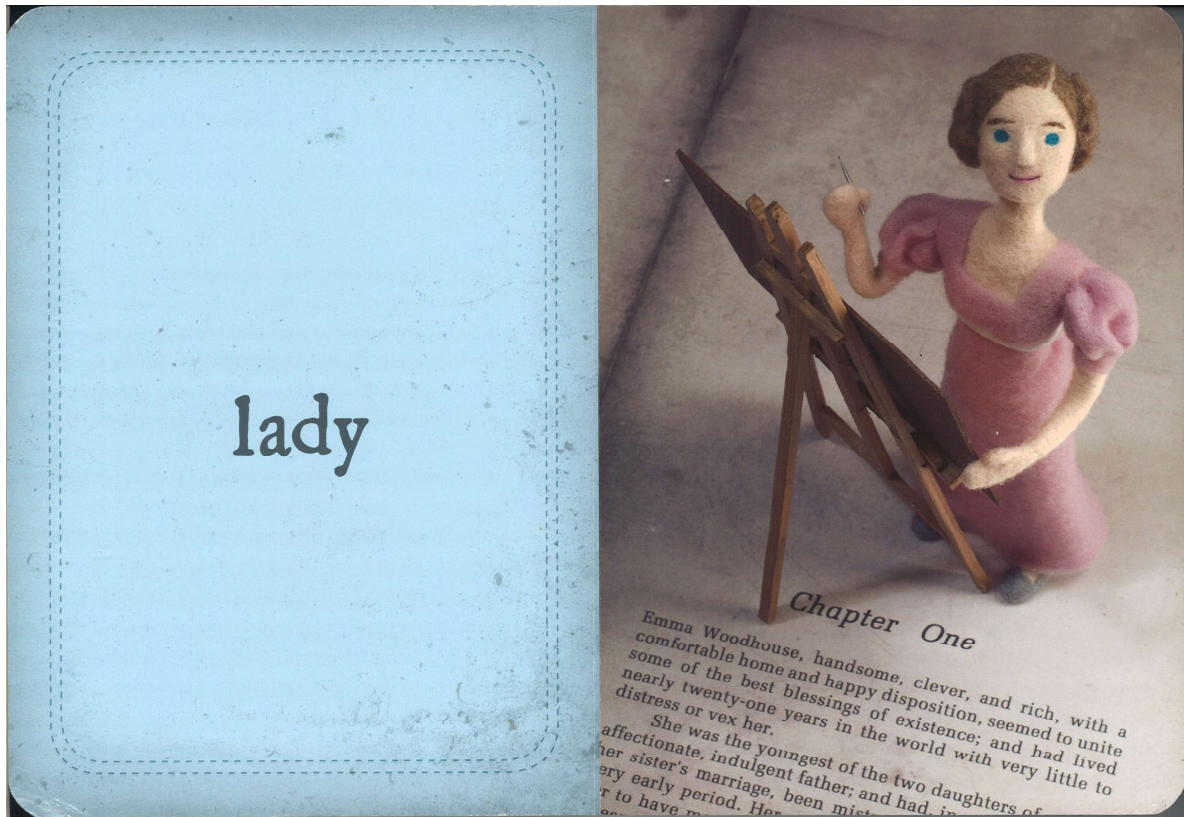


Fig. 48 – First page of *Jane Austen's Emma* by Cozy Classics (2013).



Fig. 49 – First page of Little Miss Austen's *Emma* (2015).